

Burning Questions about the Liturgy

Why is it suggested that we not read a printed version of the Sunday readings during Mass?

What we are after in the liturgy is not ease, rather sacramentality.

Many churches provide the readings in printed form. Inevitably, the announcement of the reading causes people to bury their heads and their attention into their text as they communally tune out the Lector. In this case, the **proclamation** of the Scriptures has effectively been replaced with a collective reading. In a sense the liturgical celebration has ceased in favor of some kind of collective Bible study.

Though Bible study is a worthy and necessary endeavor, it differs greatly from the celebration of the **Liturgy of the Word**. In essence, the liturgical celebration is sacramental while Bible study is not. The sacramental nature of the liturgy is relative to Christ's presence in it. When it comes to the Eucharist, we believe that Christ is present in the celebrating assembly, in the presiding priest, in the Word that is proclaimed and received, and above all in the Eucharistic species.

The sacramentality or the presence of Christ in the Word is based on the fact that the Word is proclaimed in the midst of an assembly that is ready to receive the Word. In other words, it is the proclamation and the reception that make the Word sacramental. Collective silent reading does not.

Furthermore, the proclamation of the Word is not merely the reading of a story, either individually or even communally. It is so much more than that. The Word of God proclaimed during our liturgies is the same Word by which all that exists was created at the dawn of time. That same powerful and creative Word of God is operative during the Liturgy of the Word. And even when, God forbid, we tune out because "we have heard the story before," the spoken Word of God is creatively at work in our mind, heart, and soul.

In an attempt to visualize how this works, I often think of the Word of God proclaimed in our midst as the hands of God and the listening assembly as the clay. Week after week, as we listen to the Word, God's hands mold us more and more into the image of Christ. Another image is that of a rock in a riverbed. The Word of God is the water and we are the rock. Like the water polishes the rock, the Word of God polishes us to become better Christians.

The only acceptable reasons for printing the readings in the booklet are first, to assist people with hearing disabilities; second, to compensate for a faulty sound system; third, to assist people in their meditation on the readings either before or after the liturgy.

So, when the lector announces the reading, rather than picking up the printed text, please give your full attention to the proclamation of God's Word. Let the Word wash over you, let the Word mold you so that after a lifetime of listening to the Word of God you will have become the Word you heard and received.