

A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH

THE MASS

THE MASS

But what do all these prayers and rituals mean? We might know these rites like the backs of our hands, but do we really understand the significance of all that we are saying and doing in the liturgy?

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Learning more about the Mass is well worth our time and effort. For the Mass has been at the very center of the life of the Church since the time of the apostles. It is the celebration of the Eucharist that Jesus instituted at the Last Supper. The Mass is the source and summit of the Christian life. It is the Mass that Catholics are called to attend at the same time and in the same place, every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation.



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self-offering to the Father (Catechism Nos. 1366-1368). Second, in the Eucharist we encounter the *Real Presence* of Jesus Christ himself. The Eucharist is not merely a symbol of Jesus. At the moment of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into his very body, blood, soul and divinity (Catechism No. 1374). Third, not only does Our Lord draw near to us by becoming present on the altar at Mass, he even comes to dwell within us when we receive Him in Holy Communion. These three aspects of the Eucharist are explained more in the two resources accompanying this study: the book *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass* and the teaching presentations for the group study (available on DVD and CD).

Session 2

THE MASS

The Liturgy of the Word

Introductory Rites → **Liturgy of the Word** → Liturgy of the Eucharist → Concluding Rites

Elements of the Liturgy of the Word:

- First Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading
- Gospel
- Homily
- Profession of Faith
- Prayer of the Faithful

A. Review the Context

In the Introductory Rites of the Mass, we took serious measures to prepare ourselves for the profound encounter we will have with the Lord in the liturgy. We are about to hear his inspired Word spoken to us through the Scriptures and then receive Jesus himself in holy communion. To prepare for these sacred mysteries, we first consecrated ourselves to him in the Sign of the Cross, performing a ritual reminiscent of the placing of a cross-like mark on God's faithful people in the book of Ezekiel. Next, the priest reminded us of God's presence with us as we embark on this sacred journey through the liturgy. He addressed us with the words "The Lord be with you," echoing what God and his angels said to people like Moses, Joshua, and Mary when they were called to an important mission. Humbly recognizing our unworthiness to approach God in the Mass, we confessed our sins in the *Confiteor* and called out for his mercy in the "Lord, Have Mercy." Finally, we concluded by praising God in the *Gloria*—a prayer that sums of Christ's work of salvation. Now we will turn our attention to the Liturgy of the Word, in which we encounter God speaking to us through the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures.

B. Read

Read the prayers for the second main section of the Mass known as the "Liturgy of the Word." This will take you through the various readings from Scripture to the Creed and Prayer of the Faithful.

Read "Part III: Liturgy of the Word" from Edward Sri's book *A Biblical Walk through the Mass*, pages 52-81.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will help you understand the Scriptural roots of the Liturgy of the Word. If you don't understand something, make a note to bring it up in discussion.

The Readings from Scripture

1. Paul teaches that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The word in Greek for inspiration (*theopneustos*) means "God-breathed." The Bible is God's divine word communicated to us in the words of men.

- a. Read *Catechism* No. 105. Who is the common author of all the varied books of the Bible?

- b. Read *Catechism* No. 106. What is the relationship between the human writers of Scripture and God, the divine author?

- c. Read the following passages. What does the Bible teach about the power of God's word?

- i. Isaiah 55:10-11

- ii. Hebrews 4:12

- iii. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

The Liturgy of the Word generally consists of a reading from the Old Testament, a Responsorial Psalm, a New Testament reading and the proclamation of the Gospel. In this way, both Old and New Testaments are proclaimed in the Mass.

The First Reading

The first reading is generally from the Old Testament, with texts typically chosen for their connection with the Gospel reading. Following ancient custom, the first reading during Easter Season is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, which highlights how the Church bore witness to the death and resurrection of Christ.

2. a. Read *Catechism* Nos. 121-123. Why is the Old Testament still important today?

- b. Read *Catechism* No. 129. How should Christians read the Old Testament and understand its relationship to the New?

The Responsorial Psalm

During the Responsorial Psalm, we praise, thank or call out to God as a lector and the people recite lines from Scripture in alternating fashion. This practice has roots in the Bible.

3. Read the following passages and note how they reflect this pattern.

- a. Psalm 124:1

- b. Revelation 5:11-14

- c. **Think about it:** In addition to the Responsorial Psalm, what are some other places where this kind of liturgical dialogue—this back-and-forth of praise or thanksgiving—is found in the Mass?

The Second Reading and the Gospel

The second reading, which comes from the New Testament, is used for Sundays and solemnities. These readings are usually chosen independently of the first reading and Gospel, but sometimes correspond to the themes of a particular season, such as Christmas or Lent.

Next, the Liturgy of the Word reaches a climactic moment in the proclamation of the Gospel.

4. a. Drawing on your own recollection of this moment of Mass, what happens at the proclamation of the Gospel that did not happen during the other readings from the Bible so far? In other words, what unique rituals and prayers are given specifically for the reading of the Gospel? (Feel free to look at a missalette or other resource that presents the rites of the Mass).

