

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – B

This week is week 3 of the homily series on the Mass: we've already heard about the introductory parts of the Mass beginning with the entrance procession, the sign of the Cross, the Penitential Rite, and the Gloria. And then after the Gloria, the priest says, "Let us pray," and then there is a moment of silence.

This is a time for a brief, silent prayer, in which everyone is invited to bring their own needs and intentions to God in silence. And then the priest prays a prayer known as the Collect: so-called because he is in a way collecting all the prayers of the people and presenting them together to the Lord. The Collect prayer changes from Sunday to Sunday and feast day to feast day. And they all follow the same grammatical construction which goes back to Ancient Rome:

- An address ("O God")
- Description ("Who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world")

- A petition (“Fill your faithful with holy joy”)
- Development of the petition (“For on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness.”)
- A devout closure (“Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.”)

Most Collects are addressed directly to God the Father and then also invoke God the Son and God the Holy Spirit at the end of the prayer.

After the Collect, then the congregation is seated for the first part of Liturgy of the Word, when we hear a reading from the Old Testament (or from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season) a psalm, a reading from one of the epistles in the New Testament, and then we stand for the Alleluia and the proclamation of the Gospel reading.

The different postures of standing, sitting, and kneeling in Mass are also significant. Typically we stand, an ancient sign of showing respect, during prayers such as the Collect. Or we kneel during the Eucharistic Prayer, the most sacred part of the Mass.

And of course we are seated while listening to the Word of God, except the Gospel reading when we stand as a sign of greater respect for the Gospel reading.

The Catholic Mass of course is divided into two primary parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These are in essence a combination of the two forms of Jewish worship: synagogue and Temple worship. Describing these takes us back into the Jewish history of the Old Testament. Many books have been written about all this, so I really have to summarize it and simplify it here: essentially, God gave Moses and the Israelites, when they were crossing through the desert after fleeing from slavery in Egypt, the form of worship he wanted them to make to Him. A central part of this worship involved various kinds of offerings: from their harvests, sacrificed animals, etc. The blood from the animals that were sacrificed was supposed to symbolize atoning for the sins of the people before the Lord. Many centuries later, a Temple was

built in Jerusalem where the animal sacrifices were to take place. However, later the Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were taken into captivity in Babylon, and there was no more temple worship. Seventy years later, when the descendants of those who were taken into captivity were permitted to return to their homeland, since the Temple no longer existed, synagogue worship began, which primarily consisted of the reading of the Sacred Scriptures. But not long before the time of Christ, the Temple began to be rebuilt, and temple worship and sacrifice recommenced. But synagogue worship continued, because there was only one temple – in Jerusalem – but there were numerous synagogues in every community with Jews. So one could say that synagogue worship is our Liturgy of the Word, and temple worship is our Liturgy of the Eucharist, which I will talk more about in upcoming weeks.

Our Sunday Mass readings are on a 3-year cycle: A, B, and C. This year, 2024, we are in the midst of the B cycle of readings. So we last heard these readings at a Sunday Mass back in 2021, and will hear them again in 2027. The first reading, which as I said is from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season) was chosen to be thematically related to the Gospel reading. And we hear from three of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – during the 3-year cycle of readings. So during the B cycle of readings, which we are in now, our Gospel reading is primarily from the Gospel of Mark. However, the B cycle is a little bit of special case, because the Gospel of Mark is relatively brief. So, beginning next Sunday, the continuous readings from Mark will be interrupted by a 5-week interlude from the Gospel of John (from which we also hear during the Easter season): a section of John’s Gospel known as the Bread of Life discourse, which connects very nicely – and providentially – to this homily series on the Mass, as we move into explaining the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The 2nd reading is always taken from one of the epistles in the New Testament and kind of runs on a separate track thematically from the first & Gospel readings. So this week, our Gospel reading is still from Mark's Gospel, and we hear how Jesus, who had sent his apostles out to preach the gospel, now desires that they have some time to rest and pray after their labors.

So they get into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee to travel to a more deserted place. But the Sea of Galilee is not huge, and so when people saw them departing in the boats, they must have figured out where they were heading, and simply walked along the shore until they found Jesus and the disciples again. This kind of reminds me *a little* of the time I went to Krakow, Poland, a city where I knew no one and had never been to before: I boarded the plane, flew overnight across the ocean, landed, checked in at the hotel, realized I had forgotten to pack something, decided to take the train into the city center, bought the thing I needed, walked

down to the main square, and, as I was marveling at the beautiful town square, heard a voice behind me say, “Fr. Bill?”

When he saw the crowds waiting for him, Jesus, instead of being exasperated, had pity on them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. And sheep without a shepherd are pretty helpless – they wander around, grazing on whatever grass they can find, but they don’t know where to find the better pastures where they haven’t already eaten everything. In other words, sheep are very dependent on their shepherd to lead them to find food and water, as well as to keep them safe. Jesus could see that the crowds that had followed him were aimless and lost in their lives.

I don’t think the human race has changed that much since then. On the whole, I would say the human race today is likewise aimless and lost. Yes, we have more technology, we have better medicine and on average live longer, we are more prosperous, we have many more ways of entertaining and distracting ourselves, but

in a spiritual sense I think we are often very lost. Searching for happiness, peace, contentment, serenity, fulfillment, but often in places where we cannot find them.

Just like the Jews of Jesus' time, we are in need of a shepherd to lead us to greener pastures where we will find true rest, true peace, true happiness. That shepherd of course is Christ Himself: and He is not only the shepherd he will lead us to those things, He is also the source of those things, and in Him – and only in Him - we will find true peace and happiness.

One of the ways He guides us is through His Word which we hear at every Mass. Although Jesus ascended into heaven about 2000 years ago, He is still present with us; He still guides us. And one of the ways in which he is present to us and guides us is through His Word, through the Word of Sacred Scripture. Our Catholic faith and its teachings are rooted in Scripture. However, we do not believe in *sola scriptura* – that is, the idea that everything we believe

is explicitly stated or taught in Scripture. We also believe that God gave us the Church to help us understand the Scriptures – which admittedly are not always easy to understand – and to serve as a guide to us. In other words, God guides us through His Church here on earth.

So after the homily, in which the priest seeks to open up the Word of God to the people and hopefully help them to apply it to their lives, the Liturgy of the Word concludes with the congregation standing to recite the Creed. The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*, which literally means “I believe” – which are the first two words of the Creed. The Creed of course is a formal profession of our faith, of what we believe as Catholics. Although the shorter Apostles’ Creed can be recited here, we usually recite the Nicene Creed, which was formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 (and then added to at the Council of Constantinople in 381) in response to an at-the-time prominent heresy. Having heard God’s Word, we

respond to it with a profession of faith in Him, who has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures and who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist which we will soon receive.

- **July 21, 2024 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**