

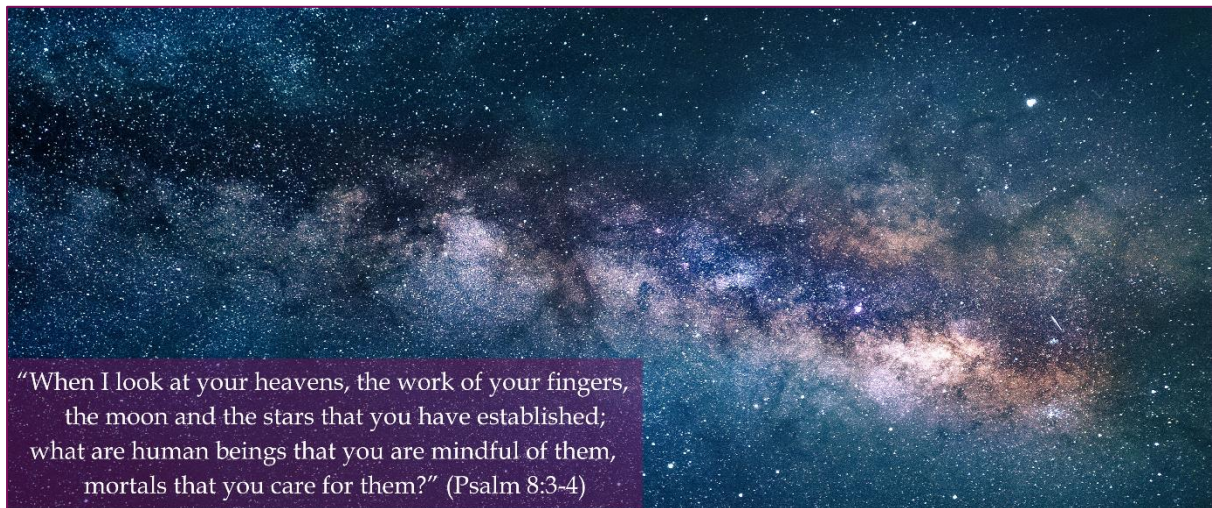
The God who Speaks

God created us so that we might share in His own life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to us. He calls us to seek him, to know him, to love him with all our strength (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1).

This is the very first paragraph of the Catechism, the document that summarises what we believe as Catholics. This is the starting point for all our reflections on God: He loves us, created us so that we might share in that love, and communicates with us. God desires a relationship with us, and relationships are built on communication.

How does God Communicate with us?

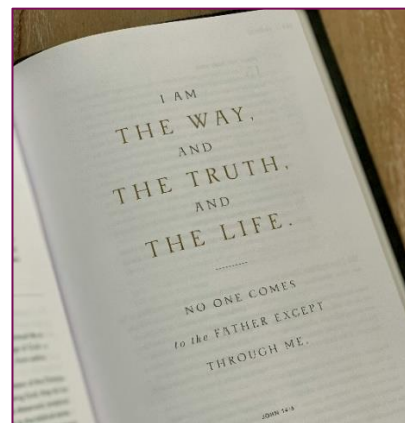
God reveals Himself to us in many ways. First, we can recognise the work of the Creator in His creation. When we look at a beautiful sunset, or walk a beach, or notice the intricacies of a spider web or snow flake, we can recognise that God is at work. We can see God's handiwork in the universe and in the human body.



God was not content with to leave us to figure out who He was from creation alone. He began revealing Himself to humanity. This revelation wasn't just about giving us information. God wanted to draw us into deeper relationship with Him.

In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself through the prophets.

"In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus is the Word of God who revealed God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Jesus commissioned the apostles (and all of us who are His disciples) to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).

When we come together to hear God’s Word at Mass, this is the format that we usually follow. We read from the Old Testament, from the New Testament and from the Gospel. These readings tell the whole story of salvation history, i.e., how God has revealed Himself to us through words and deeds in our story.

The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

“The Mass is made up, as it were, of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These, however, are so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship” (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 28).

We are nourished by God’s word and the Eucharist at Mass. God Himself speaks to His people through the scripture readings, and then gives us His Body to eat.

Structure of the Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word is a meeting with Christ himself, today present in his word. It is an experience of God’s continuing revelation in our lives and in our world.

The first reading is connected to the Gospel. The second reading may or may not be connected to the theme of the Old Testament and Gospel, as it is usually a continuous reading of New Testament letters.

