

From the Pastor – The Mass – Liturgy of the Word

Dear Friends,

This is my monthly column on liturgy. Previously I reflected on the origin and core structure of the **Liturgy of the Word**, including the three readings and how they are selected. Today I'll continue our look at this part of the Mass.

“The dignity of the Word of God requires that in each church there be a suitable place from which it may be proclaimed” (The General Instruction of the Roman Missal). **This place or furniture is called an ambo**, a word with which we probably are not familiar. Basically, an ambo is a stationary as opposed to a movable lectern from which the readings are proclaimed. The ambo is to be in a prominent place and made of good material. It and the altar are to be the main centers of focus in the sanctuary. In addition to the Scripture readings, the Responsorial Psalm is to be sung or read from here. This is why our cantor moves from the cantor stand to the ambo for leading the Psalm, an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. The ambo may also be used for the Homily and the Prayer of the Faithful.

Each of the first two Readings – the first usually from the Old Testament and the second usually from one of the New Testament letters – is introduced: “A Reading from...” This is a simple and respectful announcement of the source of the text to be proclaimed. By the way, our parish worship aid each week tells us where to find the readings in our *Gather* hymnbook. I recommend that you read the passages for the day before Mass begins. Just read them slowly, and reflect about what they mean and might be saying personally to you today. This will be a help to better listening as the lector reads out loud and perhaps we will hear something that we did not notice when we read them individually. That often happens. At the end of each of these readings, the lector says *“The Word of the Lord”* and we respond *“Thanks be to God.”* This brief dialogue announces that the particular reading has concluded and we then express our thanks to God for this gift of the Word.

Following the first Reading, the cantor leads the Responsorial Psalm. Just as the title says, this is from the Book of Psalms of the Old Testament. The Responsorial Psalm is always from one of the 150 psalms. These psalms were central to the prayer of ancient Israel, and they remain central to the prayer of our Jewish brothers and sisters. The Psalms are also the prayer of the Church. Much of the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office that priests and religious are expected to pray each day consists of these psalms. The psalms express the range of human emotion and the spiritual ups and downs that believers inevitably experience. The Psalm after the first Reading is called Responsorial because ordinarily the cantor sings the verses and we sing a response or refrain after each verse. Usually the Responsorial Psalm given in the Lectionary for a particular Sunday echoes the theme of the first Reading and is clearly our response of praise and reflection on what has been proclaimed.

This is my seventh monthly column on the Mass. I began doing this in June. You may read the prior columns on the Mass by going to the parish website at www.stmargaret.org, click on the Information tab and then Bulletins. These columns will be on that page.

May you be filled with the hope and trust in God that is so much a part of this Advent Season!

Father Mike