

**Homily for May 25, 2003
6th Sunday of Easter B**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Acts 10:5-26, 34-35, 44-48
1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17**

God chooses us through His word.

“It was not you who chose me,” says Jesus in John chapter 15, “but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain...”

As part of the last supper instruction Jesus gave to his disciples according to Saint John's gospel, it is a particularly dramatic statement of God's initiative in drawing near to every human heart. “It was not you who chose me,” Jesus says. Rather, Jesus in whom we meet no less than God chooses each of us.

We continue to receive the new General Instruction for the Roman Missal from the Pope and our bishops, and this week we are introducing the Book of the Gospels – an especially appropriate experience in the light of how God chooses us. You notice that we carried this beautiful new book in at the beginning of Mass, placed it upon the altar and then read the gospel from it. Notice that we are now using two books. What used to be read from a single book called the lectionary is now distributed over two books. The first and second readings come from our lectionary, and the gospel is in a special gospel book.

“Why all the fuss?” you might ask. It certainly would be more efficient to have everything in a single book. But efficiency is the enemy of liturgy. And

besides, one of the titles for Jesus the Christ is the Word of God. And the presence of the Lord Jesus is no less real than the bread and wine at Mass is in the word proclaimed. Furthermore, we Catholic Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of all that came before in the prophets and the law and the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures. Consequently, we now pay special reverence to the Book of the Gospels. It's only in the past few years that we've had such a book available to us, even though the original Instruction from Rome some 40 years ago asked that we honor the gospel in a special way. In our parish, it was only a few weeks ago that we were able to enlarge our ambo so that it would accommodate this fine new book. And we're grateful to those parishioners who have provided us with this new addition.

As I have in previous weeks, I'm going to invite you to sit up straight, close your eyes and try to answer within your own heart a question or two pertaining to this Book of the Gospels.

So my first question is: “Did you ever have in your life a book that was special or important, and if so, what made it special or important?” Here are some responses I've received in other settings:

“When I was growing up we had a set of books called Child Craft books that were specially bound and

that we could use but only very carefully – they were kept on a special shelf and it was a treat to make use of them.”

“We had a family Bible that sat on a coffee table in the living room, and every now and again someone would look at it or read it or add another name of a birth or a death.”

“I guess when I was holding that special book I felt kind of special myself – that somehow its importance made me important too.”

Now I'm going to describe briefly the gestures used at this Mass with the Book of the Gospels, and then afterwards I'll invite you to reflect on a question or two. We began the Mass with the invitation to greet one another. Then there was the opening hymn, and the Book was carried down the aisle and placed standing up on the altar. It remained there throughout the readings until it was time for the alleluia. The Book was then carried from the altar to the ambo, and there the Word was proclaimed at the end of which we sang. Here's a question for you to answer in your heart in response to what we've experienced at this liturgy with the Book of the Gospel: “What did it feel like for you to see this book being used at Mass?” Here are some responses given in another setting:

“I couldn't take my eyes off of it – I found it to be the center of my attention. It made me wonder what was this all about.”

“For me it meant that something important was being said.”

And another response, “I wanted to know what was in that book – that somehow it had meaning for me.”

It's worth noticing that even though we carry the Book of the Gospels in at the beginning of Mass, we do not carry it out as a book. The book stays here. But the Word, the living presence of the Lord, that Word goes out in you and in me in us. We are the body of Christ formed by this Word and sacrament to go forth and bear fruit. In such a way we become God's very own possession.

God chooses us through His word.