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# Proclaiming God's Word



## Reflection on the Opening Ritual

*Which reading or readings  
in the opening ritual caught  
your attention? Why?*

Before the age of printing technologies, manuscripts and books were highly valued and treated with greater care and respect than they seem to be today. In times past the Bible was often decorated with original artwork as a sign of great honor and reverence for the Word of God. Today we tend to take less care of the printed Word of God. For example, we routinely throw away missalettes, which contain the Word of God proclaimed at Mass. We need to be careful that the mass printing of Bibles does not contribute to a lessening of our reverence that is due the printed Word of God.

*How can we show respect and  
reverence for the printed Word  
of God?*

# The Word of the Lord

## Scripture Focus

*Why is attentively listening to and responding to the Word of God vital for our lives?*

## Faith vocabulary

### parable

A type of story that Jesus told comparing one thing to another to teach and invite his listeners to make a decision to live for the Kingdom of God.

### Kingdom of God

The biblical image used to describe all people and creation living in communion with God when Jesus Christ comes again in glory at the end of time.

All of us have had times when we “tuned out” what someone was saying to us. This response may have occurred because we were distracted by something or someone else. Or perhaps we deliberately refused to listen because of negative feelings about the speaker or what was being said. Such inattentive and nonresponsive listening can have serious consequences. Saint Matthew’s Gospel points out the tragic consequences of not listening attentively and responding to Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God.

## The Parable of the Sower

Matthew’s Gospel is organized around a series of narratives and sermons of Jesus. The third narrative and sermon, Matthew 11:1—13:1–52, contains a number of **parables** about the **Kingdom of God** and describes how the preaching of Jesus meets with growing resistance. The parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1–9) comes from this third sermon in Matthew’s Gospel and teaches the importance of listening to Jesus and not resisting his word.

Matthew begins the parable of the Sower with the seemingly unimportant detail of Jesus sitting down to speak to the crowds. Including this detail emphasized the importance of listening attentively to and not resisting the teacher. Sitting down was the posture taken by a teacher who spoke with authority.

Matthew writes that after Jesus got into a boat, he sat down and taught the crowd that was standing on the beach. After instructing them to listen he said:

“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

MATTHEW 13:3–9

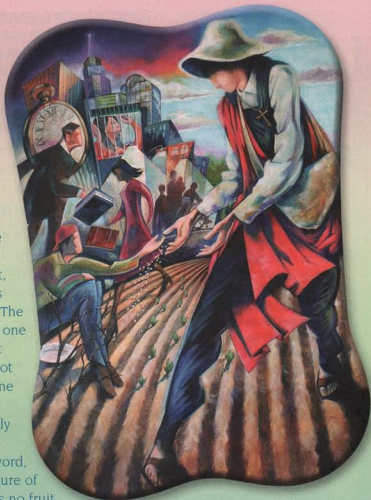
## The Fruit of Rich Soil

After Jesus finished speaking to the crowd, his disciples approached him privately and asked him about the meaning of the parable. Jesus replied:

"This is why I speak to them in parables, because 'they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.'"

Jesus continued:

"The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold." MATTHEW 13:13, 19-23



*Parable of Sower, contemporary illustration, artist unknown.*

**What do the images of the sower and the seed help you understand about listening and responding to the Word of God?**

### lifelinks

Identify different circumstances that might distract you from listening and responding to the Word of God. List some of those distractions below. Then brainstorm changes that you could make in your listening habits to be more attentive in the future.

**Distractions**

**Changes**

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |



# God Speaks to Us

## doctrine focus

*How and why has God "spoken" to us?*

Sometimes when we meet someone, we are immediately attracted to that person and sense that we could become a good friend with that person. Conversation comes about very easily, and we quickly share stories about ourselves. But it can also happen that the other person is very shy. Sometimes the person does not "open up" and tell us about themselves. If people will not tell us about themselves, it is virtually impossible for any relationship to begin, grow, and develop.

