



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 31:
The Liturgy of the Word and
the Liturgy of the Eucharist
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As we conclude the Liturgy of the Word and prepare to transition to the Liturgy of the Eucharist, it is a fitting time to reflect on how these main parts of the Mass are united and complement each other. We previously touched on this unity in our reflection on the homily. This time, we will hear from a couple of our recent popes. As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass is spread the table both of God’s Word and of the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed” (*GIRM*, 28, also cf. *SC* 56, 48, 51). Perhaps the two main parts of the Mass seem obvious, but how are they “so closely interconnected”? How are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist related? As two examples, they both strengthen us in understanding our faith and living it out in the world, and they both draw us deeper into true unity with Christ.

The Two Ways Our Lord Nourishes Us

Pope St. John Paul II reflected on how the unity of the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist goes back to the early Church: “We are well aware that from the earliest times the celebration of the Eucharist has been linked not only with prayer but also with the reading of Sacred Scripture and with singing by the whole assembly. As a result, it has long been possible to apply to the Mass the comparison, made by the Fathers, with the two tables, at which the Church prepares for her children the word of God and the Eucharist, that is, the bread of the Lord” (*Dominicae Cenaе*, 10). This image of the two tables illustrates for us that we are fed in two main ways through the Mass: through the hearing of God’s word to us and through the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. As we have reflected before, through the Scriptures we come to know God as he reveals himself to us; we learn who we are as his people; and we learn how to live our lives in him and with one another. As we will see as we continue through the Mass, in the Eucharist we are nourished in a unique way through the true presence of Jesus and his dwelling with us through Holy Communion. Our Lord nourishes us in two wonderful ways!

Pope Benedict XVI, reflecting on these two tables of the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist, emphasizes the unity between them: “First of all, there is a need to reflect on the inherent unity of the rite of Mass. Both in catechesis and in the actual manner of celebration, one must avoid giving the impression that the two parts of the rite are merely juxtaposed... There is an intrinsic bond between the word of God and the Eucharist. From listening to the word of God, faith is born or strengthened (cf. Rom 10:17); in the Eucharist the Word made flesh gives himself to us as our spiritual food. Thus, ‘from the two tables of the word of God and the Body of Christ, the Church receives and gives the faithful the bread of life.’ Consequently it must constantly be kept in mind that the word of God, read and proclaimed by the Church in the liturgy, leads to the Eucharist as to its own connatural end” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 44).

Relationship and Unity

Pope Benedict’s words remind me of the way we grow in relationships. Typically, we first encounter others at a bit of a distance. Maybe we see them in a group, or we cross paths in some way. Next, there is usually a time when we are learning basics, such as names, family backgrounds, schools, or jobs. If the relationship continues to grow, we learn more about what a person thinks, likes, and hopes or dreams. Over time, a friendship grows and deepens, and with that depth comes greater love and intimacy. Of course, even with a depth of love, we know we still communicate with each other and continue to learn more. Our love helps us to understand each other more fully and our ongoing communication helps us deepen our love. This basic comparison helps me realize more concretely what I think the popes are teaching us: in the Mass, we encounter Jesus both through the Liturgy of the Word and through the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Both tables bless us with growing deeper in our relationship with him. Both lead us deeper in unity. Both invite us to share the fruits of that unity with one another. Both increase our hope for the perfect unity with Christ that awaits us in heaven. For now, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet is coming in the Liturgy of the Eucharist!