

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF EASTERN MONTANA DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

How we Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it. Introductory Rites #10

The proclamation of God's word in the midst of the assembly has been one of the most enduring and ancient forms of evangelization in all the major world religions throughout history. From the human point of view, we assume that if God speaks to his people, then someone, a human individual, must take the responsibility to proclaim that word in the midst of the assembly.

We take our clue in all this from our Jewish sisters and brothers who have a long tradition of treating the proclamation of the Law and the Prophets with great respect. No synagogue service would be complete without such proclamation.

The scriptures of the Jewish testament contain other types of literature as well: Narratives, poetry, prophecy, psalms and laws. All of these were proclaimed in the synagogue and listened to by devout Jews, including Jesus, and discussed among all for their meaning and implication for Jewish life.

For Christians, the scriptures of the New Testament contain primarily letters and narratives written to the early Christian communities trying to remember the life and ministry of Jesus and putting these into practice in their lives. These two testaments together

make up our rich story of faith.

We know, of course too, that Jesus, at least on one occasion narrated in the gospel of Luke, attended a synagogue service in his home town of Nazareth. He was handed the scroll containing the prophecy of Isaiah and asked to read. Having finished, "He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. Then he began to speak to them. "This text" he said, "is being fulfilled today even as you listen."

We have here a perfect example of what we today would call the Liturgy of the Word: A reading from scripture and a short homily. (Perhaps it was the shortest in history!)

St. Paul, no "slacker" himself as a preacher insists that "faith depends on hearing. But how can they believe in God if they have not heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless they get a preacher, and they will never have a preacher unless one is sent..." Faith then comes from what is preached and what is preached comes from the word of Christ." (Romans 10, 14 ff.)

The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM # 29) also helps us understand how Christ is present in the proclaimed Word when it states:

“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.”

Given Christ’s presence in the spoken word therefore, it should be noted that the role of the lector at Mass is a serious and sacred responsibility. Although the Word stands on its own dignity and contains a power that reaches into peoples’ hearts and souls, it nonetheless depends for its effectiveness on the talents and efforts of the individual who takes this responsibility upon him or herself. The role of lector in the Roman liturgy, therefore, is considered a sacred ministry. We take the sacred Word of God into our frail human hands and pass it on to those who have ears to hear and the gift of faith to accept it.

It goes without saying, therefore, that those who wish to accept this sacred ministry should be well trained in the human logistics of public speaking and should make every effort to prepare well beforehand and to speak that Word in such a way that the hearts of the assembly will be moved. Again, odd as it may sound, if God’s word is truly to be a “two-edged sword” its effectiveness will ultimately depend on the gift of faith and human dedication.