

Liturgical Moments
St. Joseph Parish
Lent 2023

Week 1 – Feb. 25-26

Good morning. My name is _____ and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. At the request of the Vision Committee, we will be sharing with you over the course of Lent, a few interesting facts about the Mass. Our topics are drawn from the book (hold up the book), *Mass Class*, by Paulist Father Dave Dwyer. On this first Sunday of Lent we will talk about: Why we go to Mass.

When we gather for Mass we become the “assembly”. The assembly consists of all of us present at mass who are not on the altar. The assembly is the first place where we encounter Jesus, in and through the people around us, those who share his life through Baptism. It is our Baptism that allows us an active role in the Eucharistic celebration. This is the reason we bless ourselves with Holy Water when we enter church – preferably using water from the baptismal font - to remind us of our unity through Baptism.

The word “Mass” is a more common word for “liturgy” which actually means “the work for the people”. The liturgy serves to deepen our bonds with Jesus and with each other each week. Our presence is so important in this work. As Fr. Dave says in his book, “Catholicism is not a me-and-Jesus religion; it’s a We-and-Jesus religion.” (p.4) When we all stand for the Gathering song, and the Gospel, or kneel for the consecration – we do those actions together as a sign of our unity in faith. St. Paul’s letters remind us again and again that we are the Body of Christ and no part of the body can stand alone. Attending Mass helps us remember that.

So, Catholics go to mass to come together as the People of God, united by baptism, to be formed anew each week into the Body of Christ so that we can be sent forth to better bring the love of Christ to the world. And that’s why we go to Mass!

Next week we’ll talk about the first half of the Mass, known as the Liturgy of the Word.

Week 2 March 4-5

Good morning. I'm [name] and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. As you may remember, we will be sharing with you a few interesting facts about the Mass each Sunday during Lent. Our source of information is the book, *Mass Class*, by Paulist Father Dave Dwyer. On this, the Second Sunday of Lent, we will discuss "Why there are so many scripture readings at mass; shouldn't we be more focused on the Eucharist?"

There are many different ways to explain the parts of the mass, but the simplest is to speak of the first half of the liturgy as the Liturgy of the Word, where we take in the Word of God through the scriptures and the homily, and the second half of the Mass as the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where we take in the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ through communion.

During the Liturgy of the Word, we hear stories that tell us who we are and where we came from. The first reading is almost always taken from the Hebrew Scriptures, what most Catholics would refer to as the Old Testament. During the Easter season, however, the Old Testament reading is replaced by stories of the early church found in the Acts of the Apostles.

After the first reading, we sing a psalm, also from the Hebrew Scriptures. Then our second reading is from the New Testament, but not from one of the gospels – so, usually it is a passage from a letter written by St. Paul to one of the early Christian Communities he established in places like Corinth, or Ephesus, or Rome (hence, Paul's letters to the Corinthians, to the Ephesians, to the Romans). Sound familiar?

Finally, there is the proclamation from one of the four Gospels – either by Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, whose images, by the way, are in the artwork attached to this podium. Equally important is the homily that follows, which is intended to give us insight into the readings. This podium, called the ambo, is where the Word is proclaimed. It is just as important to the Liturgy of the Word as the altar is to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Jesus is as present to us in the Word of God as he is in the bread and wine. As Fr. Dave tell us, “We spend time with God’s Word so that we can more deeply appreciate the gift we receive in the Eucharist. The Word teaches us how to live Christian lives after having taken Christ into our very selves.” (117)

Next week, we’ll talk about how the readings are chosen for each Sunday.

Week 3 March 11-12

Good morning. My name is _____ and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. The Vision Committee has asked us to share a few interesting facts about the mass. If you have been following along, you know that our topics are largely drawn from the book, *Mass Class*, (hold it up), by Paulist Father Dave Dwyer. Today is the Third Sunday of Lent and we will continue to reflect on the first half of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word. We will focus today on the gospel and the homily, explaining why the priest can't just pick whatever he wants to read from the bible at mass?

Catholics use a book called a Lectionary which is an ordered collection of scripture passages with particular days assigned to each. We have assigned readings in part to demonstrate the unity of the Church. The word "catholic" means universal and in the Catholic church on any given Sunday you will hear the same readings as in other Catholic churches throughout the diocese, or in Africa or the Philippines, or Rome.

In fact, it's not just us Catholics. Many Christian denominations (Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and others) all use the Revised Common Lectionary to determine their Sunday readings. It's astonishing to think that most of the 2 billion Christians on the planet are hearing the same gospel each Sunday!

The gospel reading is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, and we do many things at Mass to show that. Except during Lent, we sing Alleluia before the gospel, to signal our gratitude for our encounter with Jesus in the gospels. We all stand together during the Gospel to show our unity in reverence for this scripture. And many of us make small signs of the cross with the right thumb on our forehead, mouth, and heart right before the Gospel is read. This gesture is often paired with the simple silent prayer, "May the Word of God come alive in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart," that helps us prepare to encounter the Word of God.

