

## Proclaiming the Word

*"It is essential to make every effort to train certain members of the faithful to be true proclaimers of the Word with adequate preparation, as is now customary for acolytes or extraordinary ministers of communion.*

*Similarly, parish priests can find the most appropriate way to present the Bible, or one of its books, to the whole congregation, in order to highlight the importance of continuing to read it in daily life, studying it in depth and praying with the Holy Scriptures, with particular reference to Lectio Divina."*

Pope Francis

Role of the reader: to allow Scripture to become a Word for today.

*"This word of Scripture, which you have just heard, is fulfilled today."*

(Luke 4:14-21)

## 1. "I will open your mouth"

**A Word that takes shape:** *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14)

Through baptism, we become members of his Body. Through Eucharistic communion, we "We become what we receive," as Saint Augustine says, that is, we become the Body of Christ. The same incorporation takes place through the Word. The Lord is not only present beside us, but within us. He gives us his Body so that we may become his Body. He gives us his Word so that we may become his Word, so that we may give substance to his Word. The reader, through his voice, gives substance to the text of Scripture so that it becomes the Word of God. By hearing this Word, each member of the assembly and the assembly as a whole, as a constituted and recognised local community, receive what God wants to say to the world and the mission to become the voice that will say it. We have been baptised into Christ, "King, Priest and Prophet". The reading of Scripture in the liturgy is a high point in the service of Christ the Prophet, who makes Christians his "prophetic body" in today's world.

**A Word of Covenant:** We read a passage from Scripture that takes as its model the event at Sinai and the foundation of all liturgical gatherings. It is our Covenant with God that we celebrate. It is therefore the Word of God that we must hear, as a charter to which he invites us to adhere: "If you listen to my voice and keep my Covenant..."

**Servant of the Word:** The reader acknowledges his weakness in the task of reading the Word of God, but another is to accept to serve. By agreeing to read, the reader experiences one of the great laws of the Gospel and, therefore, of life in the Church: Service is more important than one's sense of self. If one accepts a service, a function, a ministry in the Church, it is not because one feels worthy of it, but because one has been called to it. What is important is to acquire what will enable this service to be performed competently and effectively. That is why readers will exercise their function with all the sincere piety and good order befitting such a great ministry, and which the people of God rightly demand of them. "It is therefore necessary to carefully instil in them the spirit of the liturgy, according to each person's capacity, and to train them to perform their role in an accurate and orderly manner." "When I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, *'Thus says the Lord...'*" (Ezekiel 3:27). Such a service, such a mission, requires preparation.

## 2. Training readers

Choosing a reader at the last minute should only be done in an emergency. In all other cases, it is not a good idea. The person needs to be able to prepare. Why? They need to know what they are going to say in order to prepare themselves spiritually. Sometimes you have to dare to ask others, rather than always choosing the same people or saying to yourself, "No one wants to read." Identifying the text: if the reader does not know what they are going to read, they cannot identify the literary genre of the text, its structure, difficult words, or necessary breaks and pauses. In this case, the text will be read, but will it have "spoken" to the members of the congregation? We will have fulfilled the ritual of reading, but will we have truly accomplished a "liturgy of the Word"? A team of readers is needed: Can anyone read?

? It is not obvious, and this is one of the reasons why public appeals should be avoided. That said, many more people are capable of being readers, provided they undergo a minimum of training, which we will discuss later. As strange as it may seem to regulars, for many people, reading at Mass is something they do not think they have the strength to do. If we ask them to jump into the water without teaching them how to swim, we should not be surprised if they refuse.

### **The need for a team:**

For a distribution of responsibilities that is less burdensome if it does not always fall on the same people. There is another reason, less obvious but more profound. It concerns the image that the local community presents to itself: is it the concern of a few or of everyone? Is the liturgy reserved for the privileged few or does it belong to the whole congregation? If there are only children or elderly people, will the community appear to be a local church where everyone has their place and their responsibility? All the more so if it is always the same person who reads! The need for a leader: There must be a leader, who does not necessarily have to be the parish priest. Someone is needed to establish a rota, taking into account attendance and rotation; someone who can be called to ask for a replacement. Finally, no one better than a leader can regularly and discreetly identify which members of the congregation could potentially become new readers and ask them to do so.

