

First Eucharist

Session 2 – Liturgy of the Word

Goals and Objectives for Session Two

The goal of Session two is to form and transform people into the living Word of God in such a way that they are able to embrace this Word with their whole being and be ministers of the Word in their daily lives.

The objectives of this session are:

- To understand the Word at liturgy as a LIVING Word
- To be able to LISTEN to God speaking at both the liturgy and in our lives
- To participate fully in the Word through acclamations, responses, gestures, etc.
- To enable participants to become both “hearers” and “doers” of the Word in their daily lives (Evangelization).
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The Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word is an essential part of celebration of the Eucharist. When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, we do more than remember past events from the Old and New Testaments. We believe that in the proclamation of the Word, God actually speaks to us. For this reason the liturgical renewal initiated by the Second Vatican Council restored the importance of the Liturgy of the Word to all liturgical celebrations.

What Does the Church Teach?

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL) emphasizes the importance of scripture in liturgy, and especially at Mass. It states, “The two parts that, in a certain sense, go to make up the Mass, namely, the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist, are so closely connected with each other that they form one single act of worship” (56).

This emphasis is repeated in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM). It uses the image of the “table” to illustrate how we are fed on both the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ. It states, “The Mass is made up, as it were, of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These, however, are so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass the table of both God’s Word and of Christ’s body is prepared, from which the faithful may be instructed and refreshed” (28).

As Catholics, we believe that the Word proclaimed at liturgy is a living Word. The Church states, “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks

to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel” (GIRM, 29).

The scriptural readings for Mass are found in a book called the Lectionary. The introduction to the Lectionary for Mass (LM) states: “In the celebration of the liturgy, the Word of God is not voiced in only one way, nor does it always stir the hearts of the hearers with the same power. Always, however, Christ is present in his Word; as he carries out the mystery of salvation, he sanctifies us and offers the Father perfect worship.” That Word “constantly proclaimed in the liturgy is always, then, a living, active Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. It expresses the Father’s love that never fails in its effectiveness toward us” (LM, 4).

The living Word of God nourishes and feeds us. “The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God’s Word and at the table of the Eucharist. From the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness. In the Word of God the divine covenant is announced, in the Eucharist the new and everlasting covenant is renewed” (LM, 10).

As God speaks to us in liturgy, we enter dialog with him with our lives. “The liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders reflectiveness must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the Word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer” (LM, 28).

The acclamation we pray after the first two readings, “Thanks be to God,” is the way we acknowledge and confess that Christ is present and speaking to us. We proclaim “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ” after the gospel reading. The “alleluia” we sing during the gospel procession is the way we greet and welcome the Lord who is about to speak to us. It expresses our faith through song.

We respond to God speaking to us through God-given words. These are called psalms. When we sing the psalm at Mass, we enter into dialogue with the Lord.

Thus the Liturgy of the Word is a very important part of the Mass. The Church teaches that “the close 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 dispose themselves to hear the word, especially by learning beforehand more about Scripture. That same connection should also awaken in them a desire for a liturgical understanding of the texts read and for the willingness to respond through singing” (LM, 48).

When God speaks to us in the Liturgy of the Word, our proper posture is to listen with our entire being. The introduction to the Lectionary for Mass explains this beautifully:

All the faithful without exception must therefore always be ready to listen gladly to God’s Word. When this Word is proclaimed in the Church and put into living

practice, it enlightens the faithful through the working of the Holy Spirit and draws them into the entire mystery of the Lord as a reality to be lived. The Word of God reverently received moves the heart and its desires toward conversion and toward a life filled with both individual and community faith, since God's Word is the sustenance of the Christian life and the source of the prayer of the entire Church. (LM, 47)

(Source: Linda Gaupin, Embracing the Vision: Sacramental Catechesis for First Reconciliation and First Communion)