

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
St. Michael's All Masses and St. Theresa's (preach only)
Sirach 15:15-20
1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Matthew 5:17-37
February 6, 2011

Special Homily on the Liturgy of the Word

Life is full of choices. We make choices every day. Some of our choices are good, some not so good.

We are free to make whatever choices we want. How are we to make good choices? We need two things to make and carry out good choices. To carry out the diocese we need strength and courage. But first we need wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to make good choices and we need strength to carry out good choices even when they might be unpopular.

Paul speaks about wisdom in his letters. Paul makes it clear that wisdom, knowledge, counsel, understanding, and strength are gifts of the Holy Spirit. For Paul, the Holy Spirit is key.

The Holy Spirit is indeed necessary. God reveals his ways through the Holy Spirit. Another way in which God reveals to us is through Scripture. The Bible is God's revelation given to us through God's inspiration to the writers.

One might interpret Paul's writings about life in the Spirit to mean we don't need to know the Law as found in the Old Testament.

Wrong!

Jesus (found in the Bible) says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

Jesus does not throw out the Hebrew Scriptures. They are good because of God's inspiration. So Jesus comes not to throw the Law or the prophets out. Instead, Jesus comes to help us understand what the Law and the prophets are all about.

Catholics have a reputation for not knowing the Bible. It is not because the church says the Bible isn't worth reading. No, in the days that lead to Catholics not knowing the Bible it was because it was in Latin and of a fear of people misunderstanding the Bible. In 1943, Pope Pius XII changed all that in *Divini Afflante Spiritu*, calling for a critical study of the Bible.

But readings from the Bible have always been part of Mass and that part was expanded after the Second Vatican Council.

Why do we have readings at Mass? Because we *need* to hear God's word. We need to converse about what God's Word means to us.

God's Word *is important*. We cannot celebrate the Eucharist without first sharing God's Word. When we receive Communion, it is to be strengthened in God's ways. It is in the Liturgy of the Word (and reading the Bible outside of Mass) that we begin to hear what God's ways are.

Now, when we talk about the "Liturgy of the Word" as the second part of Mass, we are not just talking about the readings that we listen to like an audience.

The Liturgy of the Word includes the readings, the homily, the Creed, and the Prayers of the Faithful. But sitting in the pews, you are not just an audience who hears some words.

No, you are all to be active participants in the Liturgy of the Word (and the Liturgy of the Eucharist). Our responses to the readings (“Thanks be to God” and “Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ) are signs of our embracing the Word.

Inwardly we are called not just to hear with our ears but to listen with our brain *and* our hearts. To think about how the readings relate to our lives. God’s Word is a living word. The stories may be from ages long past but in our listening, we find to connections to today, helped by the homily whose very purpose is to help us make God’s Word alive.

It also helps us trust in God. The Bible is full of stories of how God has been present to his people so that we can know we can trust him.

To do this one reading is *not enough!*

Central, of course, are the Gospels as the story of Jesus teaching and ministry. But as Jesus comes not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, means we need to hear the Law. We find that in the Old Testament. In the Lectionary cycle, we read the gospels semi-continuously from beginning to end. The reading from the Old Testament is picked to match the Gospel.

Then, we also hear from the New Testament Letters. Read as a whole, the New Testament letters are written to address situations that the early church faced. Don’t we need to hear how they faced those issues as an example for us?

Then, to show our belief in the Word we have shared, we join *together* in the Creed that summarizes our basic beliefs. And having heard God’s Word, we pray for the graces we need to fulfill the word by caring for others and striving to follow his way.

I know people who think we could cut out some of the readings to save a little time. We *can't* do that. We need to hear the Word and to bring the Word into our lives today in the homily. We need the Creed to remind us of our belief in God. We need God and God is present in the Word.