### **Training sessions:**

Reading and speaking in public is not easy. Public reading has its own rules. You need to know them and put them into practice if you want to be not only heard, but above all listened to. These basic rules are not known to readers for whom liturgical reading is their only opportunity to speak in public, which is normal: it is not their job. Someone therefore needs to teach them.

**Training methods:** These rules will provide an introduction to the requirements of proclamation. Proper use of the tape recorder or camera: recording the readings during Mass. The recorded result will be analysed with the reader himself, taking care that he is the first to give his opinion. It is recommended that several readers be recorded on several Sundays. At the meeting that brings them together, one will be surprised at the number of comments that common sense alone will provide. Learning sessions: The tape recorder is used in work meetings:

- A reader gives a reading
- The recording is listened to
- This reader gives their own critique
- The other participants add their comments
- The same reader reads the same passage again
- We evaluate any changes, and especially any progress
- We move on to another reader...

It takes time! In a session lasting an hour and a half, only four or five readers will have been able to complete the exercise successfully. It is important to note that the discovery readers make about themselves when they hear their own voice significantly increases their interest in this type of exercise. Here's a tip! A simpler but equally effective tip is to learn to speak or read with a pencil between your teeth (wood is much less unpleasant than plastic). Practise saying the following sentences (at home) with a pencil between your teeth and recording yourself on a tape recorder:

- I demand, if I exist, that you demand that I exist
- Big, grey, fat, grain of barley, when will you de-big-grey-fat-grain-of-barley? I de-big-grey-fat-grain

When your tape recorder plays back these sentences without any syllables being swallowed or distorted, you will begin to discover what articulation is in public speaking.

### 3. Preparing for a reading

If a reader is to read a particular passage next Sunday, how should he prepare himself and the passage? But in reality, not everything that will be mentioned needs to be done every time, and above all, not at the same time.

#### **Spiritual preparation:**

The reader must, if possible, immerse himself in the message contained in the text several days in advance:

"Through this text that I am about to read to the congregation, what does God want to reveal to us about himself, about us, about his being, about our lives? ..." It is here, first of all, that the reader is the first listener, the first to hear the Word. To discover this message, the reader has his own faith, his Christian experience and his intelligence. Each book has a brief introduction, but no footnotes, because understanding of the text is supposed to be achieved through the proclamation itself and the homily that follows. Finally, to prepare spiritually, the reader can receive help from his Christian brothers and sisters by participating in the meeting of his parish's liturgical team, which, in preparation for Sunday Mass, began by sharing the biblical texts of the Mass in question.

#### **Literary preparation**

It is not a question of turning every reader into an exegete. But it is only fair that readers should be able to roughly date the work, place it in its historical context and form an idea of its author. Let us be more precise. All the readings are taken from the Bible, but that does not mean that they are all of the same literary genre. The Bible is not actually a single book, but a collection of books: each book has its own style, literary technique and genre, and sometimes several within the same book. How can we understand the text and, above all, how can we read it (make it speak) without knowing what genre it belongs to? Can we imagine reading a poem by Victor Hugo in the same way as a page from the Highway Code? The books of the Bible are not alike; they complement each other. Each in its own way reveals a spiritual experience that speaks to faith and invites believers to encounter the living God. They are precious, universally accepted testimonies through which God manifests himself to men and women and which converge on Christ, "the Word made flesh."

The term 'literary genre' refers to:

- Different ways of expressing oneself: a law, an exhortation, a poem, and an explanation are not written with the same words or the same intentions.
- The personality of the writer or group: a priest, a farmer, an educated man, a missionary... each has their own language, turns of phrase, emphases and themes.
- The age of a text or the period when it was finally set down in writing: we know that the Bible was written over several centuries; it was not until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD that the list of books forming the rule of faith was finally decided.
- The place of origin and the languages used: Arabia, Babylonia, Egypt... for the Old Testament. Palestine, Turkey, Italy... for the New Testament. Different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek... The message was first preached and lived by the community before being put into written form.

