
PARISH OF OUR LADY OF GRACE



DAY OF RECOLLECTION FOR MINISTERS

WELCOME

Welcome to our first recollection for Ministers of the Word and Ministers of the Eucharist. It's good for us to be together and to consider for a short while the work that we are involved in: our collaboration with the Holy Spirit and with each other in making the Word of God 'more and more flesh' in our community. It's a work of service to God and to the people of God. Thank you for your generosity in helping with this work and thank you for giving up your time today to reflect for a while on what we are doing.

We are used to the Stations of the Cross in Lent – moments in which we stop and pause to ponder on the work of our salvation in Christ and on our part in that work. Given that our recollection is in Lent, I wonder if we could do something similar in regard to the Mass? To stop and pause and ponder a few points in the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, a work that makes present the saving work of God, a work that as ministers of the Word and the Eucharist, you are particularly involved in?

We don't need fourteen stations! Perhaps in our Stations of the Mass we might pause at six points – three particularly concerned with the Word and three concerned with the Eucharist. But maybe it's best to remember first that the work of word and sacrament are intimately related – just as the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit are one – so the work of the reader and the eucharistic minister are one: both involved in the communication and acceptance of God's Word; both involved in making that Word flesh in the world.

THE FIRST STATION: THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Catholic theologian Anne Hunt asks a question that we don't often stop to think about: why do we trace our bodies with the sign of the Cross while saying the names of the Holy Trinity? Why do we do this? She says its an intentional act – by which we mark the beginning of most things: What we say with our lips and do with our hand is our intention. We want to share in the life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We want the our bodies, which we touch, to be part of that life – that's our intention. And in the same moment we realise that our only hope to get there is through the Cross – through the action of the saving work of Christ and the Holy Spirit on us. So we always begin at the First Station.

THE SECOND STATION: THE WORD OF THE LORD

The Second Vatican Council's Document, called *The Word of God, Dei verbum* says this:

In His goodness and wisdom it pleased Almighty God to reveal Himself and to make known the mysteries of His will; by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, human beings might, in the Holy Spirit, have access to the Father and come to share in the divine life.

At this Second Station we pause to consider how the work of the Reader is involved in God's work. You might want to look at Isaiah

55:11 and Romans 10:14. The Word is still being made flesh. Every time God's Word is spoken in the readings at mass it becomes a living Word – that doesn't go out from God's mouth without achieving what it was sent to do: be made flesh in those who hear it. And this is why St Paul says, "and they will not believe in him if they have not heard of him."

This Station makes us think of the importance and responsibility of the Reader in proclaiming the Word: The Word that takes flesh in the hearer. When this Word is heard it offers a new identity to the one who hears: the identity of the firstborn child of God. Human beings form their identity by accepting a story from witnesses they trust and then celebrating that identity together. Think of your own birthday and the narrative you accepted about yourself. Think of the story that we receive from witnesses to the Resurrection – think of the new identity that the words of the story offer.

THE THIRD STATION: CREDO – I BELIEVE

After we have listened to the Word of God in the readings and the Gospel and after we have engaged with the homily, when the priest or deacon tries to assist the Word to reach its destination in our hearts. Then we come to the Third Station: We all stand up for the Creed. Why?

Well this is the moment of truth – when we decide to give answer (or not) we have heard the story of our new identity – how God has made us his children through Christ and the Holy Spirit. And now we have to give our yes to this. Credo – I believe is the answer we give to the Word God has spoken to us.

Credo – comes from the combining of two words: heart and to give. It is a free giving of the core of our being to the truth we have heard: Yes, I accept, I believe that through Christ, the Word made flesh and the work of the Holy Spirit we have been given access to God's life.

FOURTH STATION: PLACING OF THE GIFTS ON THE ALTAR

This Fourth Station is a pivotal point and it is good to stop and pause here. The intention we expressed at the beginning of Mass: to be sharers in the Divine Life has come to a head, to a critical pitch: we want to believe with all our hearts that we are children of God now: firstborn in God's Son. But we know that we cannot effect this ourselves. So at this moment we identify ourselves with Christ – by joining our poor offering to his on the altar. We place ourselves with the bread and wine in the place of sacrifice – so that Jesus may take us, our world and our history and offer it to the father through the Holy Spirit.

FIFTH STATION: THROUGH HIM, WITH HIM AND IN HIM

In the person of Christ, the Priest speaks over our gifts the narrative of our salvation – he does this in the memory of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. As a result all that we desired, all that we placed on the altar – creation and history, ourselves is taken up into the life of God and glorified.

SIXTH STATION: THE BODY OF CHRIST – AMEN

It was St Augustine who said “you are what you receive – accept what you are.” We accept with an Amen – so be it – the identity that we have become through these mysteries. It is good to stop and pause and ponder – the work we are involved in with the distribution of Holy Communion: The making of a new community in Christ, the church.

We adore you O Christ and we praise you because by these Holy things you have given us a share in your work and made us new.