



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 14:
Listening to God's Word
by FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**



As St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” Without a doubt, St. Jerome understood that the Bible truly is God speaking to his people. That is why it is so important to have readings from the Bible during Mass. Listening to God’s Word helps us to learn about and understand who God is and how much He loves us. Also, we learn about ourselves and just how much we need God in our lives. As we continue some reflections on the Liturgy of the Word, we focus this week on the more spiritual aspects of listening to God’s Word and receiving it into our hearts.

Start with Silence

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us that silence is a very important part of the Mass. Not only are we silent while the readings are read, but there should also be a brief silence after each of the readings. As the Diocese of Peoria’s *A Study of the Mass* teaches, “Even these brief moments allow us to meditate on the marvels and mysteries we just heard... In our world of ‘noise,’ this silence may seem uncomfortable to us. Yet, this is all the more reason for us to pay close attention to this detail of the sacred Liturgy” (p. 7). Silence is an important means for the faithful to actively participate in the Mass, since it allows the opportunity to really listen with our hearts and take in God’s Word.

What if the readings don’t make sense to you? Fr. Guy Oury reminds us that “The Word of God is not a document. It is not something of the past that happens to narrate a stage of revelation” (*The Mass*, p. 62). The Word of God continues to be alive and active (Hebrews 4:12), seeking us out and helping to draw us nearer to God. That is why it is important for us to do our part during the readings of the Mass by really listening and thinking about the words of Scripture. If God is speaking to his people through the Scriptures, and we are part of God’s family, then God is saying something to us through each reading. A great question to ask ourselves is: What is God teaching me here? About himself? About us as his people? About how he asks us to live? These reflections will help us concentrate more on the words and help us understand their meaning, even from a reading about a most unusual topic!

Allow His Word to Grow Roots

Another way to help us better understand the readings is to recognize that the entire Old Testament is a preparation of God’s people (that includes us!) for receiving Jesus. The New Testament is a fulfillment of the Old—all the prophecies, all the expectations—all perfectly fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. One of my favorite meditations is to think about something from the Old Testament and see how it leads to Jesus. In the same way, then, look at something in the New Testament and remember back to its beginnings in the Old Testament. For example, we read in Isaiah 7:14, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.” For many of us, our mind probably jumps to Mary and Jesus. Some of the connections are very clear, and some are subtler. Spending time reflecting on the readings can not only help us better understand what we hear, but it also helps the Word of God to be truly rooted in our hearts, our thoughts, and our actions.

As Charles Belmonte reminds us, Sacred Scripture reveals to us the “truth, both about God and about our own salvation... What we hear during the Liturgy of the Word is truth about God and the narrative of the marvels God performed... Its culmination is the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, which is perpetuated in the Eucharist. Therefore, the central theme of the readings is always Christ... By carefully listening to the Word of God and reflecting on it, we will realize who ... Christ is, what he says and does, what he expects of us, and how we are to go about accomplishing the task he entrusted to us. Gradually, we will enter into the intimacy of God and discover the meaning of our own existence. And, as a consequence, we will get to know how to do—always and in everything—the will of God” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 75-76). Now that’s a reason to “listen up!”