The lyrical, the everyday, the meditative, and the doctrinal are presented in this way throughout the Sundays. Depending on the case, it is not a question of being intimate or grandiloquent: it is a question of being "right"! And since what the reader has to say does not come from him, he must find what the author wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. God's message is not only in the meaning (otherwise a commentary would suffice); it is just as much in the form.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Read with enthusiasm the pages of a prophet that inspire hope and announce the fulfilment of a promise.
- Be slower and simpler when dealing with texts that teach truths; the more spiritually dense a text is, the more it needs to be made easier to understand through a meditative rhythm, in the style of contemplation.
- Adopt a tone of brotherly encouragement, the intonation of conversation when exhorting. Experience shows that this makes it easier to listen, especially when care is taken to introduce the reader. This introduction does not mean summarising or explaining the reading, but rather making people want to listen, making them eager to hear it, alerting the congregation to what they are about to hear: a message of joy, a truth, a reminder of an event.

Special case: the presence of foreigners. One way to show them that they have a place in the community is to read in a second language.

### **Preparing your diction**

Technical preparation for reading. First of all, read the entire text once with your eyes and a second time aloud. For everything that follows, it is recommended that you have a black pencil (the one used for exercises), especially if the book you are working on does not belong to you. A black pencil is recommended because you can erase the marks you make, provided you do not press too hard. However, remember that at Mass, you will be reading from the lectionary, not from your pocket missal or a magazine.

### **The rhythm**

Reading is not singing. However, there is a rhythm in a French sentence. You have to find it for each sentence and assimilate it. Is it stage fright (which leaves you breathless) or poor posture... or something else? This good rhythm comes from four operations:

- Joining the words that need to be joined: 'Voici que tu es descendu, / et les montagnes...' ('Behold, you have descended, / and the mountains...') and not: "Here/ you have descended and the mountains...";
- Make breaks where necessary;
- Pausing the sentence;
- Emphasise the strong syllables.

Everything therefore depends on a subtle balance of emphasis and flowing phrasing: "Reading from the First Letter of Saint **Paul to the Corinthians**." And this can be learned. You have to repeat the sentence ten times, letting it flow smoothly but dynamically from your own mouth. That is the price you pay to bring the text to life and move it forward. Then the listeners admit that they were hanging on the reader's every word and did not miss a single thing he said.

### **Cuts, pauses and suspensions**

- The listener does not have the text. It is therefore through the reader's cuts and pauses that they will pick up on those little elements that we hardly pay attention to when we have the text in front of us, for the understanding of the text: we are talking about full stops, commas, colons, i.e. punctuation.
- We must bear in mind that sound travels faster than meaning! The purpose of cuts and pauses is to ensure that what is read reaches the ears of the listeners, but also that the meaning penetrates their understanding.
- Only if the text has been prepared before reading can we ensure that the elements of the sentence are distributed effectively.

### In concrete terms:

A pause is a momentary but complete stop in speech. It occurs at the end of a paragraph or between two sentences that present a change in meaning, tense or style.

A suspension is neither a pause nor even a break. It is a kind of elongation of a syllable that leaves the listener wanting more. It allows a word to be emphasised. "Ah! Followed by a tiny break: "Ah! ... / if only you knew!"

When you use your pencil to make marks in a book, you can draw a slash; when speaking in public, regardless of the size of the audience, and even if you have a sound system:

A pause requires a three-second break, signified by three slashes ///.

A normal cut is two seconds and a short cut or suspension is one second. For example: "All nations / will flock to it, // many peoples will set out, // and..."

That seems excessive! Perhaps... But we repeat, this is the price you have to pay for a smooth reading. Try it! In your exercises, mark your bars in pencil on the book and read while counting the seconds mentally (not aloud). Record yourself or try it in your church with people at the back of the church. You'll see! You will understand, and, above all, your listeners will understand you!

### **Articulation:**

This is said to be the main problem. Not necessarily, if the other elements are in place. That said, there are a number of details to pay attention to.

- Avoid the minimum: People is not peupe
- Avoid overdoing it: Christ is not Christe, nor are my brothers my brothers. Be careful, then, with consonants that some people omit, while others overuse them out of excessive zeal: you are the SSSeigneur. Silent 'e's have their place. It is neither 'reading of the book of Isaiah' nor 'reading of the book of Isaïe'. They must be taken care of, both between words and at the end of a sentence.

