

**Homily for January 30, 2005
4th Sunday of the Year in the
Year of the Eucharist**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
1 Corinthians 12:31--13:13
Luke 4:21-30**

The answer to either question changes our lives, for God is with us in the Word proclaimed!

At Mass we meet the Lord Jesus, we meet no less than God, in the Word proclaimed as well as in one another, and in bread and wine.

As we continue our reflections on the Mass in this Year of the Eucharist proclaimed by Pope John Paul II, we encounter this weekend a third presence of the Lord, to add to our previous encounters of the Lord's presence in the gathered people and in the person of the priest.

What would happen if Jesus came to church next Sunday? I mean, if he showed up in his first-century garb – robe, sandals and beard – and walked up to the ambo and began to speak. What would you do? How would you react? I suspect it's a safe bet that all of us would have our eyes fixed on him and our ears alert to every word he would speak. Of course, somebody would probably be on a cell phone alerting the media to this miraculous event!

Such an event should not strike us as so unusual, however. Though he does not appear in first-century dress, Jesus comes here every Sunday to speak to us. That's what the Catholic tradition teaches – that when the word of God is proclaimed in our midst, Christ

speaks to us today. He comes in disguise, we might say, speaking through the lectors and deacons and priests who proclaim the readings. The Second Vatican Council put it this way in 1963: “[Christ] is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #7.)

This is the third way that Christ reveals his presence during the Eucharist, in addition to the Lord's presence in the gathered people and in the person of the priest. Every time we gather in his name, Christ has something to say to us. Reverence for Christ present in his word calls us to attentive listening. Formed in the time when the Mass was in Latin and we had to read along, many Catholics may still have a habit of reading the texts as they are proclaimed. But the preferred response is to put down the books and listen with open ears and open hearts to what the Lord is saying to us.

Listening does not mean being passive, however. Truly listening is a very active response when someone speaks to us. We show respect for anyone who talks with us by looking at the person and concentrating on what he or she is saying. That takes effort on our part, not allowing other thoughts or external distractions to claim our attention.

It may be helpful to realize, however, that our primary task is not to get every word that is spoken, but to listen carefully for whatever word the Lord wants each of us to hear that day. Relax. Let the words wash over you. What is heard will vary from person to person, but Christ offers each of us the message that we really need to hear. It may be the sung melody of the responsorial psalm that grabs us. That happened to me this week after the Mass with the children on Monday. “Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.” That melody has been rattling around in me ever since – a comfort really.

This listening to and hearing Scripture at Mass is more than and different from what happens when we read Scripture alone. The power of the Lord present as his word is proclaimed could call to our minds what we might otherwise miss when we read Scripture by ourselves. A word or phrase may strike us, resonate in us. I know it often does in me as I proclaim the Gospel or listen to the lector, even though I’ve studied the text and written about it earlier. At the moment of proclamation, God can and often does offer a gift of Himself in His Word that we can then latch onto, carry with us. It will have about it the power of God, something God wanted us to hear. It doesn’t necessarily give us something to do or a task to perform, although that could happen. Rather, the Word, the presence of the Risen Lord we receive, is meant to be a source of God’s closeness through the Lord Jesus, truly a gift.

That’s what makes it a good idea to read the readings at home before you come to Mass; that’s why most parishes print the Bible references in the bulletin each week so that you can look them up. Then, when the word is proclaimed, you can allow Christ to speak directly to you through the readings and the homily. In such a way, then, God’s word will be effective in your life.

In the silence after the readings and after the homily, you might ask yourself either one or both of two simple questions: Lord, what do you want me to hear? What does that mean, Lord? Return to that word of phrase or idea in the silence of your heart as the opportunity presents itself during the week.

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changes our lives, for God is with
us in the Word proclaimed!**