- b. Why do you think the Gospel reading receives this extra attention in the Mass? (See *Catechism* No. 125).

The Homily

The word *homily* means “explanation” in Greek. It is used to describe the priest’s (or bishop’s or deacon’s) explanation of and expounding upon the biblical texts proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word. This practice has roots not only in the early Church, but also in the Scriptures themselves.

5. Read Nehemiah 8:5-8. In this passage, the Book of the Law is not merely proclaimed to the people. What do the Levites do to ensure that the word of God is understood properly?
6. In Jesus’ day, the Scriptures were read in the synagogue and then explained by the rabbis or other leaders. How is this reflected in the following verses, which report Jesus’ own ministry in the synagogues?
 - a. Mark 1:21
 - b. Luke 4:18-30

Profession of Faith: The Creed

After the priests’ homily, we stand up and recite the Creed.

7. The ancient Israelites had their own creedal-like summary statement of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It is known as the *Shema*, a Hebrew word meaning “hear,” which is the first word of their statement of faith, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord...” In reciting the *Shema*, the Israelites expressed a different view of the world than was commonly accepted. The nations around Israel believed in multiple deities; they worshiped not the Creator, but the things he created, such as the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and animals. Israel’s *Shema*, however, emphasized belief in only one God (monotheism). Israel’s God was the one true God over all and the creator of all the things that the pagans mistakenly viewed as deities. As such, the *Shema* was countercultural.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- a. In what ways is the Christian view of the world (as summed up in the Creed) different from the way many modern men and women view and live their lives? For some ideas, review the book *A Biblical Walk through the Mass*, pages 73-74.
- b. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5. In what ways do you think the Christian Creed is similar to this Old Testament creedal statement? In what ways is it different?

c. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9. List the many things the Israelites were supposed to do with their creed?

d. How might the ancient Israelite devotion to the *Shema* (as seen in Deuteronomy 6:6-9) inspire us to say and ponder the Creed?

Prayer of the Faithful

In the concluding part of the Liturgy of the Word, we respond by presenting our petitions to God through the Prayer of the Faithful. Here, we intercede for the Church, for those in authority, for those in need, and for the salvation of all people.

8. Read the following passages. What do they tell us about the importance and/or effect of intercessory prayer?

a. Acts 12:1-7

b. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

c. 2 Corinthians 1:11.

9. *For personal reflection:* In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people are often invited to pray for their own intentions in the silence of their hearts. What intentions would you like to pray for when you next attend Mass?

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

The people of Israel prepared themselves for three days before encountering God's word spoken to them at Mount Sinai. One thing we can do to prepare ourselves better to hear God's word at Mass is to read the Sunday Mass readings before we go to church. These readings are available online at www.usccb.org/nab.

This week, read the Mass readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass. Before you begin, say a prayer asking God to help you be attentive to what he wants to teach you through these readings. Then think about one thing that stands out to you in those readings—something which either grabs your attention, piques your interest, or is related to something in your life now...something through which you sense God might be speaking to you.

Dear Lord,

Session 2 Talk Notes

The Liturgy of the Word

A. Introduction to the Liturgy of the Word

1. The Bible: fully human, fully divine
 - a. Gk. *theopneustos*, "God-breathed"
2. God speaks to us in Scripture
 - a. Mt. Sinai, Ten Commandments: an individual message
 - b. "In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them" (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 21).
3. Role of the lector: lending God a voice
4. The Liturgy of the Word: "the greatest Bible study on earth"
 - a. Cycle of readings
 - b. "Verse knowledge" vs. "passage knowledge"

B. The First Reading

1. Connection with Gospel
2. The place of the Old Testament in the Liturgy of the Word
 - a. "The word of the Lord" – a joyful announcement
 - b. "Thanks be to God" – our grateful response

- i. Echoes Paul's language
 - Examples: Romans 7:25, 1 Corinthians 15:57

C. Responsorial Psalm

1. We respond with His inspired words
2. Liturgical dialog: roots in Scripture
 - a. Psalms
 - b. Revelation 5

D. The Second Reading: New Testament; emphasis on living the life of Christ

E. The Gospel's special place in the Liturgy of the Word

1. Gospel given "extra ceremony"
 - a. Standing (Nehemiah 8:5)
 - b. Singing and praise ("Alleluia," Psalms; Revelation 19)
 - c. Procession
 - d. Priest asks God to cleanse his heart and lips
 - i. Isaiah 6:1-7
 - e. The sign of the Cross

F. The Homily ("explanation")

1. Nehemiah 8:7-8: Old Testament precedent
2. Luke 4: Jesus' example
3. Magisterium: special role of homily in catechesis

G. The Creed

1. Reason for weekly affirmation
2. Meaning of "believe" (see *Catechism* No. 150)
 - a. Intellectual assent
 - b. Entrusting self to God
 - c. Hebrew root (*'aman*)
3. The Creed challenges us to true belief
4. Updated translation
 - a. "I believe" vs. "we believe"
 - b. "Consubstantial"
 - i. Reflects Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) addressing Arianism

H. Prayer of the Faithful