Liaisons are becoming less and less common! But when reading in public, you must at least link:

- Articles with nouns: les-z-enfants;
- Adjectives with nouns: les jolis-z-enfants;
- Verbs in the third person plural with the vowel that follows them: ils disent-à;
- But the noun does not always have to be linked to the verb: les enfants / arrivèrent.

### **Repetition**

We invite readers to practise reading aloud at home.

It is thus, by chewing on words, that he will realise for himself (with a tape recorder) the effect he hears himself producing. Not everything is achieved through this repetition, but experience shows that we are quite harsh judges of ourselves. In any case, reading with your eyes will never be enough. The eyes read, but they do not speak!

## 4. Reading

It is important for the reader to know when to intervene in the celebration.

### The reader's position

The reader should not approach the lectern until the opening prayer has been completed, but should do so without delay as soon as the Amen has been pronounced. In his heart, he can say this prayer: *"Lord, purify my heart and my lips so that I may proclaim your Word with faith."* He approaches calmly, without detours or haste. He takes his time. He does not try to avoid the top of the central nave. If he passes in front of the altar, he pauses briefly and bows. In addition to being a liturgical act, this movement can reduce stage fright by circulating the blood and calming the whole body.

When he reaches the ambo (the lectern where readings are given), he does not rush into the first word, but makes sure that the book is on the right page and that the microphone is at the right height, i.e. his own height, and, first of all, that it is open (on = open, off = closed). In many cases, it will have been necessary to test the microphone before Mass.

Finally, the correct position for reading is as follows:

- Both feet firmly on the ground (not balanced unsteadily on one);
- Heels parallel and slightly apart;
- Toes pointing like the hands of a clock at 10:10;
- Both hands on the right and left edges of the bottom of the music stand.
- This stable position also helps to combat stage fright.

### The gaze

Once in position, the reader looks at the congregation for a moment, not to say, "I'm here!", but to consider all those to whom he is going to read the Word, especially the faithful who are furthest from him, at the back of the church or on the sides.

This gaze may last a little longer if silence has not yet been perfectly established, as the reading should only begin when all the noise of chairs, papers or coughing has ceased.

Contrary to what is often said (and seen!), the reader does not have to look at the congregation when reading, except in very exceptional cases, at the end of a paragraph or to emphasise a particular phrase. Not at every point (this is known as the chicken tic).

Some people think that you communicate more if you look at people: this is not true. The reader is reading the Word of God, so he does not have to look at those to whom he is speaking as if he were preaching or giving an opinion. In reality, true communication in the act of reading does not come from looking at the congregation, but from perfect diction carried by an intense and sustained voice.

On the other hand, it is good for the reader, after scanning the text, to announce the reading while looking at the congregation: "Reading from the letter of Saint Paul, Apostle, to the Romans." Anyone can say these ten words without looking at the text. Then the reader pauses, takes a deep breath, looks at the text, and begins.

### Breathing

During this preparation time, the reader began to breathe calmly, deeply and from the abdomen. Most people breathe poorly because they do not know how to breathe. They breathe from the upper chest by lifting their shoulders, which means that only a quarter of the lungs are filled. The breath is therefore short and so is the speech: choppy, jerky, breathless! This effect is naturally increased as soon as emotion arises, and redoubled as soon as stage fright sets in. However, it is through the lower part of the lungs (through the abdomen) that one should breathe, without raising the shoulders, but by pulling them back slightly and inflating the abdomen. When filling a glass, one always starts by filling the bottom first. Therefore, avoid deep chest breaths at all costs. Take another breath from your stomach during the pauses. If necessary, take a quick, light breath through your nose. Proper breathing does not cure stage fright.

### **The voice**

We have the voice we have, more or less beautiful, more or less distinctive, but we must learn how to use it. We have the voice we have, but we also have a register (a range of sounds) where the voice sounds best: we say that it is well "placed". That said, public speaking requires the reader to use the upper part of their good register. It also requires us to speak "far", that is, to those who are furthest away, even if we have a good sound system.

### **Tone**

This depends, of course, on the literary genre of the text. It also depends on the reader, who has their own personality, temperament and tone of voice. As a general rule, the tone of a reading requires a great deal of restraint in terms of variation: what does this mean? A kind of vibratory intensity within the syllables being recited. How? Many readers begin a sentence high and end it low. This is catastrophically ugly and monotonous. On the contrary, a sustained tone requires that one rise: the ends of sentences should almost never end with a descent, but with a rise that sustains the meaning and opens it up to the listener instead of knocking them out or closing them off.

