

## The Source and Summit of Christian Life No. 4

At the conclusion of the introductory rite the congregation immediately sits for the Liturgy of the Word. Before we look at the practicalities of our celebration there are a few points that we need to refresh our minds on with regard to this section of our Eucharist.

First we need to approach the Word with an openness and reverence for the presence of Christ that we encounter in the readings. The Minister of the Word is much more than a reader. Because Christ is truly present in the Sacred Text then the one who voices these words is really the voice of Christ speaking to us. In his apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, Pope John Paul II writes that:

*In the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, it is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his People, a dialogue in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed...and one in which the people demonstrate their fidelity to the task of continual conversion.*

What I often say is that rather than understanding the text, which is really a desire to have control of it, we need to be willing the “stand under” the text in order that we may surrender to it and be transformed by it. To put it another way, the purpose of the liturgy of the word is not so much education as formation. We do not gather to learn about God; we gather to meet God. We do not listen to learn about Christ: we listen to Christ speaking to us today. Like the liturgy of the Eucharist (the table of the Bread and Cup) the liturgy of the Word (the table of the Word is meant to nourish us with a spiritual experience of Christ’s presence in the present moment. At Mass we are nourished at two tables then and at Tetbury we are very fortunate that our Ambo is made of the same material as the altar and is close to looking like a table rather than a lectern.

That we may enter into the whole spirit of this liturgy it is essential that we look and listen. This means that we should not sit with our

heads buried in the text reading it. Experts on communication remind us that a very significant part of the communication process between people occurs beyond the words themselves. Body language, facial expressions, eye contact are just some of the modes of communication that are involved. We must not lose this by not watching the proclaimer of the word. Watching and listening is not a passive activity. It takes effort to focus attention on the speaker. If Christ is truly speaking to us, then certainly we should be paying close attention to what he has to say. Such listening is itself a prayer.

The following of the text in this country probably stems from the times when the liturgy was in Latin and one needed to have a translation in English. (The provision of missalettes was something that church publishers took upon themselves from which they have made a considerable amount of money!) So what about the lovely bound missals? Well these maybe useful if one needs some help with the prayers that we say together but perhaps the best use of them is at home where we should prepare for our Eucharist by reading the lectionary set for the day before we come to church.

Next week I will provide an overall view of how we came to have the new lectionary which has opened up the scriptures significantly more than in the past 1000 years.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Describe the role of scripture in your own spirituality
2. In what ways do you live your life “standing under the word?”
3. Do you experience the word as formation rather than education?
4. Can you see the reason why we should look at the speaker and listen carefully to the readings?
5. Does the idea of “the two tables” at Mass help you to be nourished by the word?