## Faith vocabulary

### Divine Revelation

God's free gift of gradually, over time, communicating in words and deeds his own mystery and his divine plan of creation and Salvation.

### biblical inspiration

The process by which the Holy Spirit assisted the human writers of Sacred Scripture so that they would teach faithfully, and without error, the saving truth that God, the principal author of the Scriptures, wished to communicate.

## God's Words and Mighty Deeds

God has told us much about himself. He has made known, or revealed, in words and deeds the mystery of who he is and his divine plan of creation and Salvation for humankind. The action of God "speaking" to us is called **Divine Revelation**. Through his Self-Revelation, God invites us to enter into relationship with him. In the New Testament we read:

In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe. HEBREWS 1:1-2



Jesus Christ is the final and definitive Word of God. He is the only Son of God the Father who became incarnate, assuming human nature without losing his divine nature. After Jesus Christ there is no further Revelation.

## The Holy Spirit, Teacher and Advocate

Divine Revelation is passed on both in Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition. Sacred Tradition is the "living memory" and "living transmission" of God's truth with the assistance of the Holy Spirit among the People of God in every generation. It is the ministry of the Church to grasp, over time, the meaning and significance of Divine Revelation.



**Biblical inspiration** is the term the Church uses to name the Holy Spirit's action of assisting the human writers of Sacred Scripture so that they faithfully and without error communicate the saving truth that God wanted to share. It is through the action of the same Holy Spirit that the Church, through her Magisterium, authentically interprets and faithfully hands on "the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 85).

God has freely spoken his word and invites us to listen and respond because he wants us to live in friendship and communion with him. He wants us to know him and love him and serve him. This is why it is so vital that we listen attentively to the Word of God proclaimed at Mass and respond in a way that deepens our relationship with him. When this happens, we are "good soil." We receive his word in faith, live in hope of its promise, and act on it in love.

**What is the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating God's word to us?**

## lifelinks

*In a small group list three key things you have come to know about God from Sacred Scripture and from the teachings of the Church. Circle one and describe how it makes a difference for your life.*

What I Have Come to Know

The Difference It Makes

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## Liturgy Link

The *Rite of Confirmation* states: "Great emphasis should be placed on the celebration of the word of God that introduces the rite of Confirmation. It is from the hearing of the word of God that the many-sided work of the Holy Spirit flows out upon the Church and upon each one of the baptized and confirmed. Through this hearing of his word God's will is made known in the life of Christians" (*Rite of Confirmation, "Introduction"* 13).

# The Liturgy of the Word

## RITUAL FOCUS

*Why is the Liturgy of the Word an essential part of the celebration of Confirmation?*

## FAITH VOCABULARY

### Liturgy of the Word

The part of the Church's liturgical celebrations during which the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed and the assembly of the faithful is invited to respond with faith.

### Lectionary

The book that contains the Scripture readings that are assigned to be proclaimed at the celebration of the liturgy.

Digital forms of communication that have changed the way families, friends, and businesses carry on relationships each day. Yet, for all that is new about today's communication technologies, people still connect by communicating in words and actions that allow them to be present with one another. The **Liturgy of the Word** of the Word of God includes words and other ritual gestures and the assembly of the faithful's response in faith.



## Roots in Ancient Jewish Worship

The Liturgy of the Word at Mass as we celebrate it today is rooted in ancient Jewish worship rituals. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament we read about the Jewish people not only gathering to listen to the proclamation of God's word but also responding to his word by renewing their commitment to live the Covenant. For example, Luke 4:16–20 describes a synagogue service at which Jesus gathered with the people of Nazareth for the proclamation of the Scriptures of ancient Israel. These synagogue services of the Word of God became the model for proclaiming the Word of God when the early Church gathered.