### **Speed**

This is the last technical point that needs to be worked on. The truth is that a reader reads at the right speed when they feel that they are reading too slowly (and that it is ridiculous!). As we have said, sound travels faster than meaning. Readers read for meaning, not sound. We could say that with sound, there is no longer a problem.

Yes, it does! First, the acoustics of the church are more or less good (and the sound system more or less suitable). We need to know the reverberation time of the sound. We clap our hands or shout a loud, short "Ah!" and time the number of seconds during which we hear the sound spreading and lasting. This can be up to eight seconds. If you go too fast, there is a risk that the text will be incomprehensible. The reader should study their own church. It is by reading calmly that they will have a chance of being understood.

## **5. Places and objects of the Word**

### **The place of the Word**

There are two tables: the table of the Word and the table of bread. Is the place of the Word beautiful enough (noble, highlighted, decorated, lit...) to suggest that it alone constitutes an essential focus for the gathering of Christians?

It is at the Lord's table that we receive our nourishment: the Bread of Life... But it is at the table of Sunday readings that we are nourished by the Lord's doctrine (Saint Hilary).

### **The Book**

For the Word of God to have weight, it is important to proclaim it in the lectionary. The book is, symbolically, a place of the Lord's presence among his people. Let us not reduce its visible form. Christ "is present in his Word because it is he who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in church".

One final requirement is that the ambo should be used solely for the Word. If it is used in turn by the song leader, the celebrating priest, the commentator and the reader, then it becomes a place for everything. What would be inappropriate at the altar is no more appropriate at the ambo. Dignity of the place, dignity of the book: dignity of the Word!

## **Sound system**

The sound system amplifies everything it is given, indiscriminately: both the good and the bad! This is why the microphone is said to be a false friend. Sometimes, you can do without a microphone if the venue is suitable.

### **Some technical advice:**

Each microphone should be equipped with a switch so that it can be turned off when not in use and when changing places.

### **The art of the microphone**

Start by locating the "on-off" button and noting which position it is in when switched on, so that when the third line of the reading is reached, a listener is not forced to rush in and say, "We can't hear anything, the sound system isn't connected!"

Let's position the microphone at the correct height: approximately 20 centimetres from the mouth, at shoulder height, i.e. slightly lower than the mouth and pointing upwards. Then we turn on the power button. To make sure the microphone is working, tap the stand lightly with your fingernail instead of blowing on it (as this sends a large amount of moisture into the microphone, which is not good for the capsule). You can use different distances if you have learnt how:

- Intimate zone (2 to 10 cm): such as psalms or words of confidence;
- Conversation zone (15 to 20 cm): most readings;
- Proclamation zone (25 to 35 cm): lyrical or prophetic texts; ...

Sound amplification is neither a toy, nor an instrument of power, nor a means of compensation or personal gratification.

Finally, adjusting the sound system volume is not something that can be done once and forgotten. It must be done taking into account: the building, the size of the congregation, and the vocal power of the reader, which means that someone must be responsible for adjusting the volume during the celebration itself.

## **6. The sequence of readings and readers**

An attentive leader will ensure this. As soon as there is a team of several readers, a reading schedule will be established. As far as possible, care will be taken to ensure that ages, backgrounds and neighbourhoods are represented in a balanced way, not only to avoid jealousy, but also to ensure that the community and its diversity are better represented by the readers themselves.

A word here about young people and children. They have a flexibility and simplicity that is not yet attained by the human respect of adults. This is evident in the surprisingly true tone they find to express a text. Reading is an opportunity offered to them.

### Depending on the location, there are two solutions:

- Or the readers leave their places, one after the other, to go up to the ambo and return immediately after they have read;
- Or all those who are to read leave their seats together after the Amen of the opening prayer and go to sit in the choir, on the side of the ambo. They take turns and return to their seats in the nave at the end of the readings.