- First Reading (Old Testament except during Easter when it is from Acts)
- Responsorial Psalm. (should be sung where possible)
- Second reading (New Testament)
- Gospel Acclamation (and procession)
- Gospel
- Homily (where God’s word is broken open for us by the priest or deacon)
- Profession of Faith (Creed)
- Prayer of the Faithful

Appropriate silences, particularly after the readings and the homily also form part of the response of the assembly.

The readings follow a three year cycle:

Year A: The Gospel according to Matthew.

Year B: The Gospel according to Mark (The Gospel according to John is read on 7 Sundays during Year B with Mark and also during special seasons and feasts).

Year C: The Gospel according to Luke.

Types of Literature in the Bible

The Bible is not a book so much as a collection of books, a library of different literature types. We wouldn't read poetry in the same way that we might read a story etc. We need to pay attention to the type of literature that we are reading in order to best approach it.

Looking at the way a writer chooses to share information can open the way for new ways of understandings what the Bible has to say. The Bible includes a great number of types of literature. Some forms of literature describe an entire book. In the Bible the most important of these forms are laws and rules, history, poetry and songs, wisdom sayings and proverbs, Gospels, letters, and apocalyptic writings. Other forms of literature describe sections within a book. The most important of these forms are prose narrative, prayers, parables, prophecies (oracles), and long family lists (genealogies).

Try to express the tone of the text in your voice without over dramatising it. The focus should be on God's Word, not on you.



Technique

A good posture is important for breath control - standing tall with head up, shoulders relaxed and hands resting lightly on the sides of the lectern

Before starting to read, relax by breathing out; then breathe in deeply by expanding the ribs outwards, not by lifting the shoulders. This needs to be practised. Shorter breaths may be taken quickly through the mouth if required during a long sentence. This should be done at a comma or at the end of a phrase.

The voice should be directed outwards by keeping the head lifted up and not downwards into the book.

The microphone may need to be adjusted so that it is level with the reader's mouth.

Dos and Don'ts

Dos

- Remember that you are a Minister of the Church
- Check your rota during the week and secure a replacement in advance whenever you cannot serve at a Mass for which you are scheduled
- Begin your preparation with prayer
- Read the passage. What strikes you? Reflect and pray about it
- Read the other readings of the day for context. Read the passage in the context of the chapter of the Bible from where it was taken
- Practise reading the passage aloud
- Pay attention to the type of text being read: story, speech, poetry etc.
- Dress appropriately and respectfully, avoiding clothing or shoes which may be problematic
- Prepare yourself before every Mass with a moment of quiet prayer
- Arrive 15 minutes before Mass starts and sign-in in the customary way
- Check the ambo that the lectionary is on the right page and that the microphone is at the right level for you
- Know how to turn on, off and adjust the microphone
- Become aware of the acoustics of your church
- Participate fully in all the parts of the liturgy. Try not to let your ministry distract you from worshipping. You are at Mass first and foremost to worship God
- Before walking up to the ambo, pray that, through you, the Word may be heard and received in faith
- Move with dignity and show reverence by bowing to the Altar (not genuflecting) before beginning to read and after the conclusion of the reading
- Read with conviction
- Pay attention to your:
 - Clarity of sound
 - Diction and pronunciation
 - Pace and speed
 - Correct phrasing (i.e., taking breaths in the right places)
- Have a sense of where to place an emphasis, to pause for a moment's silence etc.
- Communicate with the congregation – use eye contact
- Pay attention to how you might include variety - to maintain interest, distinguish characters, issues
- Pray in thanksgiving afterwards

Don'ts

- Spend time alone in the sacristy with a child (altar server)
- Don't walk up to the lectern whilst a prayer or an introduction is being given. This is a sacred ministry
- Don't rush to begin. Take a moment to gather yourself at the ambo, and then begin
- Don't read from anything other than the Lectionary where possible.
- Don't say 'The First Reading...etc' Simply and clearly announce 'A Reading from...' There is also no need to read the introductory phrase (the phrase in red). It is not part of the reading
- Don't say 'The response to the Psalm is..' Normally the Psalm will be sung, but if it is to be recited, simply read the response and allow time for the congregation to respond. There is no need to say 'response' at the end of each verse. If you wish to indicate that you have come to end of a verse, you may wish to make eye contact with the congregation
- Don't give directions, e.g. 'Please stand..' The congregation knows when different postures are used and will take their lead from the presider

Prayers

Prayer of Cardinal Martini before Reading and Reflecting on Sacred Scripture

Lord, we thank you for putting us in the presence of your Word which you inspired in your prophets.

