



Episode 22: The Book of Gospels

SUMMARY

The Church teaches that the proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, the first part of Mass. The Gospel is so significant that the Church has a special book that contains just those words. The Book of Gospels, the repository for the Word of Christ, is another symbol of the Lord present to the church. Since it is his own word, the proclamation of the Gospel is honored with a kiss and candles and incense as if it were Christ himself.

This is why the Book of Gospels is carried in procession. It precedes those who by virtue of Holy Orders are more closely conformed to Christ. This is also why the Book is placed flat on the altar, which is another symbol of Christ. The altar receives the Word of Christ as it receives his Body.

The proclamation of the Gospel during Mass is always the Deacon's responsibility, a ministerial role. It is a role that differs from the preaching of the homily.

As the Gospel is proclaimed, let us also honor it by receiving it in our hearts, allowing it to take root and to bear fruit in our lives.

The Roman Missal

The reading of the Gospel constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy itself teaches the great reverence that is to be shown to this reading by setting it off from the other readings with special marks of honor, by the fact of which minister is appointed to proclaim it and by the blessing or prayer with which he prepares himself; and also by the fact that through their acclamations the faithful acknowledge and confess that Christ is present and is speaking to them and stand as they listen to the reading; and by the mere fact of the marks of reverence that are given to the Book of the Gospels.

General Instruction, n°. 60

The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to be read by a reader, but the Gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another Priest. If, however, a Deacon or another Priest is not present, the Priest Celebrant himself should read the Gospel.

General Instruction, n°. 59

IN THE TRADITION

“But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Revelation 10:14-15

“How sweet to my tongue is your promise,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light for my path.”

Psalms 119:103, 105

“And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter, and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all. Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.”

Dei Verbum, n° 8

“It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.”

Dei Verbum, n° 18

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “The Gospels are the heart of all Scriptures ‘because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.’”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n° 125

✠ “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord: both nourish and govern the whole Christian life.”

CCC, n° 141

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord,
with a blessing that endures for ever,
and keep them faithful
to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son,
so that they may always desire and at last attain
that glory
whose beauty he showed in his own Body,
to the amazement of his Apostles.

Prayer over the People, Second Sunday of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever wondered about the various reverences shown to the Book of Gospels?
2. Why does the Church teach that “the four Gospels occupy a central place” in the life of Christians? See *CCC*, n° 139

FOR FURTHER READING

Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).