

Scripture in the Liturgy

Talk Two

1 The Word of God is vulnerable

God has entrusted his Word to the world, where it finds acceptance (in the Church) and rejection (by the World). There is no way of protecting the Word from this dilemma, and this God knows better than we do.

For those of us who have responded to the Word by becoming the Church, there is a special duty of care towards the Word. This doesn't depend on our holiness. Both Judas and John have their rôle to play in the Gospel story.

2 "This Must Not Happen To You, Lord!" (Mt 16:22)

Peter's horror at the prediction of the Passion is all too human, and is very much our response to the vulnerability of the Word. But his cautious way is not open to us: it is called *Satanic* by our Lord, because it wants to prevent the coming of the Cross. As soon as the Word becomes flesh, it is assailed by its enemies; not only sinners, but saints too. We must become part of that story, and unafraid in our readiness to enter the Way of the Cross. Those who announce the Scriptures in Church are stepping up to stand with Jesus on the threshold of the Passion. That should be the spirituality of a receiver of the Word.

3 The Liturgy Always Forms Us: But What Sort Of Liturgy Is It?

Ideal liturgy would form ideal Christians. Liturgy that falls short forms Christians who fall short. Herein lies the urgency of our getting the Liturgy right: making it the sort of Liturgy that obeys Jesus, the Liturgy he approves. The Liturgy's whole definition is *the act of the people of Christ*; but suppose we have a liturgy where no-one, or very few of us, are acting? The Liturgy is simply *not itself*, it isn't Liturgy. That non-Liturgy forms a non-Church, and that non-Church does the right thing and dies. Bad Liturgy destroys community, just as bad eating and drinking destroys a person. Good Liturgy creates and forms community that does the deeds of Jesus, and gathers the Church and makes it what it should be. Every bad liturgy we commit damages and weakens the Church.

4 The Generosity of Participation

Belonging to the Church demands a generosity of self-giving in the spirit of Christ. This must show itself in real deeds - greeting and gathering, welcoming and listening, sharing and caring. These real gifts are symbolized in the liturgical action. You can sing generously or keep your mouth shut. The first is good liturgy, the second is bad liturgy. The first creates the Church, the second destroys it.

The Liturgy of the Word demands good proclamation and good listening. The first reflects what God has done - proclaiming Good News is good proclaiming. God has already done his part. Now we must do the same: proclaiming accurately and sensitively, in ways that the listeners can receive and understand, and listening attentively and generously - *ready to be changed by the living Word*. Such proclaiming and receiving of the Word creates the Church, and is infectious - missionary! Priests must preach accurately, neither patronising, nor using language their hearers cannot reach, but generously, working hard to include what the people need to hear, in ways the people can understand and accept.

Readers of the Scripture do untold good work when they themselves have worked to understand what they proclaim. It doesn't matter if you are reading at the Lectern, or listening in the congregation: the understanding you have won, by your study, your prayer, and your readiness to live out what you have heard, creates the miraculous atmosphere in which the Word is made flesh.

Two Readings

Isaiah 2:1-5

In the days to come the mountain of the Temple of the Lord
shall tower above the mountains
and be lifted higher than the hills.
All the nations will stream to it,
peoples without number will come to it, and they will say:

*Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths;
since the Law will go out from Zion,
and the oracle of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

He will wield authority over the nations,
and adjudicate between many peoples;
these will hammer their swords into ploughshares,
their spears into sickles.
Nation will not lift sword against nation,
there will be no more training for war.

O House of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

John 15:26 - 16:4

Jesus said to his disciples:

When the Advocate comes,
whom I shall send you from the Father,
the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father,
he will be my witness;
and you too will be witnesses,
because you have been with me from the outset.

I have told you all this so that your faith may not be shaken.
They will expel you from the synagogues,
and indeed the hour is coming
when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God.
They will do these things
because they have never known either the Father or myself.

But I have told you all this,
so that when the time for it comes
you may remember that I told you.