



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 31 January 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and sisters, Good Morning!

Today we continue the catechesis on the Holy Mass. After pausing to reflect on the Introductory Rites, let us now consider the Liturgy of the Word, which is an integral part because we gather precisely to listen to what God has done and still intends to do for us. It is an experience which occurs “live” and not through hearsay because “when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 29; cf. Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7, 33).

And how many times, as the Word of God is being read, are comments made: “Look at him... look at her; look at the hat she is wearing: it’s ridiculous...”. And the comments begin. Isn’t that true? Should comments be made while the Word of God is being read? [*They answer: “No!”*]. No, because if you are chatting with others, you are not listening to the Word of God. When the Word of God is being read from the Bible — the First Reading, the Second Reading, the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel — we must listen, open our heart because it is God himself who is speaking to us, and we must not think about other things or talk about other things. Do you understand? I will explain to you what takes place in this Liturgy of the Word.

The pages of the Bible cease to be writings and become living words, spoken by God. It is God, who through the reader, speaks to us and questions us, we who listen with faith. The Spirit “who has spoken through the prophets” (*Creed*) and has inspired the sacred authors makes the Word of God that “we hear outwardly have its effect inwardly” (*Lectioary*, Introduction, 9). But in order to listen to the Word of God, we also need our heart to be open to receive the Word in our heart. God speaks and we listen to him, in order to then put into practice what we have heard. It is very important to listen. At times perhaps we do not fully understand because there are a few

somewhat difficult Readings. Yet God speaks to us in another way; [we must be] silent and listen to the Word of God. Do not forget this. During Mass, when the Readings begin, let us listen to the Word of God.

We need to listen to him! It is in fact, a question of life, as we are reminded by the profound expression that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Life which gives us the Word of God. In this sense, we are speaking of the Liturgy of the Word as a “meal” that the Lord prepares in order to nourish our spiritual life. The meal of the Liturgy is a lavish one which draws largely from the treasures of the Bible (cf. sc, 51), both the Old and the New Testaments, because in them, the Church proclaims the one and the same mystery of Christ (cf. *Lectioary*, Introduction, 5). Let us think about the richness of the Bible readings offered by the three Sunday cycles, which in the light of the Synoptic Gospels, accompany us throughout the Liturgical Year: a great richness. Here I wish to also recall the importance of the Responsorial Psalm whose function is to foster meditation on what was heard in the reading that precedes it. It is preferable that the Psalm be enriched by song, at least in the response (cf. girm, 61; *Lectioary*, Introduction, 19-22).

The Liturgical proclamation of the very same readings with the songs derived from Sacred Scripture expresses and fosters ecclesial communion by accompanying the journey of each and every one. It is thus understandable that some subjective choices such as the omission of readings or their substitution with non-biblical texts are forbidden. I have heard that when there is a news story, some people read the newspaper because it is the news of the day. No! The Word of God is the Word of God! We can read the newspaper later. But there, we are reading the Word of God. It is the Lord who is speaking to us. Substituting that Word with other things impoverishes and compromises the dialogue between God and his people in prayer. On the contrary, the dignity of the pulpit and the use of the Lectionary, the availability of good readers and psalmists [are required]. But we must look for good readers! Those who know how to read, not those who read [distorting the words] and nothing is understood. This is how it is. Good readers. They must be prepared and rehearse before the Mass in order to read well. And this creates a climate of receptive silence.

We know that the Word of the Lord is of indispensable help so as not to get lost, as is clearly recognized by the Psalmist who, speaking to the Lord, confesses: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119[118]:105). How can we face our earthly pilgrimage with its difficulties and its trials without being regularly nourished and enlightened by the Word of God which resounds in the Liturgy?

Of course it is not enough to listen with our ears without welcoming into our heart the seed of the Divine Word, allowing it to bear fruit. Let us remember the Parable of the Sower and of the results achieved by the different types of soil (cf. Mk 4:14-20). The action of the Holy Spirit which renders the response effective needs hearts that allow themselves to be fashioned and cultivated in such a

way that what is heard at Mass passes into daily life, according to the admonishment of the Apostle James: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas 1:22). The Word of God makes a pathway within us. We listen to it with our ears and it passes to our hearts; it does not remain in our ears; it must go to the heart. And from the heart, it passes to the hands, to good deeds. This is the path which the Word of God follows: from our ears to our heart and hands. Let us learn these things. Thank you!

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly those from Australia and from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Finally, I address a special thought to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we remember Saint John Bosco, father and teacher of youths. Dear *young people*, may you look to him as the exemplary teacher. May you, dear *sick people*, looking to his example, always confide in the Crucified Christ. And may you dear *newlyweds*, turn to his intercession to embrace your conjugal mission with generous commitment.