

The Catholic Mass... Revealed!

Study Guide

Session Three (Corresponds to Booklet Chapters 9-14)

As participants gather, play the "Ave Maria" track from the soundtrack CD.

1. *Opening Prayer:*

Leader:

Heavenly Father, we come before you in thanksgiving for the gift of your Son, and particularly for his sacrifice which won the victory over sin and merited for us eternal salvation. Open our minds and hearts, Lord, so that we may learn the treasures of the Mass, in order to live each day as a preparation for our next Mass, as a thanksgiving for our last, and longing to serve You in others until we encounter You definitively and join the Liturgy of Heaven. We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

2. *Gospel Reflection:* (10-15 minutes for the Gospel to be read and each participant to share a personal insight)

Reader: Our text this evening is Luke Chapter 8, verses 4 to 15.

When a large crowd gathered, with people from one town after another journeying to him, he spoke in a parable.

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold."

After saying this, he called out, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."

Then his disciples asked him what the meaning of this parable might be.

He answered, "Knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God has been granted to you; but to the rest, they are made known through parables so that 'they may look but not see, and hear but not understand.'

"This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those on the path are the ones who have heard, but the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts that they may not believe and be saved. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when

they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of trial. As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the ones who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit. But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.

Some points for reflection/discussion: Leader acts as a guide

- God came to earth to teach us something. He sent his Word among us, and spoke in human language.
- His Word is eternally fruitful, but it bears fruit according to the dispositions of those who receive it.
- Christ's words often require further explanation and teaching. Christ preaches his word, and then has a conversation with his disciples in order to shed light on his words and apply that teaching to their lives.
- What can we do in order to "weed and feed" the garden of our souls, so that our receptivity to God's Word at Mass might be more fruitful?

3. *Audiovisual Presentation* Play the DVD Chapters 7, 8, and 9

A. The Liturgy of the Word – 10 Minutes

- We must realize that silence and listening are very important modes of participation. There is no concert without the audience. But we are not merely an audience; we are a family, the People of God. We are reading together the story of Salvation history, our family story.
- We must be attentive to go over these readings again and again over the course of our lives. Reflect on what one of the Church's greatest preachers said, "*To get the full flavor of an herb, it must be pressed between the fingers, so it is the same with the Scriptures; the more familiar they become, the more they reveal their hidden treasures and yield their indescribable riches.*"-- St. John Chrysostom, A.D. 347-407
- Do we realize that we are a "Bible Church" even more so than many protestant denominations? It is only through the Catholic Church that we have the Bible, since it was the authority of the Church that discerned among the various writings about Jesus and determined which were divinely inspired. To accept Scripture without Sacred Tradition is to have, in the words of a protestant scholar "a fallible collection of infallible books."

- For further reading, here are the some numbers of the Catechism of the Catholic Church about Sacred Scripture:

131 "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life."¹⁰⁹ Hence "access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful."¹¹⁰

132 "Therefore, the study of the sacred page should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too - pastoral preaching, catechetics and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place - is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture."¹¹¹

133 The Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful. . . to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."¹¹²

IN BRIEF

134 All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, "because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ" (Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2,8:PL 176,642: cf. *ibid.* 2,9:PL 176,642-643).

135 "The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired, they are truly the Word of God" (DV 24).

136 God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors; he acts in them and by means of them. He thus gives assurance that their writings teach without error his saving truth (cf. DV 11).

137 Interpretation of the inspired Scripture must be attentive above all to what God wants to reveal through the sacred authors for our salvation. What comes from the Spirit is not fully "understood except by the Spirit's action" (cf. Origen, *Hom. in Ex.* 4, 5: PG 12, 320).

138 The Church accepts and venerates as inspired the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New.

139 The four Gospels occupy a central place because Christ Jesus is their center.

140 The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God's plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.

141 "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord" (DV 21): both nourish and govern the whole Christian life. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (*Pss* 119:105; cf. *Is* 50:4).

B. *The Readings and the Responsorial Psalm – 10 Minutes*

- What are the different levels of meaning that Scripture contains? Here is the answer from the Catechism of the Catholic Church: (Leader Reads)

115 According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two *senses* of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.

116 The *literal sense* is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal."⁸³

117 The *spiritual sense*. Thanks to the unity of God's plan, not only the text of Scripture but also the realities and events about which it speaks can be signs.

