

From the Pastor's Desktop

A Message from Father Charles Puthota

January 28, 2024



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

The Importance and Necessity of the Liturgy of the Word in the Mass: Some personal musings: Sometimes I observe some good, well-meaning Catholics who would like to attend Mass as quickly as possible and get back home or wherever they are going. They give the impression that if there is no Word of God and homily, they would be happier because that way they could get to the Communion as quickly as possible and go home. The Mass is ended, go in peace! Since we take the trouble after all of getting out of bed, giving up certain morning comforts and of being in the church, why not participate in the Mass by putting our heart and soul into it. One of the ways in which we could do this is by saying the liturgical prayers with more energy and volume. We are called to be active participants, not mere spectators.

Another way is to pay close attention to what the Word of God is challenging us to do and be. The Second Vatican Council over sixty years ago came up in its document called "Dei Verbum" (God's Word) with a vision about the importance of the Word of God. The misunderstanding that the Protestants took the Bible with them and we Catholics took the sacraments had to be dispelled. We Catholics are people of the Word and the Eucharist. That's why each Mass is a union of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We cannot celebrate the Eucharist without first hearing, meditating and interpreting the Word of God. How many of us really pay attention to the Word of God? Hearing the Word of God and having it interpreted wakes us up from our at-times passive way of attending Mass. The purpose of the homily is to make some connection between the Word of God and life, and to let the scriptures come alive. We need to make a more serious effort, through our alertness and attention, at staying with the Word of God and exploring what it means for our lives, our families, and the world. After all, God speaks to us through these scriptures.

Remember how Jesus faces his three temptations by falling back on the scriptures? You may also recall how Jesus interprets the scriptures to the Emmaus disciples before he breaks the bread with them. When we go away from Mass, the questions we could be asking are: what did the Word of God interpreted in the homily speak to me for my life today? How can I be a better person and Catholic because of God's message for me today? Mass is not a passive ritual but a dynamic form of worship at which our mind (by being enlightened) and the heart (by being in communion with Jesus) are "nourished." Here's an example of how the Word of God changed a man completely from the annals of Jesuit history: St. Ignatius of Loyola kept asking Francis Xavier at the University of Paris in the 1530s: "What does it profit for someone to gain the whole world and forfeit one's soul?" This question of Jesus kept working in the soul of St. Francis Xavier; he gave up his worldly ambitions, joined the first group of Jesuits, and became the greatest missionary, second only to St. Paul.

Word of God this Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The responsorial psalm today calls us to think about this: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." This is something important not only in our faith-related matters but also in simple relationships. We are to hear others' voices. We have to open our ears to listen. It is possible that in our family, workplaces, and communities, we are so preoccupied with our own needs and desires that we are unable to hear others' voices. Once we are able to let others' voices reach our ears, we are better able to open also our hearts. This would apply in our relationship with God as well. God speaks and we have to hear his voice. There are other competing voices that drown out God's voice. It's like in the parable of the seeds and weeds---that the thorns choke the seeds to death. The same way, other voices can prevent us from hearing God's voice. When we hear God's voice, our hearts have to be ready and supple---not hard---to let that voice penetrate our hearts. Then our love can flower as a response to God speaking to us. Then discipleship can happen. We will hear the voice of Jesus and let it go straight to our hearts and we will follow him, giving up certain things and embracing certain other things. Therefore, if today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts!

AAA 2024: Archdiocesan Annual Appeal: Next Week February 03-04, we'll be launching the 2024 AAA. My letter is being mailed to the whole parish. Please give it all the support you can, as you have done in previous years.

Coming Up Soon: Ash Wednesday, February 14: Lent begins! Easter is on March 31.

Lenten Retreat on Saturday March 02: Please do come join if you are able to. Forms will soon be available for registration. Starts with the 8:30 a.m. Mass. Breakfast. Three talks on Spirituality. Then lunch! \$15 registration fee.

Think About It: Love's Forgetfulness: "Why do you keep talking about my past mistakes?" said the husband. "I thought you had forgiven and forgotten." "I have, indeed," said the wife. "But don't you ever forget that I have forgiven and forgotten." Sinner: "Remember not my sins, oh Lord!" Lord: "What sins? I forgot them long ago. You'll have to prod my memory. Love keeps no record of wrongs." (1 Cor. 13) (ADM) When we confess our sins, God throws our sins into the deepest ocean and posts a sign that reads: "No fishing!"

Religious Humor: A distinguished minister and two elders from his congregation attended an out-of-town meeting that did not finish until rather late. They decided to have something to eat before going home, but unfortunately, the only spot open was a seedy bar-and-grill with a questionable reputation. After being served, one of the elders asked the minister to say grace. "I'd rather not," the clergyman said. "I don't want him to know I'm here."

Your Friend and Pastor,

Father Charles Puthota