May we approach this Word reverently, humbly and attentively.

May we not despise this Word, but receive all it has to say to us.

We know that our hearts are closed,

often incapable of comprehending the simplicity of your Word.

Send your Spirit to us so that receiving the Word in truth and simplicity, our lives may be transformed by it.

Let us not be resistant, Lord;

may your Word penetrate us like a two edged sword;

may our hearts be open to it;

let not our eyes be closed, nor our minds wander,

but may we give ourselves entirely to this listening.

We ask this Father,

in union with Mary who used to recite the psalms,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

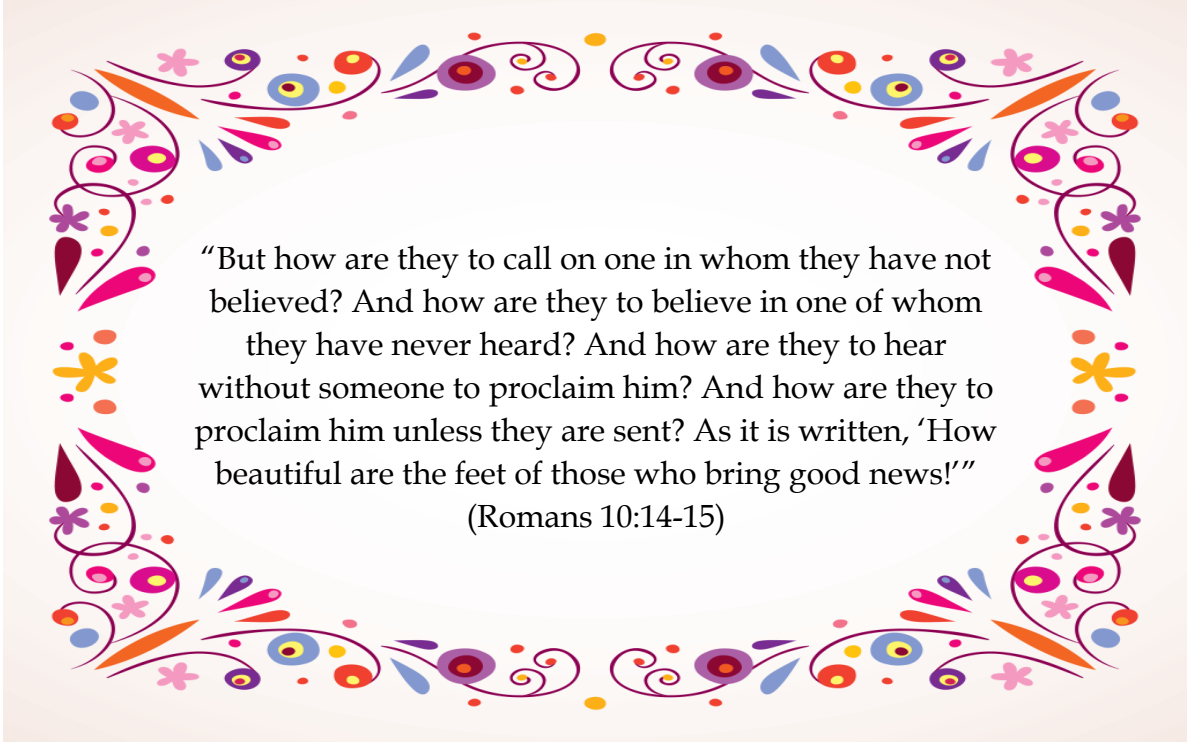
Prayer to the Mother of the Word of God

Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own "yes"
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
pray for us. Amen. Alleluia.

Prayer for a Minister of the Word before Mass

Lord, invest me with your power
as I prepare to proclaim the marvel of your message.
I have prepared my reading,
I have tried to take within me the meaning of what I am about to proclaim.
Help me to proclaim, not just with my lips, but with my whole heart and soul.
Lord, make me a hollow reed so that your voice will be heard by all who hear me.
Free me of excessive concern over my performance.
Convert my feeling of nervousness
and turn all my apprehension into an energy
for proclaiming your word with power and authority.
May your Spirit live in me and fill the holy word that I proclaim. Amen.



"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"
(Romans 10:14-15)