

**Homily for March 6, 2005  
4th Sunday of Lent Cycle A  
By Father Charles Bowes  
1Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13  
Ephesians 5:8-14  
John 9:1-41**

## *We not only hear the Gospel, but we go forth from here to share it as well.*

We continue, even during Lent, to reflect on the Mass as instructed by Pope John Paul II in this year dedicated to the Eucharist.

Have you ever wondered why we sit for the first two readings at Mass, but stand for the Gospel? This is one of several ways that the liturgy indicates the special significance of the portion of the Bible that is found in the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

We believe, of course, that Christ speaks to us in all of the readings. Because he is the Word of God made flesh, whatever God says to us comes to us through Christ, whether in the Old or the New Testament. As Saint John of the Cross wrote, "God spoke but one word, and in that word said everything." Yet there is still something special about those four books that give us most of our information about Jesus himself. The gospels reveal him to us, recounting his teaching and his miracles, his journeys and his encounters with people of his time, his death and his resurrection. It is in the four gospels that we find the fullest picture of Jesus and his meaning for our lives. And when that word is proclaimed in this gathered assembly, we meet no less than God. It is God who speaks when the Word

is proclaimed.

There are several ways that the liturgy reminds us of the pre-eminence of the gospels. Before the gospel is proclaimed, the deacon or priest expresses the hope that the Lord will be with us, and we respond in kind. This reminds us that the Lord is present in the gospel in a special way. On special occasions, the minister will also incense the lectionary or the gospel book to express our reverence for Christ.

Many parishes, like ours, use a special Book of the Gospels for this proclamation. Though this is not required, it is encouraged in the official documents from Rome. The Gospel Book is carried in procession at the beginning of Mass and commonly placed on the altar until the time to proclaim the gospel reading.

The main expression of the gospel's importance, however, is the gospel procession after the second reading. Following our shared silence after that reading, we all stand and sing the gospel acclamation. That music is designed to accompany the procession of the deacon or priest to the ambo for the proclamation of the gospel.

Asking for the grace to proclaim the gospel well, the deacon receives a blessing from the priest (or the priest will proclaim the gospel, as I do...the priest bows briefly in prayer). If there is a separate Gospel Book, he

carries that in procession, raising it high for all to see and acknowledge. Servers with candles and with incense may accompany him, if that is being used. As the procession forms and moves, the whole assembly acclaim Christ and welcomes him in his word by singing the Alleluias (or another acclamation during Lent).

All of this is intended to open our minds and hearts in a special way to the words of the gospel. It clearly indicates that something important is about to happen, and that we are all to be fully attentive.

Of course, hearing the gospel is only the first step. Once we have heard the words, then we are to figure out how to live them. Through the gospel, Christ challenges us to imitate him and to walk in his ways. That's why the liturgy treats it with such solemnity and reverence. We go forth and live what we hear and celebrate here.

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