

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Word

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Thus far in our exploration of the Liturgy of the Word in Sunday Celebrations of the Eucharist, we've reflected on the readings from sacred Scripture, the lectionary, the homily, the lectors, our response, and on the invitation of Pope John Paul II in his *Apostolic Letter on the Year of the Eucharist* – the invitation to “listen with our hearts.” Before we leave the topic of the proclamation of the word of God in Scripture and the homily, we turn to another important element in this section of the Liturgy of the Word. We turn to the role of the Holy Spirit.

Part Two of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* contains some beautiful statements about the work of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the Word of God at Mass. Sections 1100 – 1103 remind us that it is God at work in us who makes it possible for us to receive the word of God in such a way that we are transformed daily into all that God invites us to be. Notice the interplay between the Holy Spirit and God's people in the following passages:

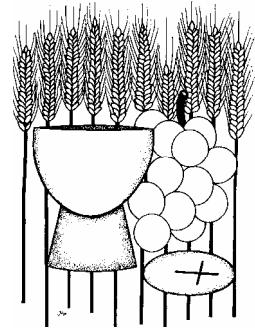
“The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual understanding of the Word of God to those who read or hear it, according to the dispositions of their hearts. By means of the words, actions, and symbols that form the structure of a celebration, the Spirit puts both the faithful and the ministers into a living relationship with Christ, the Word and Image of the Father, so that they can live out the meaning of what they hear, contemplate, and do in the celebration” (#1101).

“By the saving word of God, faith is nourished in the hearts of believers. By this faith then the congregation of the faithful begins and grows. The proclamation does not stop with a teaching; it elicits the response of faith as consent and commitment, directed at the covenant between God and his people. Once again it is the Holy Spirit who gives the grace of faith, strengthens it and makes it grow in the community. The liturgical assembly is first of all a communion in faith” (#1102).

I am reminded of the instructor in a Writing class from years ago who said, “Use *ACTIVE, DESCRIPTIVE* words if you really want to say something.” And the Catechism does just that: “spiritual understanding”... “living relationship with God”... “live out the meaning”... “hear, contemplate and DO”... “faith that is nourished in the heart”... “elicits response, gives, and makes grow”!

One can almost envision a graceful dance between God's Spirit and the human spirit as God lavishes upon us all that we need to be nourished by God's word, and we make every effort to be open to grace. The seeds of such openness to God during Mass, are grown in our every day lives with God. If we come to Sunday liturgy having depended on God's grace during the week, we will receive “according to the disposition of [our] hearts.” Because it is God's desire that we be in a living relationship with Christ, daily openness to God holds the promise of continual growth into the fullness of God's kingdom.

Part 18 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
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FROM
**THE INTRODUCTION TO THE
LECTIONARY FOR MASS...**

#48. The intimate connection between the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist in the Mass should prompt the faithful to be present right from the beginning of the celebration, to take part attentively, and to prepare themselves in so far as possible to hear the word, especially by learning more beforehand about Sacred Scripture. That same connection should also awaken in them a desire for a liturgical understanding of the texts read and a readiness to respond through singing.

When they hear the word of God and reflect deeply on it, Christ's faithful are enabled to respond to it actively with full faith, hope and charity through prayer and self-giving, and not only during Mass but in their entire Christian life.

Text: Judy Gray
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