

Understanding the Mass – the Words of the Mass

This weekend as we continue our series on Understanding the Mass it would be good to make a few comments on the words of the Mass – for these words are meant to lead us to an encounter with Jesus Christ!

From the beginning of the Mass we use the words of Jesus and words that lead us to Jesus. In the words of the Sign of the Cross, we encounter Jesus who saves us from sin. In the Penitential Rite we beg for His mercy. In the scripture readings we listen to the Word of God as He is made present to us in the proclamation and becomes alive in us as the Word enters our hearts. In the prayers of consecration we hear the words of Jesus as He offers Himself on our behalf to the Father and we encounter Him in the words “The Body of Christ”!

Throughout the Mass the words used are the living Word of God taken from scripture or the words of the Church fathers revealing who Jesus is to us or those from our hearts which are the words the Lord has put in us to cry out to Him for his help that we may encounter Him.

There are three prominent places in the church from which we hear these words. The easiest to recognize is the Ambo from which the Word of God is proclaimed. The ambo is meant to be like a second altar which is why in some churches its style resembles the main altar. Here Jesus becomes present through the spoken word as we hear His voice in the readings.

Another place of the word is the altar which speaks to us of the love and sacrifice of Christ. During the Mass Jesus becomes present on the altar which is why we bow to it and kiss it. At this altar we hear the dialogue of Jesus with the Father through the words of the priest.

Lastly there is the chair. From the chair we are invited to enter into this encounter with Christ, proclaim our faith and trust in Him and are sent forth to proclaim Him to the world. Its significance is seen even more clearly when the bishop presides in the Mass and he speaks as a successor of the apostles and representative of Christ.

How can we best hear these words of the Mass? First, we should come early to Mass and come prepared spiritually. In our busy lives this may be difficult but coming early to Mass gives us time to pray and quiet ourselves that we may be more attuned to hear the Lord. Next, we should sit in silence – both physically and mentally. It is hard to find silence in our world today but we should sit in silence before our Lord present in the tabernacle and also internally so we are more receptive to the words of the Mass.

Beginning this Advent, some of the words we use in the Mass will change with the new translation of the Missal. Change will force us out of our comfort zone and make us listen more carefully to the words we use.

But let’s not wait until then to listen to the words of the Mass. Be attentive today for these words help us encounter Jesus Christ so that we may enter more deeply into relationship with Him. The deeper we go in this relationship, the richer will be our experience of the Mass.