



For many of us, the Gospel is one of our favorite parts of the Mass. We get to hear the stories about Jesus and the Apostles, how Jesus worked miracles of healing, and the words that he taught. For many, it is easy to imagine the scenes in our minds as we listen to the words. As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “The reading of the Gospel constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the Word” (*GIRM*, no. 60). The Second Vatican Council teaches us that the Gospels have a special importance among all the books of the Bible because they are “the principal witness for the life and teaching” of Jesus (*Dei Verbum*, 18). According to Charles Belmonte, the proclamation of the Gospel “emphasizes the union between the Incarnate Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, symbolized by the altar and sacramentally present after the Consecration, and the word of God written in the Gospel” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 91).

The Meaning of the Gospel

What does the word Gospel mean? The glossary of the Catechism defines Gospel as “[t]he ‘good news’ of God’s mercy and love revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. [...] The Gospel is handed on in the apostolic tradition of the Church as the source of all-saving truth and moral discipline” (*CCC*, Glossary, “Gospel”). The four Gospels are named after their human writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Second Vatican Council teaches, “The Church has always and everywhere maintained, and continues to maintain, the apostolic origin of the four Gospels. The apostles preached, as Christ had charged them to do, and then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they and others of the apostolic age handed on to us in writing the same message they had preached, the foundation of our faith: the fourfold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.” (*Dei Verbum*, 18).

During the Mass, after we stand for the Gospel Acclamation, the priest or deacon begins with that familiar dialogue: “The Lord be with you!” and the people respond, “And with your spirit!” Then, the priest introduces the Gospel and the people respond, “Glory to you, O Lord!” These back-and-forth dialogues help us to prepare for what is about to happen: the Lord Jesus speaking to us. Another preparation for the words of Jesus is a simple gesture of a sign of the Cross. As the priest or deacon says, “A reading from the holy Gospel according to...,” he will make a sign of the Cross on the Gospel book. At the same time, the people at Mass trace a small sign of the Cross on their foreheads, lips, and chests. I still remember, as a young boy, my dad teaching us to make this gesture and to say to ourselves: “May the words of the Gospel be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart.” Those words have stayed with me through the years and are still a sincere prayer that the Word of God would be at the forefront of my daily living. As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, these acts and prayers are all “signs of veneration for the Word of God proclaimed to us in the holy Gospel. Our standing, our singing the Alleluia, our gestures and our responses are all outward signs of our inward disposition of love for Christ and reverence for his Word” (“A Study of the Mass,” p. 8).

Our Response to the Gospel

At the conclusion of the gospel passage for a particular Mass, the priest or deacon says, “The Gospel of the Lord!” Our response in faith is, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!” Then, the priest or deacon kisses the page he just read from and says silently, “Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.” Charles Belmonte beautifully writes that “we can at least make ours the kiss the priest has placed on the sacred book. With it, we want to tell our Lord we are ready to give our lives for the truths contained in the Gospel... At the same time, we ask forgiveness for our faults” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 95).

Of course, the Gospels are so wonderful that we should read and pray about them more often than just at Sunday Mass. The life of Jesus is so rich and beautiful and can really provide great strength for us every day. Maybe try reading just one chapter of the Gospels every day and see what happens!