When the reading of the gospel is complete, we sit and prepare ourselves for another important part of the Liturgy of the Word – which is the homily. We use the word “homily” and not the word “sermon” because a homily is a reflection on a predetermined set of readings that the preacher did not choose. We hear a homily each week because the scripture it is based upon is chosen for us by the Church.

The priest or deacon’s homily serves as a reflection on the scripture message in light of the needs of the world in general and the needs of St. Joseph’s parish in particular. The homily helps us to see more clearly God’s presence and action in our daily lives in light of the scriptures.

. . . Next week, we’ll talk about the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Week 4 March 18-19

Good morning. I'm [name] and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. At the request of the Vision Committee, we are sharing with you a few interesting facts about the Mass. As you know, our topics are largely drawn from the book, *Mass Class*, by Paulist Father Dave Dwyer. Today is the Fourth Sunday of Lent and we will be talking about the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Offertory, when we bring our gifts to the altar. As the bread, wine, and collection basket are brought forward, we can reflect on what else we are bringing to God this Sunday, knowing that the bread, wine, and the collection are but symbols of what each of us has to offer.

You may have noticed that there are times during the Liturgy of the Eucharist when the priest says some prayers quietly to himself. We, the assembly, are often singing the Offertory Song at these times, so they can be easy to miss, but you may hear these prayers at a daily mass or at other celebrations that are not accompanied by music.

One of those quiet prayers the priest says occurs at the beginning of the communion rite when he says a blessing over the bread and wine. The priest says, "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made." And over the wine he says, "Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink." In both instances, the assembly would respond, "Blessed be God forever."

If you have ever been invited to celebrate Shabbat with Jewish friends, or seen in a movie the blessing of the candles that begins Shabbat, you have heard these same words, but in Hebrew: "*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam*" which can be translated as "Blessed are you Lord God of all creation." The priest is saying the same blessing over the bread and wine that Jews say every Shabbat, and that Jesus himself

would likely have heard in his lifetime. Knowing this helps us to connect to the Jewish roots of Christianity and unites us in prayer with our Jewish brothers and sisters to this day.

Week 5 March 25-26

Good morning. I'm [name] and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. Today is the Fifth Sunday of Lent and we will be talking about one of Fr. Dave's most frequent questions: What is the "word" that needs to be said for us to be healed?"

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, while still kneeling, we say together, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Apparently, many people want to know what exactly is that "word" that must be said? Here's the answer – there is no one word that needs to be said! The expression, "just say the word" is an idiom, just like if I were to offer to help and said to someone, "I'll be happy to do the dishes, just say the word, and I'll get right on it." It's just an expression – and apparently, an expression that was in use at the time of Christ because the whole of what we say is taken almost verbatim from a story that appears in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. A Roman soldier asks Jesus to heal his servant, who is sick back at the soldier's house. Jesus offers to go to the house, but the soldier doesn't want Jesus to go out of his way, so he replies, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, just say the word, and my servant shall be healed."

When we repeat this line from scripture each week before we approach the communion table, we are affirming our great faith in God – and God alone – to prepare us for the reception of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. God just needs to "say the word" and our souls shall be healed.

Week 6 April 1-2

Good morning. I'm [name] and I serve on the Liturgy Committee (or Vision Committee) here at St. Joe's. The Vision Committee has requested that we share a few interesting facts about the mass each of these Lenten Sundays. Our topics have been largely drawn from the book, *Mass Class*, by Paulist Father Dave Dwyer. Today is the Sixth Sunday of Lent and we will be talking about what we say as we receive communion.

When the minister offers us the host, and says, "Body of Christ," we reply, "AMEN." The word "amen" is hard to translate, which is why we don't, but it is essentially an affirmation, a way of agreeing with what's been said. When the minister of the Eucharist holds up the host and says to you, "The Body of Christ," and you reply, "Amen," you are saying you agree - yes, this is the true body of Christ, and I believe that.

When we receive a sacrament, we are receiving an offer from God, and it is up to us to accept it – to cooperate with God's grace. Communion is not a magic potion that works on us whether we want it to or not. Fr. Dave writes, "To receive the very essence of our Lord within our bodies carries with it the responsibility to live a life commensurate with that gift; to make right choices, to make sacrifices, to think less of me and more of others, to forgive, to make peace, to love. The miraculous change on the altar from bread and wine to body and blood is not the only change the Mass is meant to bring about. We too must allow ourselves to be changed by the Eucharist."

So when the minister holds up the host for you, imagine them saying, "will you allow the presence of Christ to transform your life this week?" Hopefully, you will respond clearly with your Amen. As we enter Holy Week, this is an especially good time to embrace God's offer of transformation.

If you have enjoyed these Liturgical Moments and would like to see them continue, just email Fr. Jim and let him know. There are also Feedback forms in the pews that you

can fill out and return to the box on the counter in the back. Thank you for your attention these past 6 weeks.