

UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC MASS

(Researched and compiled by Bernie Ramis for the Roman Catholic Churches of Vernon)

Delivered on August 15 & 16, 2026

V. Parts of the Mass - The Liturgy of the Word

(Note: Due to time constraints, I will not go through every single part of the Mass. I highly recommend attending [Upon This Rock](#) for a deeper dive into the biblical roots of the Blessed Sacrament.)

Our visual aid is the Sunday Missal. Please turn to Page 8 so you can follow along.

A quick review of where we left off. The Mass has two main components – the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. They are bracketed by two rituals on each end – the Introductory Rites at the beginning and the Concluding Rites at the end. Together they form a repeating rhythm: We are gathered and prepared, we are given a gift, and we are sent. (See Talk #4)

The Introductory Rites gathers and prepares us. We are gathered as children of the Trinitarian God whose name we invoke as we make the sign of the cross, *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. We are prepared through the *Confiteor* as we confess our sins to God and to one another. Immediately following our confession, we cry out: *"Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy."* Now, having been moved by God's abundant mercy, we respond with a jubilant hymn of praise to our God, proclaiming *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will!"*

Then we proceed to the COLLECT prayer. It starts with an invitation as the presider says, *Let us pray*. Here, you and I silently offer our own prayers and petitions to God. The priest's spoken words merely "collect" our individual prayers into one single voice. To which we give our assenting AMEN! With that "Amen," the introductory rites come to a close.

Notice that throughout this period we have been standing. In liturgy, standing is a posture of respect and readiness. Ready to receive. Ready to take action. But now, we take our seats as we transition into the Liturgy of the Word. Sitting is a receptive, reflective posture. In the ancient Jewish world, disciples sat at their teacher's feet to listen and learn.¹ It is very practical too. Sitting removes physical effort; our bodies drop into a state of rest. However, it is not a permission to day-dream. Because after we have been gathered and prepared, we are now given a gift. We are to be fed from the Table of the Word. We are fed not by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And it's a four-course meal! The First Reading, the Responsorial Psalm, the Second Reading, and The Gospel.²

The readings aren't picked at random; they are woven together with divine intention. The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament, it grounds us in salvation history and directly prefigures or connects to the Gospel of the day, to show us how God has been at work long before Jesus' incarnation. Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies. As St. Augustine said *"The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is made manifest or fulfilled in the New."*³

We don't just listen to God's Word; we respond to it! The Responsorial Psalm gives us inspired scriptural

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, 3rd Ed., 43.

² *GIRM*, 55, 57.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, 129.

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words to digest and pray – and ideally, sing – back to God.⁴

The Second Reading is usually taken from the New Testament Epistles; this reading offers practical instruction on how early Christian communities lived out the faith; this is guidance that speaks straight to our parish life today.

After each of these readings, time is given for silent meditation on the word.⁵ (GIRM 55-64)

But that all changes in an instant. With great exultation, the choir breaks into song, singing Alleluia (or another acclamation during Lent), and the whole assembly stands in a singular act of prayer, joining them in song as the presider (or the deacon) processes to the ambo. Once at the ambo, the presider (or the deacon) formally greets the assembly, and he makes the sign of the cross from the book to his forehead, lips, and heart.⁶ In essence, praying, May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips and in my heart. Give me wisdom to understand the Gospel, courage to proclaim it, grace to live it. By all accounts, it is easy to see that this is the high point of the liturgy of the word.⁷ The reading of the gospel is given precedence over the other readings, because it is the fulfilment of the other readings. In this reading, Christ is not just hidden or manifested, but fully present. **In the Gospel, we hear the very words of Jesus Christ.**

After the Gospel is proclaimed, a final response is set. We have all just received Jesus Christ into our minds and hearts. And we say “Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!”

Now we must meditate on what we have been given, and prepare our response. During the Homily, The priest or deacon breaks open the Scriptures, sheds light in their connections, and connects them to our modern daily lives so we can put God's Word into practice.

Having heard God's truth, we stand together to declare what we believe. Reciting the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed is our "yes" to the covenant God has just proclaimed to us.⁸

Finally, transformed by the Word, we are sent to exercise our baptismal priesthood by interceding for the needs of the Church, the world, our community, and those who are suffering. The Prayers of the Faithful is our call to mission.⁹ Pay attention to how our prayers today respond to the readings. Father will start with the words “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David” – directly pulled from today's Gospel. We will ask that we may also persevere in prayer, just like the woman in the Gospel, and we pray for the grace to be faithful witnesses and follow the example of Jesus. We are sent to be **doers** of the word.

After the homily, the creed, and the general intercessions, the liturgy of the word is complete.

Now, the liturgy transitions to the second part, the liturgy of the Eucharist.

⁴ GIRM, 61.

⁵ Ibid., 55-64.

⁶ Ibid., 132, 134.

⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁸ Ibid., 67-68.

⁹ Ibid., 69-71.