

# The Mass

## The Parts of the Mass – Part 5 – The First Reading

### A. The First Reading

The first reading is usually from the Old Testament, except for during the Easter season when it comes from the Acts of the Apostles. Although the Old Testament awaits the fullness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ, it is accepted by the Church with veneration as “authentic divine teaching.” In the Old Testament, “the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way” (Dei Verbum, no. 16). The truth is, a person cannot adequately understand Jesus and the New Testament Scriptures without knowing the story of Israel in the Old Testament.

The inclusion of the Old Testament reading at Mass helps us to enter in the story of Israel and thus see the unity of the Bible more clearly. As Vatican II taught, echoing the teaching of Saint Augustine, God “brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be manifest in the New. For, although Christ founded the New Covenant in His blood...still the books of the Old Testament, all of them caught up into the Gospel message, attain and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament...and, in their turn, shed light on it and explain it” (Dei Verbum, no. 16).

These readings generally correspond to the Gospel reading for the day. Sometimes, the correspondence is thematic, illustrating continuity or contrast between the Old Testament story and the Gospel. Other times, the readings underscore how the Old Testament prefigures Christ and the Church. Images of Passover are associated with readings about the Eucharist. The Exodus story is linked with baptism. As such, the beautiful symphony of Scripture resounds in the Liturgy of the Word.

### B. Thanks Be To God

At the end of the first reading, the lector says “The Word of the Lord.” One theologian has noted that this announcement is like a great shout or a trumpet call, reminding us how marvelous it is for us human beings to hear God speak to us through the Scriptures. “The declaration should be heard with absolute amazement. How absurd it would be to take for granted that God should speak in our midst. We are expressing our amazement, and we are saying that we do not

take it for granted when we cry out from the depths of our hearts, ‘Thanks be to God.’” (Jeremy Driscoll, *What Happens at Mass*, pp. 40-41)

Thanksgiving is gratitude to God for His goodness and His acts in history. It is a common facet of worship in the Bible from both the Old Testament to the New Testament. The specific words, “Thanks be to God,” were used by Saint Paul to thank the Lord for delivering him from sin and death (Romans 7:25; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14). Since the whole of the Bible ultimately points to Christ’s work of salvation, it is fitting that we respond to the Scriptures proclaimed in the liturgy with the same expression of gratitude Saint Paul used in his joyful thanksgiving for Christ’s victory on the cross: “Thanks be to God!”

Our response is then followed by a moment of silence as we sit in awe and adoration of the God who just spoke to us. Silence is part of the heavenly liturgy in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 8:1), and it gives us time to reflect on the words we just heard. In this way we become like Mary who “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:18).