**The altar and the ambo:** To symbolically express the theology of the two tables, the sanctuary of a church contains an ambo and an altar. These furnishings should highlight the presence of Christ during the proclamation of the Word and during the prayer over the bread and wine. Ideally, these furnishings should be simple and beautiful, to promote the link between the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy. They can be of the same style and made of the same material. From the Greek "anabaïnein", which translates as "to ascend", the ambo is the liturgical term for the place reserved for the Word of God. It is a specific place in the sanctuary for the proclamation of the Word and for the homily. The universal prayer may also be said there.

### **Let us add a few details:**

- If an introduction to the readings is given, it is preferable that it be read by someone other than the reader of the biblical text. If the same person does both, care should be taken to change tone and pause appropriately so that the introduction does not sound like the reading, and vice versa.
- Do not say "first" or "second reading".
- If you say "The Word of the Lord" at the end of the reading, you should say it separately, change your tone and emphasise the word "Lord" to elicit a response from the congregation. (The same applies to "Let us acclaim the word of God").
- At the end of the reading, the reader pauses briefly before leaving the lectern.
- It is best if each reading is done by a different reader. He cannot do everything.

### **The case of the monition:**

Therefore, someone other than the reader will give the admonition, but there is no reason why this person should be the priest.

Where possible, if there is another microphone or a place for the presenter, this monition will not be given in place of the Word.

The introduction before the reading(s) is neither a homily that explains everything in advance, nor a summary that spoils the surprise. The purpose of the introduction is to prepare the listener to listen (to whet their appetite).

### **The case of the psalm:**

It is in the nature of psalms to be sung. If this is not possible, here are a few remarks for reading them.

- Psalms are always poetic in nature. This makes them the most challenging to read. Without reserving them for specialists, they cannot be given to just any reader. Special sessions should even be organised to teach people how to read psalms.
- It goes without saying that someone else will read or sing the psalm, to make it clear that this is not just another reading, but a response to the Word.
- The psalm is part of the word of God, but it is also the most intense cry of mankind. We do not always give enough importance to these masterpieces of universal literature, which are also one of the most poignant ways in which God speaks to us.

The first reading is followed by the responsorial psalm, or gradual, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. It is the word of God and the word of man, filled with cries of joy or sorrow. As such, it can never be replaced in an equivalent way by a non-biblical song. Usually, the psalm is taken from the Lectionary, because each psalm text is directly linked to each of the readings: the choice of psalm therefore depends on the readings." (General Introduction to the Roman Missal, PGMR n°36). Points to note: As its name "psalmos" means in Greek, and "mizmor" in Hebrew, the psalm is a song accompanied by plucked string instruments (or others, such as the organ, of course). It is therefore in its nature to be sung and not read. It can be sung by a soloist (the psalmist!) or a choir, and in both cases with an antiphon to the assembly, or even sung by the whole assembly. It should therefore only be read as a last resort, if no one is able to sing it (but this can be learned!), while maintaining the singing for the antiphon of the assembly. It should be noted that if the psalm is read, it must be read by a different reader than the one who did the first reading, because of the change in literary genre, which, moreover, requires even more careful preparation since it is poetic in nature. Finally, we are, unfortunately, forced to wonder what kind of frivolous behaviour and abuse of power allows some people to deprive the assembly of a psalm that is "the word of God" (a word of God that is never so much the word of man!) and replace it with a hymn, even a well-written one, which is not always the case. Even if some of their words and images are from another age and another culture, the psalms are the nourishing treasure of Christian prayer. In any case, the congregation participates by singing the refrain. If the verses of the psalm are not sung, at least the refrain should be sung. In this case, an instrument can accompany the reading of these verses with a discreet background sound. If the psalm is only read, it should be remembered that reading a poem is more

delicate than any other. It should therefore be handled with extra care: for example, one should seek a tone of voice suited to the character of each psalm; one should seek to bring out, without exaggeration, the rhythm specific to each verse. Since the psalm responds to the word of God, it is preferable that the psalmist who reads or sings the psalm should not be the same person who gave the first reading. If it is too difficult to use the proper psalm on certain Sundays, the Sunday Lectionary has grouped together a few selected texts from psalms and refrains for the different times of the year.

**The Alleluia "Hallelu-Yah":** Praise Yah (weh). How beautiful this word sounds, which, together with "Amen", brings the sacred language of Judaism into Christian prayer! It should remain a kind of musical cry, rather than spreading out into a long melody that exhausts its acclamatory character.

