

Why We Do What We Do IV: The Liturgy of the Word, Part 2

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts. For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.”

Isaiah 55:8-11

“The homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.”

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

We continue to work through our exploration of the Mass, and reflect on why it is that we do the things we do.

Today’s reflection picks up where I left off last week, regarding the Liturgy of the Word. Today I wanted to reflect on the remaining parts of the Liturgy of the Word, namely the homily, the Profession of Faith (Creed) and the Universal Prayers, formerly called the Prayers of the Faithful.

We are a people who strive for meaning in our lives. That is our nature. So as we hear God’s Word in the Liturgy of the Word, we naturally try to make a connection between that Word and our life. What is God telling us today? What is the challenge, consolation or message he is speaking to us in his word? The purpose of the homily is to provide some assistance with that. Here, the priest or deacon reaches into his own prayer life, his experience, his training, to provide something of an explanatory exhortation on the words of Sacred Scripture.

Does this always mean we are completely successful? No, of course not. On a given day my experience of the Word may make sense to you. Or perhaps it won’t. It is always my prayer that I will do the best job possible, so that I might reach as many as possible. The homilist may do this by means of personal examples, or stories of our tradition, or by connecting the Word with the Church’s prayer. There are many approaches. You never know what will resonate with someone.

After the homily, there should be a period of silence, so that once again, we might all meditate on the word of God and let its message stir in our hearts and minds. So during this period of silence, we might ask ourselves: What have I heard? What has God called me to do differently? Is God giving me some consolation here, or a challenge? Have I heard the answer to any prayer?

We then rise and proclaim the Profession of Faith together. Here, we call to mind the mysteries of God and give verbal witness to our acceptance of the Church’s teaching. These words have been crafted over centuries and have come at a great cost. Here, the Church stands as one and proclaims God’s dominion over the totality of our lives. Here we offer assent to the many ways God has revealed himself. The Profession of Faith happens on all Sundays and Solemnities of the Church year.

Finally, we end the Liturgy of the Word by expressing the prayers of our hearts. Here we pray “for the needs of the Church; for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world; for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; for the local community.” (General Instruction of the Roman Missal)

The priest leads the prayer from the chair, and the intentions are announced by the deacon or a lector. The people respond and give expression to their own prayer by saying the acclamation “Lord hear our prayer” or something else, depending on the season. We also make some time for silent prayer during which all may call to mind the intentions of their hearts.

And so, the readings of Scripture bring us into the revelation of God. Here we experience and respond to God by hearing and responding to his Word. Next week, we will begin to reflect on Christ present in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.