

Believe Celebrate Live **THE EUCHARIST**

The Liturgy of the Word

We continue reflection on our most important prayer, the Mass, with a focus on God’s word.

As far back as the second century, Saint Justin the Martyr wrote:

“On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or in the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the presider of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings.

Then we all stand up together to pray.”¹

Doesn’t this sound like what we do each week when we gather together to pray?

And yet this description of the first part of the Mass dates back more than eighteen hundred years!

From very early times, the prayer of the Christian community has consisted of two main parts: Word and Eucharist.

In the Liturgy of the Word, we don’t just recall past events;

we learn what it means to be followers of Christ here and now.

We listen to the word proclaimed in our midst and we also *respond*:

“Thanks be to God!” Thank you, God, for speaking this word to us!

Think of the Liturgy of the Word as the school for discipleship.

This is a primary and central way to become a disciple—by hearing the word and letting it take root in our hearts. This is the reason that missing the Liturgy of the Word by arriving late for Mass is to deprive ourselves of something we really cannot afford to miss!

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote, “Christ Himself speaks when the holy scriptures are proclaimed in the Church.”² Christ himself is speaking! So as we listen to the readings, we shouldn’t get too comfortable. Instead, we should brace ourselves!

When Christ speaks, *things happen*. People change. Minds are opened. Hearts are set on fire.

Through Christ’s living word, the Spirit will break into our lives—if our ears and hearts are open.

Let us pray that the Lord Jesus will open the scriptures to us
and make our hearts burn while he speaks to us.

1. Office of Readings for the Third Sunday of Easter. *Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume II. (Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy), 695.

2. Austin Flannery, OP, ed. *Sacrosanctum Concilium: The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council*. In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Volume 1. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co. and Dominican Publications), 1998, 5.