

## From the Pastor – 102013 – The Mass – Structure

Dear Friends,

**Today I am continuing my monthly column on liturgy.** I have been working our way through the Mass, part by part. As you know, **the Mass has a structure that has been in place for centuries.** In fact, the basic structure has been there since at least the second century – almost 1,900 years ago! The Mass consists of four parts: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rites. Last month I concluded my comments on the Introductory Rites. Today let's start looking at the Liturgy of the Word.

**I'll begin my comments by saying that the Mass, in a certain way, finds its roots in Old Testament Jewish practices.** Our Liturgy of the Word, consisting primarily of the Scripture readings and the homily, seems to be based on the synagogue liturgy at the time of Christ. In the synagogue service, the Hebrew Scriptures were read by a lector and then there was a kind of homily or interpretation given by a recognized elder or leader of the community or by a renowned visitor. There are various New Testament references to this.

**Probably the most familiar instance of this is when Jesus visits the synagogue at Nazareth. There Jesus is asked to both read and interpret the Scripture (Luke 4.16-22).** In another example, we hear of Paul and his companions visiting the synagogue in Antioch, listening to the reading of the Law and the Prophets, and then being invited to speak (Acts 13.14-15). So, it is clear that this part of our Mass has roots in the Jewish synagogue practice of Jesus' day. In some future column, we will also see some Old Testament roots for our Liturgy of the Eucharist.

**The next thing I want to note about our Liturgy of the Word is the book called the *Lectionary*.** For the celebration of Mass, there are two official books: the *Lectionary* and the *Roman Missal*. The *Lectionary* contains the Scripture passages that have been selected to be read at Mass for every Sunday of the year. These are the same for every Catholic Church throughout the world. By the way, the *Lectionary* also contains the universal readings to be used for weekday Masses. The *Roman Missal* or *Missal* (called *Roman* because it is developed and approved by the Holy See for the universal Church) contains all the prayers of the Mass. I will comment more on the content of the *Roman Missal* when we eventually get to the Liturgy of the Eucharist in these columns.

**In truth, the *Lectionary* could also be called the *Roman Lectionary*.** The Scripture passages selected for the universal Church were chosen by a special commission established by Pope Paul VI and their recommendations were ultimately approved by the Pope. These passages were selected from arrangements of readings dating from the earliest centuries of the Church through the Middle Ages and from the selection of readings used during the Tridentine period (from the mid 1500's to the 1960's). The translations of the readings for particular countries are recommended by the bishops of each country and again ultimately approved by the Holy See. So, like the *Roman Missal*, our Catholic *Lectionary* is also *Roman* since it is issued by the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.

**In November I will reflect on the structure of the Liturgy of the Word and give an overview of the readings.** I hope these columns will enrich our understanding and appreciation of the Mass – the very core of our faith. I welcome your comments, reflections, or questions. By the way, the past columns on the Mass (June 2, July 7, August 4, and September 1)) can be found on the parish website at [www.stmargaret.org](http://www.stmargaret.org). Blessings to all of you!

Father Mike