

***Alleluia!***

With this familiar word (generally sung) of the Gospel Acclamation, we all stand for the Gospel. Where does that word come from? According to the *Catechism*, “Alleluia” is a word that means, “Praise the Lord!” (CCC, no. 2589). As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* reminds us, this sung acclamation is a rite “by which the gathering of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel and profess their faith by means of the chant. It is sung by everybody, standing, and is led by the choir or a cantor” (GIRM, no. 62).

While we use the word “Alleluia” for the Gospel Acclamation most of the time, as Charles Belmonte notes, “During Lent, instead of Alleluia, an acclamation is made before and after the verse before the Gospel” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 90). For example, the people might acclaim, “Praise and honor to you, Lord Jesus Christ!” or “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory!”

**Honoring the King of Kings**

If you have ever wondered why we stand during the Gospel Acclamation and the proclamation of the Gospel, the above reminder explains it well. According to standard manners and etiquette (which are not always observed in our modern day in the same way as in the past), we always stand when someone important or honored enters the room. For example, when a king or leader would enter, everyone would stand to greet that person. In a similar way, we are honoring the Lord Jesus present before us in the Word of God. We stand to acknowledge his presence, and we stand to give him honor. As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, “we stand in respect as the Master prepares to speak to us just as he spoke to the apostles” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 8). Other ways to increase our reverence and honor for Jesus present in the Holy Gospel are by using a Book of the Gospels and processions with candles and incense. As you may have noticed, we sometimes use a large, ornate book with decorated pages for the Gospel. This book is placed on the altar before the proclamation of the Gospel, showing the connection between Jesus present in the Word of God and Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist (more on that connection in the future). The Book of the Gospels is a very beautiful way to honor the Holy Gospels, with its decorated pages and beautiful artwork helping us call to mind how blessed we are to be hearing the actual words and actions of Jesus.

**The Dignity of God’s Word**

The honor for Jesus the Word of God increases even more when we use candles and incense. Candles remind us of Jesus the Light of the World and act as a kind of reverential escort for Jesus in the Gospels. Incense, which we use to honor holy people and things, reminds us of the dignity of the Gospels and all of the Word of God, one of God’s main ways of speaking to us.

Have you ever noticed that before going to proclaim the Gospel, the priest stops at the altar, bows in reverence, and then seems to be saying something? What he does there is a prayer asking the Lord to strengthen him for the joyful opportunity and privilege of proclaiming the words of Jesus in the Gospel. As he bows, the priest says silently, “Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.” If a deacon proclaims the Gospel, the celebrant gives him a blessing with similar words. This prayer recognizes the honor of what is about to take place and helps the priest or deacon to prepare for it.

The Gospel Acclamation really fits right in with all these honors which we give to Jesus. It is an acclamation of praise and excitement for Jesus truly present. We are overjoyed if we realize the significance of what is taking place: Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Son of God, the One who came to save the world, the One who walked on this earth nearly 2000 years ago, is speaking to all of us together as his family. No wonder the Church asks us to stand and praise God. No wonder the Church asks us to sing together in joy and praise: *Alleluia!*