

**Sixteenth Sunday Per Annum (B)**  
***July, 19, 2015.***

*And He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things (Mk. 6:34).*

As we did last Sunday we will meditate on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, our central act of worship, *the source and summit of Christian life (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican Council II)*; the very heart of all that Church is and does. *The liturgy has two purposes: to worship God with all due reverence and love, and to feed, nurture, shape, and perfect the worshipper (Peter Kwasniewski, Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis, p. 72-73).* The ultimate purpose of the liturgy is to form our souls in the beauty of holiness. Each one of us has an individual soul, unique to each person. Indeed, we define the human person as a unity of body and soul (*corpore et anima unus*). Our soul has three faculties or powers: the intellect, the memory and the will. Each of these is engaged in the exercise of our sacred worship. There is a beautiful liturgical verse that expresses the effect of God's living Word in us: *Lord Jesus, open the Scriptures to us: make our hearts burn with love when you speak (Gospel Acclamation, Third Sunday of Easter, Year B)*. This verse is based on the experience of the disciples who had encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus: *And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?'* (Lk. 24:31-32). As we walk the path of our own devout discipleship, Our Lord also talks to us in the Sacred Scriptures that are proclaimed and expounded in what we call the Liturgy of the Word or what in the Extraordinary Form of the Mass is called the *Mass of the Catechumens*. This first part of the Mass until the recitation of the Creed is based on the practice of the Synagogue. Here we offer prayers and praise to God and receive instruction from Him. In the earliest days of the Church, catechumens, that is, those being instructed in the faith, were welcome for this portion of the Mass.

In their synagogue service on the Sabbath, the Jews read from the Scriptures: first from the Law, then from the Prophets. These readings were interspersed with the singing of the Psalms. Thus when the first Christians gathered on Sunday to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord, they continued this tradition; reading also from the Apostles and the Evangelists. In continuity with these ancient practices, we read from both the Law and the Prophets in our First Reading, sing or recite a Psalm, read from the Epistles of the Apostles in our Second Reading and lastly from the Evangelists. The book that contains these selections from the Sacred Scriptures is called the *Lectionary*. There is a separate liturgical book called an *Evangelary* or *Book of the Gospels* containing those portions of the four gospels which are read during Mass or other offices. While sitting is a position of receptivity for the first and second readings, we stand for the Gospel, both as a sign of respect for the words of Jesus and to manifest our eagerness and attentiveness to hear His Word. The reading of the Gospel is preceded by the singing of the *Alleluia* and other expressions of reverence such as candles, incense and the kissing of the Gospel text. The word *alleluia* comes from the Hebrew *ballelu*, meaning *let us praise* and *Yah*, which is a shortened form of one of the names of God. As we make the sign of the cross on our forehead, lips and heart, we ask our Lord to keep His Word in our thoughts words and

deeds. All our faculties, intellect, memory and will are enlightened by God's saving truth. At the end of the Gospel reading the priest or deacon kisses the Evangeliary and he says: *By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out. (Per evangelica dicta deleantur nostra delicta)*. This silent prayer speaks to the power of God's Word. What is self-evident of course is that Sacred Scripture is omnipresent throughout the celebration of the Mass. These are memorable words that we ponder and weave into the fabric of our personal prayer, and life. In the cycle of the liturgical year our Lord continues to teach us many things. It is He who shepherds us and by our attentive listening we learn to recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd.

It may be helpful for us to make a very important distinction regarding this part of the Mass in which the Scriptures are read and explained. *The Word of God is Jesus Christ, not a book, not even an inerrant and infallible book...is a lifeless thing, but a person is alive, and a divine Person gives life to all spirits that serve Him. The purpose of proclaiming Scripture at Mass is to prepare the worshipers for communion with the Word, the source of the written word* (Peter Kwasniewski, *Resurgent in the Midst of Crisis*, p.53). The traditional division between the *Mass of the Catechumens* and the *Mass of the Faithful* better expresses what takes place during this part of the Mass which represents the soul in the process of conversion to Christ, hearing His word and bringing it to bear on the concrete situations of life; while the second part, the *Mass of the Faithful*, represents the disciple now *formed by divine teaching*, receiving the light, truth and life of Christ in a union which is transformative and intimately personal. This is the intimacy of Holy Communion.

*And He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things* (Mk. 6:34). Over the course of the liturgical year, especially on Sundays and Feast Days it is customary to preach a homily or sermon. The origin of this practice is also ancient. In the second century St. Justin Martyr (+ c. 165) wrote that *on the day called Sunday, all assembled in the same place, where the memorials of the Apostles were read... and when the reader has finished, the bishop delivers a sermon*. The homily or sermon is an integral part of our worship for the celebration of the Mass is both the school and feast of faith. Both preacher and the faithful do well to consider the importance of the homily as the principal means of ongoing instruction and formation in the faith.

The recitation or chanting of the Creed concludes this part of the sacred liturgy. The creed is a summary of our faith containing all the truths of our faith. In the centuries after the death of Our Lord, there were many misunderstandings about Christ's nature as both true God and true man. As a result, the Church fully developed each article of belief in the Apostle's Creed at the Councils of Nicea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD) and expanded certain parts of the Creed; giving us what we call the Nicene Creed. It is Our Lord Himself whom we see and hear in the celebration of the sacred mysteries. May we be steadfast in the profession of the true faith and ever attentive to His word. *Lord Jesus, open the Scriptures to us: make our hearts burn with love when you speak.*