



THE GOSPELS

The Gospels tell us about Jesus - who He was, what He said and what He did.

You may recall that there are four Gospel writers or evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The first three are sometimes referred to as “Synoptic” Gospels. This comes from the Latin for “same.” The reason for this is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have many similarities in the stories they tell about Jesus and what He said and did.

John writes in a different style. He writes in long discourses.

The Gospel plays an important role at Mass and it certainly is the highlight of the Liturgy of the Word portion of Mass. The Gospel is so important at Mass because we believe that when the priest (or deacon) proclaims the Gospel that it is Christ Himself giving us His words.

There are many elements of the Mass that help the Gospel to stand out.

Let’s start at the very beginning. Usually in the entrance procession the deacon (or the lector when no deacon is present) carries *The Book of the Gospels* and places it directly on the altar. This is actually a blending of the Liturgy of the Word (the Gospel) with the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the Eucharistic table or altar). This action is showing us at the beginning of Mass that Christ who will become present to us in Bread and Wine is also present to us in His Word.

If you are a keen observer, you may have noticed that the Book of the Gospels is not carried out in the Closing Procession at Mass. The reason for this is again symbolic. We ourselves are now carrying the Gospel out after having heard it proclaimed to us.

The Gospel is the last and most important reading that we hear at Mass. To get ready for it several things happen.

A procession begins to take shape. The altar servers take their candles and prepare to escort the priest or deacon to the ambo. The priest meanwhile takes the Book of the Gospels off of the altar and carries aloft for all to see. On special occasions this procession is led by incense.

While this is all happening we, the members of the assembly, stand. While we sat for the other two scripture readings we stand for the Gospel as a way of honoring it. In addition, to show even more joy, the Gospel Procession is accompanied by the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. It is a way for us to announce that the Good News is about to be heard! Alleluia!

If a deacon will proclaim the Gospel, he asks for and receives a special blessing from the priest prior to his going to the ambo.

The Gospel is the only reading that starts with a greeting. (The Lord be with you) and it has its own special ending (Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.) Both of these serve to reinforce that Jesus is present in the gospel.

You may notice that the priest makes the sign of the cross on the Book, and his forehead, lips, and heart. We all do the same. In this blessing we ask that we may use our mind to live the Gospel, use our lips to proclaim Him, and our heart to love Him.

Make a special effort to really *listen* to the Gospel. Imagine yourself standing in the background. This action is referred to as active listening. What do you hear being spoken to *you*? The Holy Spirit may be giving several different messages - with each of us hearing what we need to hear.

At the end of the Gospel, the priest kisses the Book and silently says “through the words of the Gospel, may our sins be wiped away.”

Because the Gospels were written so long ago and were written for people of that time their meanings may need to be interpreted so that we may better understand them today. That is the purpose of the homily.

All of the actions or symbols around the Gospel serve to show us how important the Gospel is to the Mass and how important it should be to us and our faith. We need to realize that as we listen to the proclamation of the Gospel we are actually encountering Christ!

One final thought. There is a saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. It says: “Spread the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” I like this sentiment because it is the essence of our faith - we are called to live it and model it for others. It is through the Gospel that we can learn how to do this.

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