Today, the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word at Mass is similar to the ritual of the ancient Jewish people. God's word is solemnly spoken among the faithful, and he is present and acts with power in the assembly's midst. That is why we treat Sacred Scripture, the Word of God and the book in which it has been written down, with such respect and reverence.

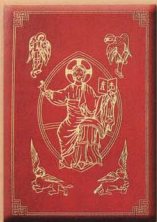
## Listening with Faith, Hope, and Love

The Lectionary is the book that contains the Scripture readings that are assigned to be proclaimed at the celebration of the liturgy. For the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation the Lectionary designates five Old Testament texts for the First Reading, six Psalms for the Responsorial Psalm, twelve New Testament texts for the Second Reading, and twelve Gospel selections for the Gospel Proclamation. In these Scripture passages God has revealed himself to be the mystery of One God in three divine Persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We call this mystery of One God in three divine Persons the mystery of the Holy, or Blessed, Trinity.

When Sacred Scripture is proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word on the day of your Confirmation, how ready will you be to listen to what God is telling you about himself? How ready will you be to experience God's presence in word and deed on that day? How open will your heart be to respond in faith, hope, and love to God, who invites you to live in friendship and communion with him?

How ready will you be to open yourself to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that he wants to pour out upon you that day? To be ready you must prepare yourself. The Church puts it this way, "[I]t is necessary that the faithful come to [the liturgy] with proper dispositions" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 11).

**Why is it important to participate fully in the Liturgy of the Word?**



## Liturgy Link

There are many actions the Church uses during the Liturgy of the Word to show reverence for God's word. We stand for the proclamation of the Gospel. The Book of the Gospels is often surrounded by lighted candles and is incensed before the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel. After reading from the Gospel, the priest or deacon kisses the page where Jesus' words are contained. The assembly responds at the end of each reading with a special acclamation, acknowledging that they have listened to the Word of God.

## lifelinks

*Think about what you can do to prepare yourself to participate actively, fully, and consciously in the Liturgy of the Word at your Confirmation and at every liturgical celebration. List what you will do.*

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# The Church

## Lives the Faith

Faith-filled people who have listened to the Word of God, taken it to heart, and made it part of their lives continue to play a significant role in the history of the Church.

Saint Anthony of the Desert is one example of such a faith-filled person. When he heard the Gospel passage "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor . . . Then come, follow me"

(Matthew 19:21), Saint Anthony responded by doing exactly that. He gave all his possessions to the poor and lived out the rest of his life as a person of prayer in solitude in

the desert. Christians today respond to the Word of

God and make similar heroic responses to the one made in the fourth century by Saint Anthony of the Desert. Sister Dorothy Stang is one of those heroic Christians.



Sister Dorothy Stang.

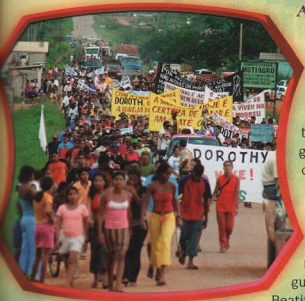


Sister Dorothy visiting village in Amazon region.

### The Angel of Trans-Amazonia

Sister Dorothy Stang, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, worked for several decades with the rural poor of the Amazon rain forest basin in Brazil, South America. Because of her work of helping and advising the rural poor to protect their land, Sister Dorothy received numerous death threats from wealthy

landowners and loggers who wished to profit by cutting down the trees in the rain forest. Despite these threats, Sister Dorothy continued to be outspoken in her efforts on behalf of both the poor and the environment.



Funeral procession from airport to Santas Missoes Church in Anapu, Northern Brazil, February 14, 2005.

