

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

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The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
Department of Worship & Spiritual Life
Catholic Diocese of Memphis
in Tennessee

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Word *continued*

During this Year of the Eucharist, we are looking closely at our parish Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist in the light of church teaching, including the recently revised *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* and other related church documents. It would be easy in this weekly reflection on the Mass to get bogged down by the rubrics – those instructions that tell us what to do when and how to do what. While knowing the rubrics is a must, the point of these articles is to help us look at *why we do what we do and pray as we pray* in order to enrich our own experience of Sunday liturgies and grow together as a community to do as Jesus taught us when he said, “Do this in memory of me.”

When I studied music theory, I remember wondering if analyzing and identifying music patterns, intervals, etc., would detract from my experience as a music lover when I attended the opera and the symphony. I had always enjoyed being carried away by the beauty of the music and I wasn't ready to trade that experience for an evening of naming cadences. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the knowledge I had gained in my studies enhanced my appreciation for the music, the composers and the musicians, and deepened my love for music. I learned the same valuable lesson later when I studied liturgy. So let us continue...

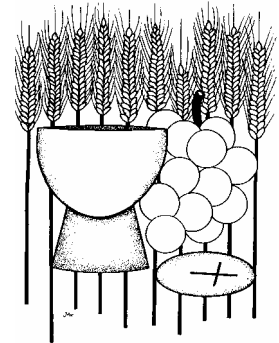
The Lectionary and the Book of the Gospels, the books containing the Biblical readings for Mass, are arranged in a three-year cycle for Sundays, and a two-year cycle for weekdays. For the Sunday readings during Year A, the Gospel readings for Ordinary time are taken from Matthew. For Year B the Gospel readings are from Mark, and for Year C, Gospel readings are from Luke.

Because the Lectionary is organized according to the seasons and feasts of the church year, rather than in a chronological story-line, we often hear a mixture of texts which seem to be out of sequence. During the Sundays of the Christmas season, for example, we hear the nativity story, followed by the story of the flight into Egypt, followed the next Sunday by the nativity story again, and then the baptism of Jesus as an adult.

The genius of the church's liturgical calendar is that we are helped to focus on one aspect of the mystery of salvation at a time. It is impossible to celebrate the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the sending of the Holy Spirit on a given Sunday. So the readings are arranged to help us focus on one facet of this mystery... to dwell on it, to absorb it, to listen to God who wants to help us live it.

If we expect the Scripture readings at Mass to give us an ordered sense of history, we might come away a bit perplexed. But, when we understand, for example, that during the Christmas season the Church does not only celebrate the birth of Christ as a baby, but the *Incarnation of Christ* -- God taking the form of a human being -- then it makes sense that to complete the nativity story we must go to the baptism of Jesus and hear God the Father say, “This [person you know as a human being] is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

The arrangement of the readings for Mass according to particular aspects of the mystery of salvation is evidence of our need to “listen with our hearts” as Pope John Paul II encourages us to do in his Apostolic Letter on *The Year of the Eucharist*.



FROM THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION ON THE ROMAN MISSAL...

THE BIBLICAL READINGS

#57. In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable to maintain the arrangement of the biblical readings, by which light is shed on the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history

Moreover, it is unlawful to substitute other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God.

#58. In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always proclaimed from the ambo.

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