

In Communion with Christ

3. Word

The senses of Scripture

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: 'All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.'

The spiritual sense. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

The allegorical sense. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism.

The moral sense. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written 'for our instruction.'

The anagogical sense (Greek: *anagoge*, 'leading'). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem.

A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses:

The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith;
The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 115-118.

Living by the Word

There has been a renewed interest in the Word of God according to the orientation of the Council which called for a 'more abundant, more varied, and better selected readings of Sacred Scripture.' The new lectionaries, for example, offer an ample choice of Scriptural passages, which constitute an inexhaustible source from which the People of God can draw. Indeed, we cannot forget that 'in listening to the word of God, the Church is built and grows; nor can we forget the wonderful deeds that God has performed in the history

If Christian individuals and families are not regularly drawing new life from the reading of the sacred text in a spirit of prayer and docility to the Church's interpretation, then it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect. This is the value of initiatives in parish communities which bring together during the week those who take part in the Eucharist - priest, ministers and faithful - in order to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed. The objective sought here is that the entire celebration - praying, singing, listening, and not just the preaching - should express in some way the theme of the Sunday liturgy, so that all those taking part may be penetrated more powerfully by it. Clearly, much depends on those who exercise the ministry of the word. It is their duty to prepare the reflection on the word of the Lord by prayer and study of the sacred text, so that they may then express its contents faithfully and apply them to people's concerns and to their daily lives.

Pope John Paul II *Dies Domini*. 40

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

55-71, 128-138

Mass with Deacon: 175-177

Concelebrated Mass 212-213

Celebrating the Mass

68-71, 91-92, 98, 151-173

of salvation, by mystical truths reflected in the signs of liturgical celebration.’ Within the celebration, the Word of God expresses the fullness of its meaning, stimulating Christian life in a continual renewal, because ‘that which is heard in the liturgical action is later acted in life.’

In our time a renewed need of spirituality re-emerges, in so many forms. How can one not see in this a proof of the fact that in the inner being of man it is not possible to cancel the thirst for God? There are questions that find an answer only in a personal contact with Christ. Only in intimacy with him every life acquires meaning, and can arrive at experiencing the joy that made Peter say on the mountain of the Transfiguration: ‘Master, it is well that we are here’ (Luke 9:33 par).

Given this longing for the encounter with God, the Liturgy provides the most profound and effective response. It does so especially in the Eucharist, in which it is given to us to be united to the sacrifice of Christ and to be nourished from his Body and his Blood. It is necessary, nevertheless, that the Pastors do so in a way that the meaning of the mystery penetrates in consciences, rediscovering and practicing the ‘mystagogic’ art, so dear to the Fathers of the Church.

Pope John Paul II. *Spiritus et Sponsa*, 8, 11, 12.

The source from which catechesis draws its message is the word of God:

‘Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church’.

This ‘deposit of faith’ is like the treasure of a householder; it is entrusted to the Church, the family of God, and she continuously draws from it things new and old. All God’s children, animated by his Spirit, are nourished by this treasure of the Word. They know that the Word is Jesus Christ, the Word made man and that his voice continues to resound in the Church and in the world through the Holy Spirit. The Word of God, by wondrous divine ‘condescension’ is directed toward us and reaches us by means of human ‘deeds and words’, ‘just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men’. (And so without ceasing to be the word of God, it is expressed in human words. Although close to us, it still remains veiled, in a ‘kenotic’ state. Thus the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has to interpret the word continually. She contemplates the word with a profound spirit of faith, ‘listens to [it] devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully’.

General Directory for Catechesis, 94

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant---
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise
As Lightening to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind ---

Emily Dickinson

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Word

Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How effective is the sound system in the Church? Is there a loop system installed for the benefit of the hard of hearing? Is the face of the reader well lit, for benefit of those relying on lip-reading?

What ongoing formation is provided for parish readers?

How are people helped to listen to the word proclaimed?

What helps/hinders people's use of times of silence after the readings?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Homily notes

How is the action of hearing and responding to God's word represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'listening and responding' take place in the daily life of your community?
What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the theme of listening and responding?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.