



## The Liturgy of the Word

“Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight his paths.”

Matthew 3:3

### Second Sunday in Advent

Our series continues with the liturgy of the Word. This second Sunday in Advent, we hear John the Baptist's cry to prepare the way of the Lord. The liturgy of the Word helps us to prepare a space for Christ, the Word-made-Flesh, and to apply that Word to our lives, through scripture, preaching, profession, and prayers, as our salvation history is proclaimed in our midst.

**Scripture Readings** The Second Vatican Council emphasized that Christ himself is present when scripture is proclaimed in the midst of the assembly, and our liturgy is filled with scripture. We are seated for most of the liturgy of

the Word, so that we can be receptive to receiving God's Word. The assembly participates in the scripture readings not just through active listening and quiet prayer but also by singing the responsorial Psalm refrain and responding at the end of each reading. Members of the assembly come forward to proclaim the Word as readers and cantors, and as such serve as vessels of Christ's presence as the Word of God. During the liturgy of the Word, we hear three scripture readings and a Psalm. The first reading is usually from the Old Testament and is followed by a sung responsorial Psalm that relates to that reading. The second reading is taken from the Epistles (letters) of the New Testament and is followed by the Gospel reading, which is the scriptural summit of the Liturgy of the Word.

**Gospel Procession** We give special significance is given to Christ's presence in the proclamation of the Gospel, since they contain the core accounts of the life of Jesus Christ: his birth, family, ministry, suffering, dying and rising. The Gospel readings are contained in their own book. We prepare for this reading by standing and singing, “Alleluia,” or during Lent, another acclamation of praise. The priest or deacon shows this book of the Gospels to the whole assembly and then carries the book, often accompanied by servers carrying candles, from the altar to the ambo. The ordained minister who proclaims the Gospel begins with the greeting, “The Lord be with you”, and the people respond, “And with your spirit,” emphasizing the sacredness of the Gospel proclamation. The book may be incensed. Then, with our minds, bodies, and hearts freshly attuned, Christ speaks to us in the Gospel.

**Homily** After the proclamation of the Gospel, the minister kisses the book, as a sign of reverence, places it aside or in a special place of display, and all are seated for the homily. The Word of God is living and active, scripture says, and the main purpose of the minister's homily is to help all of us to apply that Word to our lives today. Through the homily, the priest or deacon opens up the Word so that we are challenged, consoled, transformed, or enlivened by God's Word. Christ works in us to transform the world with his Gospel message. A moment of silent prayer follows the homily, to allow a time of recollection, meditation, and prayer, inspired by this encounter with Christ, the Word, proclaimed.

**Profession of Faith** Then we stand to profess our faith, using the Nicene Creed. With the new Missal, some of the words of this creed will change, and we will also be encouraged to use the Apostles' Creed during Lent and Easter, in part because of its ancient and contemporary connection to its use in Christian initiation. When we profess our faith, we do so both as individuals and as a community of believers, uniting our voices as one.

**Prayer of the Faithful** Having heard the Word proclaimed and explained in our midst, having had time to reflect on its meaning in our lives, and having professed our unity of faith, we finally offer prayers for the Church, all nations and peoples, and those in need. A deacon, if present, or a lay reader announces the prayers, which are composed by someone in our parish community to voice our needs.

**Two Tables, One Word** The Word of God is read from “ambo”, which is a Greek word for a public speaking platform. Christians have called the ambo the “table of God's word” since ancient times. Having been nourished at this table of the Word through the writings of God's prophets and apostles, we look toward the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice at the altar of the Lord's table. It is at this table where we come to know Christ, Word become flesh, that the world might have life.

*Next week, the series continues with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.*

