

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Word *continued*

Toward the end of a recent gathering of people from several parishes in the diocese, one courageous soul opened the topic of whether or not we should read along with the proclamation of Scripture at Mass. Let me say that, until the subject of “reading along” was raised, these were agreeable, calm individuals. Suddenly there was tension in the air. These otherwise composed persons became almost instantly ruffled (in a friendly way, of course). I knew a nerve had been struck.

When people become instantly passionate about their opinions or positions, it is usually because they care deeply about the subject matter. This type of tension does not have to be negative; it does not even have to be unpleasant. Such tension reveals that we have broached a subject that is close to the heart. Of course our hope would be that in such a situation we would strive for – and pray for – openness so we could truly listen to the opposing position. After all, we were discussing what we do when we come together as the body of Christ to celebrate the Eucharist!

I’m happy to say that the individuals in my example, being the wonderful people they are, remained respectful and tried to listen to each other. When they all too quickly came to an impasse, they turned to me for the “correct” answer.

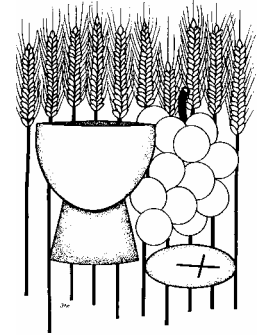
I had to report that I am not aware of any official directive of the Church which states clearly and without a doubt that we may or may not read along when Scripture is proclaimed at Mass. It is not the intent of Church documents to give us a rule for every possible scenario. The Church expects that we, as intelligent and deeply spiritual human beings, will prayerfully study the teachings of the Church in order to gain an overall sense of their meaning. This study should take place in the context of individual reading and prayer, and in guided study and formation sessions available in parish and diocesan programs.

So, may we read along with the proclamation of Scripture during Mass, or should we close the Missalette and listen? Let’s first look at some preliminary questions. Looking at the Introduction to *The Lectionary for Mass*, we find the following statement:

“A speaking style on the part of the readers that is audible, clear, and intelligent is the first means of transmitting the word of God properly to the congregation” (#14).

Perhaps the first pertinent question then is, “Do the lectors proclaim God’s word in such a manner that enables and encourages active listening rather than reading along? A related question would be, “Is the sound system in the church adequate?” Before we can debate the pros and cons of active listening without the aid of a missalette, these two issues must be addressed.

If the lectors are doing a good job, and the sound system is adequate, then we are ready for a reasonable discussion... which we will continue in the next article.



**FROM
THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION
ON THE ROMAN MISSAL...**

#29. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, all must listen with reverence to the readings from God’s word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture God’s word is addressed to all people of every era and is understandable to them, nevertheless, a fuller understanding and a greater effectiveness of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the homily, as part of the liturgical action.

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The Year of the Eucharist
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