The verse it frames is not repeated by the person proclaiming the Gospel. It is sung (or proclaimed, if necessary) by the leader or the choir. It does not have to be repeated after the Gospel, if we understand, at least, that the phrase "Let us acclaim the word of God" is not intended to acclaim a page of the lectionary, but Christ himself, the Word of God, who has just announced his Message, his Good News, to the assembly.

So we acclaim "Christ the Word" and not "this word"!

## **BECAUSE OF THE TWO TABLES, ALWAYS!**

A succession of readings, but also a succession of rites. "The Mass consists of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist; but they are so closely linked that they form a single act of worship," according to the general introduction to the Roman Missal.

With the universal prayer, the Liturgy of the Word comes to an end, and with it, the service of the readers. But we still need to show the connection between what is ending and what is about to begin: the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is the same Lord who speaks and gives himself as food. It is also liturgical: these two actions follow one another in the same celebration. But precisely in order for what is mystical (of the order of faith and therefore invisible) to become liturgical, a number of perceptible signs are needed to reveal the invisible link.

The first of these tangible signs is the assembly gathered in the same place for the Word and the Eucharist. The second is the celebrating priest who presides over both of these actions.

And this is where readers, too, can be a sign of the bond that unites the two tables.

At the very least, it is highly appropriate that the readers, who have given the assembly the nourishment of the Word, should receive, at the table of the Lord's Supper, the fullness of the nourishment that is his Body (and the drink that is his Blood). There is even a certain logic, if lay people are to give communion, that at least one of the readers should perform this service.

It is between the final Amen of the Eucharistic Prayer and the introduction of *the Lord's Prayer* that the celebrating priest calls those who have performed a service in the celebration (in these or similar words): "Let those who have performed a service during this celebration come to the Lord's table.

They go up to the choir and surround the altar (readers, but also the cantor, choir director, sacristan, collectors, etc.). It is even planned that after the Lamb of God, the priest will bless those who are going to give Communion (see Missal altar square, bottom of page 446).

In addition to manifesting the union of the two tables, as we have said, this practice allows the assembly to be represented in the choir by some of its members for this rite of communion.

## Encountering Christ in his Word

At Sunday Mass, we have an experience similar to that of the disciples of Emmaus. During the Liturgy of the Word, we listen to the word of God. It is the Lord himself who speaks to us. We welcome this Word into our hearts and respond to it by singing a psalm.

For Jews, the terms "to speak" and "to act" often mean the same thing. This is why the Hebrew word "dabar" is translated as "word" or "event". In the Jewish mindset, the word is always effective: it is a force, a dynamism. The word reveals the person who, in speaking, expresses his identity and communicates his strength. It is God who speaks.

In the New Testament, God intervenes in a special way by giving humanity his only Son: "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:1-18). Jesus alone is the Word in its fullness; through his whole life, his message, his actions, his death and his resurrection, Jesus communicates the mystery of his person and the plan of God his Father for all humanity. In Jesus, the word of God is given fully, once and for all.

So that nothing of God's word would be lost, authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote down their testimony of faith in Jesus of Nazareth, who died and rose again. This is the case, for example, with the evangelists, who recount the life of Jesus. Added to the other texts of the Jewish Bible, the Gospels enable us to preserve and transmit the word of God, so that we may hear it and live by it.

The word of God is therefore Good News because it opens up a relationship between man and God. It is affectionate because it affects man like a loving word from a God who sets out to meet him, who reaches him and touches him. This exchange of words between God and man is no ordinary dialogue. For two people to talk to each other, they must share the same language, otherwise dialogue is impossible.

But when God speaks to man, it is He who enables him to speak "the language of God". The Bible is the written record of God's "speech" through men. The whole Bible, the whole word of God, is the word of men. Man speaks God in it. (R. Chéno, "L'Homélie, action liturgique de la communauté eucharistique" [The Homily, Liturgical Action of the Eucharistic Community], La Maison Dieu, 227, 2001, 3, pp. 11-12.)

For the Bible to become the Word for us, we must lend it our voice.

In the<sup>5th</sup> century, St. Caesarius of Arles said:

"The Word of God is no less valuable than the Body of Christ."

That is why only consecrated bread and the Gospel book could be placed on the altar.