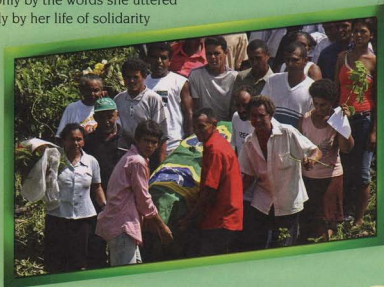
## A Witness for Christ

Sister Dorothy's ministry resulted in her giving her life for the people. According to news reports, two gunmen approached her on February 12, 2005, and aimed their weapons at her while she was reading the Bible. Witnesses reported that while at gunpoint, she read the Beatitude "Blessed are the peacemakers, / for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9) to her assassins. The assailants, whom police said were hired by Brazilian landowners, responded by shooting her at point-blank range.

Sister Dorothy responded to the Word of God by reaching out to the rural poor of Brazil. That response included her standing on the side of the poor, no matter what. In the end, she proclaimed God's word, not only by the words she uttered from the Gospel, but just as loudly by her life of solidarity with "the least of my brothers" (Matthew 25:40). As news of her death spread, more than two thousand poor Brazilian farmers marched to the remote jungle town of Anapu for the funeral of this seventy-three-year-old woman whom they called the "Angel of Trans-Amazonia."

***When has your response to the proclamation of the Word of God required you to act with courage to be a witness for Christ?***

Procession to cemetery.



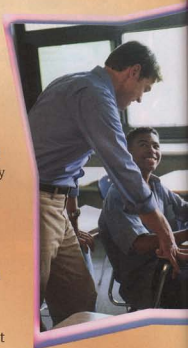
# *Living the Faith* Makes a Difference

We have all been with people at one time or another who seem not to pay much attention to us when we are trying to communicate with them. They are so distracted or distant that it seems as if they are not really "there"—beyond their mere physical presence to us. We have also known people who are so tuned in to what we are saying or doing that they quickly come to understand and respond. In other words, the latter group has good interpersonal communication skills.

## **Interpersonal Communication**

Good interpersonal communication skills do not just come about by chance. People learn and develop these skills over a lifetime. One of the most basic of these skills is active listening.

Researchers tell us that while most people speak at a rate of between 100 and 175 words per minute, we can listen intelligently at a rate of 600 to 800 words per minute. Since only a part of our mind is required to follow a speaker, it is easy to let our minds drift while we are listening. The cure for this is active listening. Active listening is a skill which allows us to be intent and focused on the other person in a very deliberate way.



## Developing Active-Listening Skills

Fortunately, a good bit of study has been devoted to the skills and qualities that go into making someone an active listener. Active listening includes being involved on a thinking and a feeling level both to the person speaking and to what is being said. Here are some tips to help you become a better active listener:

- **Be present.** Focus your attention deliberately on the person who is speaking and on what is being communicated. Avoid distractions.
- **Make eye contact.** Look directly at the person who is speaking. Listen not only with your ears but also with your eyes and other senses.
- **Be open-minded.** Avoid making quick judgments about what the person is saying.
- **Clarify.** Acknowledge and clarify points as they are being communicated.
- **Communicate.** Show interest in what is being said through verbal and nonverbal actions.

While you are learning how to more effectively listen and respond to God's word, it is also important to develop good listening skills and to become an active listener. Listening actively will help you grow as a member of the Body of Christ.



## Faith Decision

- In a small group identify the things you have found that help you to be an active listener. Then discuss how you can strengthen these skills.
- Next, review your responses to the "Life Links" activity on page 19. Reflect on what can be done to overcome those obstacles.
- Finally, think about the steps you can personally take to become a better active and attentive listener.

This week I will listen more attentively to God's presence in my life by

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## my thoughts

In this chapter you reflected on the Liturgy of the Word that precedes the celebration of the rite of Confirmation. You have learned more about the significance of this part of the celebration of Confirmation. You have discussed the importance of listening attentively and responding to God's word by making it part of your daily life.

*Write about the ways you can become a better "hearer of the word" as part of your preparation for the day of your Confirmation.*

*A question to share with your sponsor and parents:*

How have you encountered the Scriptures in the Liturgy of the Word, in reading the Bible individually, or in other ways that have "made a difference" in your life?