

Tea and Talk

14 October: The Liturgy of the Word



Introduction

The **Eucharist** (also called the **Mass**, or **Holy Communion**) is the principal Christian act of worship, which we celebrate in obedience to the command of Jesus on the night of his betrayal. In the offering of the Eucharist we re-present the sacrifice of Calvary, and Jesus gives us his body and blood in bread and wine.

The Mass has four main sections: (1) The Gathering; (2) The Liturgy of the Word; (3) The Liturgy of the Sacrament; (4) The Dismissal. Today we look at **the Gathering**.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11.23-26)

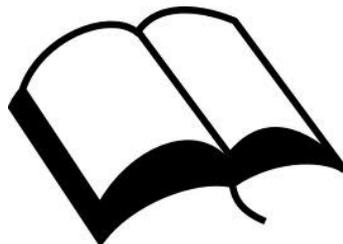
The second part of the Mass is based around the Word of God. Here we meet God in the Scriptures. These are 'the lively oracles of God', through which God speaks to us. The readings at Mass are not chosen at random. They come from a lectionary — a set pattern of readings. The lectionary we use on Sundays (in common with the rest of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church) is on a three-year cycle.

1. Non-Gospel Readings

On a Sunday there are usually two readings before the Gospel, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament. There may also be a Psalm.

**This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.**

Why do you think we have so many readings? Do you ever notice a theme between the readings?



We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2.13)

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. (Hebrews 4.12)

Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6.17)

2. The Holy Gospel

The proclamation of the Gospel is the climax of the Liturgy of the Word. This is where we encounter Jesus in his words and actions as recorded by the evangelists. 'Gospel' means 'good news'; we hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Because this is one of the most important parts of the Mass there is lots of ceremonial connected to it.

- The Gospel is read from the Book of the Gospels, an ornate book, which is carried in to the church at the beginning of Mass and is put on the altar
- The Gospel is proclaimed by a deacon
- At the announcement of the Gospel we make the sign of the cross on our foreheads, mouth and chest, expressing our wish that the words of Jesus may find a home in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts
- The Gospel book is honoured with incense
- Everyone stands
- At the end of the reading, the Book of the Gospels is kissed

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. (Matthew 4.23)*

And Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' (Mark 16.15)*

✠✠✠ Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to *M/M/L/J*.

3. The Sermon

The Sermon (sometimes called Homily, or Address) is an opportunity to reflect on the readings we have just heard. It's the role of the preacher to explain anything which is difficult to understand, to expound the teachings of the Church, and to explore ways in which we can apply the Word of God to our everyday lives.



We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1.23)

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' (Luke 4.18-19)

What makes a good sermon? What makes a bad sermon?!

4. The Creed

Having heard God's Word in the readings, reflected on it in the Sermon, we respond to it by declaring and affirming our faith in the Creed.

The word 'creed' comes from the Latin 'credo' ('I believe'). A creed is a statement of belief. The Church has three creeds: The Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The Nicene Creed (named after the Council of Nicaea, held AD 325) is the creed we usually use at Mass, and expresses our belief in the Trinity: one God in three persons.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty...
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ...
We believe in the Holy Spirit...

Immediately the father of the child cried out, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' (Mark 9.24)

Do we sometimes find it difficult to say the creed? Are there bits which we don't understand?

5. The Prayers of Intercession

Having heard and reflected on the Word of God, and affirmed our own faith, we now move to a time of intercession.

The whole of the Mass is a prayer to the Father, through Jesus Christ our eternal high priest, in the power of the Holy Spirit, so the Prayers of Intercession are designed for to voice the particular intentions of this community at this time. (This is why they are called 'The Prayers of the Intercession' rather than just 'The Prayers'. Ideally, the Prayers of the Intercession are linked to the readings we have just heard and the theme of that day's Mass.

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5.17)

'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.' (Matthew 6.7)

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes^s with sighs too deep for words. (Romans 8.26)



Usually we pray for: the Church; the world; our nation/local community; the sick and suffering; the departed.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Next week...

We discuss **the Liturgy of the Sacrament**, in which bread and wine are brought to the altar, prayed over, and distributed to the faithful.