1. The *allegorical sense*. We can acquire a more profound understanding of events by recognizing their significance in Christ; thus the crossing of the Red Sea is a sign or type of Christ's victory and also of Christian Baptism.⁸⁴

2. The *moral sense*. The events reported in Scripture ought to lead us to act justly. As St. Paul says, they were written "for our instruction".

3. The *anagogical sense* (Greek: *anagoge*, "leading"). We can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem

118 A medieval couplet summarizes the significance of the four senses:

The Letter speaks of deeds; Allegory to faith;
The Moral how to act; Anagogy our destiny.

Discussion

- What is my attitude as I listen to God's Word at Mass? Meditative? Am I asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten me and apply God's Word to my life?
- Do I ever discuss the readings with a friend or family member after Mass or even before? Do I realize this is the "family story" God proposes for my thought and prayer today, or this week in the case of the Sunday readings?
- Do I understand the different cycles of readings, for weekdays and for Sundays?
- Do I participate in singing the Psalm, whether or not my voice is melodious, in order to sing God's praises together with my parish family?
- Do I use the Psalms in my own personal prayer, knowing that God has taught me through them how to pray in so many attitudes of the heart: when sad or happy, when all is well and when I feel persecuted and alone?

C. *The Gospel – 10 Minutes*

- The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) has this to say about the Gospel:

“The reading of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy itself teaches that great reverence is to be shown to it by setting it off from the other readings with special marks of honor: whether the minister appointed to proclaim it prepares himself by a blessing or prayer; or the faithful, standing as they listen to it being read, through their acclamations acknowledge and confess Christ present and speaking to them; or the very marks of reverence are given to the Book of the Gospels.” (GIRM, 60)

- Why are the three small signs of the cross done when the Gospel is announced? What do they symbolize?
- Do I realize that in the Gospel Jesus Himself reveals Himself to me in his words and actions? Is the reading of the Gospels central to my prayer life?
- It is a good idea to read the Sunday Gospel before Mass, or to keep it in mind throughout the week. Even if one cannot attend daily Mass, it is useful to read the Gospel of the day to consider what text our Mother the Church is proposing for us. Living the liturgical calendar helps us have our minds and hearts united as brothers and sisters throughout the world.
- Am I grateful to hear the Gospel proclaimed? Is my “Praise to You, Lord, Jesus Christ” getting routine? Or is it an act of homage, gratitude and faith?

D. *The Homily – 10 Minutes*

- As in the Gospel passage we reflected on above, we often need to have God’s word explained to us. The priest or deacon has undergone special preparation for this, but also counts on a “grace of state,” a special divine help to guide his congregation toward a full understanding and living of God’s Word.
- We should be open to what the homilist has to say, even when the message may be a demanding one. As we read in St. Paul, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in Righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17.)
- Have I ever thanked a priest or deacon for a homily I found helpful?

E. The Profession of Faith – 10 Minutes

- Do I take advantage of this occasion to renew my commitment to my Catholic Faith?
- Italian journalist Vittorio Messori, a convert, stated that, having come into the Church as an adult, he cannot say the Creed without emotion, thinking of all who have suffered to clarify, defend and pass on these truths. Am I ever similarly moved by these words, by which we profess together what God has done for us?
- When was the last time I studied what each article of the Creed contains?
- Do I realize that, when professing my faith, I am first and foremost talking about what God has done for me? Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways", we renew our many reasons for responding to God's great love.

F. The Prayers of the Faithful – 10 Minutes

- As God's family, we ask our Father together for what we need. Do I feel supported, knowing that I am praying together with my parish community?
- The General Instruction says, "In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all." (GIRM, 69) Am I aware of this responsibility that comes from my baptism, of offering prayers and sacrifices for others? How much do I pray for others outside of Mass? Do I remember those who have asked me for prayers?
- Do I realize that, by praying for the needs of my community, I renew my commitment to serve others, and to be God's agent of change in my world?
- By praying for the Church throughout the world, especially in the person of the Holy Father, do I renew my love for the Church universal?
- As the Liturgy of the Word closes, am I conscious of God's action in the world and in my life, so that, offering myself together with Christ

4. Closing Prayer

Leader:

Lord, we have come here to reflect together on the great memorial You left us, the most powerful means You have given us to be fed and strengthened in the struggle for your Kingdom on earth. May this time together unite us as your family, and unite us to You, in Your Eucharist, the source and summit of our Christian life. In Your name we pray, Amen.