

April 1, 2018

We continue our examination of the Liturgy of the Word moving this week to the Gospel reading from one of the four Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. This is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word and is treated with special respect. It is proclaimed by the deacon or the priest if there is no deacon while the previous readings were proclaimed by a reader from the assembly. Here we listen to the words and deeds of Jesus himself and are challenged to become images of Christ in the world we live.

We begin with the Gospel Acclamation. This follows the period of silence after the second reading but is not a response to the second reading. It is a welcoming and greeting for the presence of Christ in the Gospel. If a deacon is present, he asks the presider for a blessing which is given in a low voice so that we do not hear it. This is the blessing: "May the Lord be in your hearts and on your lips, that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Roman Missal: 523). If there is no deacon, then before the priest proclaims the Gospel, he prays: "Cleanse my heart and my lips, Almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel" (Roman Missal: 524).

The Gospel Acclamation is the singing of the Alleluia (meaning praise God), a verse of scripture, and another Alleluia. During the season of Lent we do not sing the Alleluia so we use a different acclamation such as: "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of Endless Glory." During the singing of the Gospel Acclamation, the Book of the Gospels, which was placed on the altar during the Entrance Procession is carried in procession from the altar to the ambo, the place where all the readings are proclaimed from. This book contains all the Gospel readings and is usually very ornate.

"Special signs of solemnity surround the gospel proclamation since this reading is the high point of the liturgy of the word. The Good News of salvation, a living word, is proclaimed by the Risen Lord. It is Christ present among his own who continues to speak to his people as he calls them to faith and conversion" (Johnson, Lawrence J., *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass* : 45).

One sign of solemnity for the Gospel is that we stand rather than sit as we did for the first and second reading. We also use candles and sometimes incense. At the beginning of the Gospel, we mark ourselves with the cross on our forehead, lips, and heart "expressing readiness to open one's mind to the word, to confess it with the mouth, and to safeguard it in the heart." (Johnson, Lawrence J., *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass* : 44). We seek that this word be in our minds and hearts and on our lips.