

# Personal Relationship with the Lord Through the Liturgy of the Word

The Mass is supposed to be central to who we are as Christians. If we approach it simply as something we have to do, I don't see how it can reach its potential. But, if we approach it as an opportunity to have a personal encounter with the Lord, we allow it to open itself to its true beauty. And, there are several ways we can encounter the Lord in the Mass; in the Word proclaimed, in the Eucharist itself, in the community gathered and in the presider. Our task is to open ourselves to the possibility.

Opening ourselves to a personal encounter of the Lord in the Liturgy of the Word is a relatively easy process to understand. I like to describe the beginning of the process as letting the words wash over us, that is the words of the First Reading, the Second Reading, the Gospel, the homily and even the Prayers of the Faithful. The whole Liturgy of the Word consist of listening to God and responding in prayer. Letting the words wash over us implies setting our preconceived notions aside, suspending our thought processes and just hearing the words, the sentences, as if they were brand new.

Oftentimes, a word, or a phrase, or a concept will grab our attention. When that happens, that word, or phrase, or concept is speaking to something in our experience of life. We should hold on to it and reflect upon it until the message becomes clear. Luke tells us that, when he shepherds visited at Jesus birth and told the message given them by the angels, "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. (Lk 2:16-19) Mary is our first and greatest example of discipleship; we should learn from her.

These words, phrases and concept are like dreams; the more time that passes after them, the easier it is to forget them. We can avoid this by carrying a notebook and writing down what touched us. It's O.K. to do this writing during Mass, no matter what other people may be thinking about you. You could even write it in a note-taking app on your phone. To simply forget about it, though, seems to me to be disrespectful to God, who, out of His love for us, put the effort in to touch our hearts.

Sometimes, the words, phrases or concepts have an immediate and sensible meaning for us. They might be speaking to something that is going on in our lives at that particular time or maybe something that has been a continuing struggle for us. We might understand that God is speaking to us even if we don't like the message. Oftentimes it can be unsettling.

At other times we may not know why a particular word, phrase or concept strikes us. If we hold on to it, though, the meaning might reveal itself to us at a later time. This may happen through

what Carl Jung called synchronicity,<sup>i</sup> or you might discover the meaning through the help of a dream or your mind may simply figure it out, as we say, in time.

As we reflect throughout the week, we might periodically ask ourselves, “What is God trying to say to me? Why did this particular word, phrase or concept grab my attention?” This is different from asking, generally, what the Gospel is about. The general question runs the risk of becoming a purely academic exercise disconnected from our day-to-day lives. Such an academic exercise may aid our understanding, but it will only be fruitful if we keep it connected to our day-to-day lives. That is where God is to be found, in the circumstances of our day-to-day lives.

The act of holding on to the words, phrases or concepts, throughout the week, almost becomes a background to our daily living. Oftentimes we will begin to see a connection to happenings in our life. It is as if God is saying, “Look at these things in your life. Are they expressing the best version of the you that I created you to be? If not, are you willing to change them?”<sup>iii</sup> This dialogue, that continues throughout the week, is what we call personal experience of, or relationship with, the Lord.

Some people gather with a Small Ecclesial Community each week as part of this process. In that small community, they put words to their experience of God, including, and sometimes emphasizing, their experience of the Lord through the Liturgy of the Word. This is a highly beneficial process because, as human beings, whatever we express in words takes on a greater reality than if we just keep it in our minds. We are spirits who express ourselves physically and putting words to our spiritual experiences reinforces them and gives them a solid place in our consciousness.

As Catholics, we should participate in our community’s Eucharistic Liturgy every weekend. In a three-year cycle, the Mass covers just about everything in the Gospels. We shouldn’t skip the opportunity for the Lord to speak to us. The Sunday we skip might be the one He was waiting for to touch us.

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<sup>i</sup> Merriam Webster Online Dictionary defines synchronicity: the coincidental occurrence of events and especially psychic events (such as similar thoughts in widely separated persons or a mental image of an unexpected event before it happens) that seem related but are not explained by conventional mechanisms of causality —used especially in the psychology of C. G. Jung

<sup>ii</sup> For a discussion of synchronicity, see the Psychology Today article by Gregg Lavoy:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/passion/201712/synchronicities-sure-sign-youre-the-right-path>

<sup>iii</sup> One of the things the nourishment of the Eucharist is for, is to give us the energy we need to make such changes. He not only strengthens us through the Eucharist, but also, companions and encourages us throughout the week.