

The Source and Summit of Christian Life No. 5

Before we move into the practicalities of the Liturgy of the Word we might refresh our memories on the difference in today's lectionary that came into use in 1969 and the one used previous to that date. The old lectionary was first of all based on a yearly cycle rather than the three year cycle we have now. The old lectionary only used two readings which were almost always a reading from one of the Letters in the New Testament and the second from the Gospels which was predominantly from Matthew. The new lectionary has opened up a much wider exposure to the Scriptures. We now have three readings spread over a three year cycle. The first reading is taken from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) which is followed by a Psalm. The second reading is from one of the non-Gospel readings from the Christian scriptures (the New Testament.) Before the Gospel reading is a "Gospel Acclamation." Each of the three years is given to one of Gospels with a year for each of Matthew, Mark or Luke while John is primarily used during the Easter Season. It should be noted that the First Reading and the Gospel are linked in their theme whereas the second reading is usually a continuous reading from one of Paul's letters. Currently in England and Wales the translation used is that of the Jerusalem Bible but other English speaking countries use different translations. It is proposed that we should all follow the lead of the Canadian and some of the other Churches in using the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This one is done by an ecumenical group of Scripture scholars. It is a more accurate translation from the ancient languages and also has inclusive language.

So now let us look at our celebration. First, showing the importance and dignity of the ministry of the reader, we should watch as the reader confidently walks down the centre of the aisle and with a bow of the head to the altar (not the tabernacle). The reader then proclaims the reading from the ambo. It is important that they will have spent some time in preparation to become familiar with the text and how it relates

to the other readings so that the appropriate emphasis can be put on the words. It is not sufficient to just read the text. It is important as we said before for the reader to have eye contact with the congregation and be aware that their posture will communicate as much as the words they say.

At the end of the reading there is a pause for silence which is required by the General Instructions for the Mass (GIRM). The norm for the responsorial psalm is for it to be sung. If this is not possible it may be said in which case the reader gives no introduction but simply says the response for all to repeat. The psalm needs to have been well prepared if its meaning is to be drawn out.

The second reading is proclaimed in a similar way to the first and again there is to be a period of silence following the reading. All stand for the Gospel Acclamation which is omitted if it cannot be sung. Please note that the verse portion following the first singing of Alleluia is **for the reader only**. When the acclamation is finished the minister of the word leaves the Ambo coming to the centre of the aisle and bowing the head to the altar before returning down the centre of the aisle to their place in church. (This will change very slightly when there is a second reader or if there is someone to sing the Psalm but the same principles apply).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Does it help to know how the lectionary is arranged with its three year cycle?
2. When you read the first reading and then the Gospel set for the day do you see that theme or connection?
3. Do the lectors at our church proclaim the word with power? When this happens does it help you to surrender to the word?