

## **SEPTEMBER 10 DEACON MIKE WALSH**

Well, today I'd like to follow up on my homily from last week. I mentioned that we would be spending some time reflecting on the different parts of the Mass, and this all came about from a short conversation I had with Fr. Dan Donovan. As you remember, Fr. Dan was a longtime celebrant of the Daily TV Mass and is now in retirement. He is a very thoughtful man.

One day, just before we were going to tape the Daily TV Mass, he said to me, looking a little quizzical, "You know, Mike, I had an experience this morning that I never had in 60 years of priesthood." He had celebrated Mass at the local parish before coming to be with us, and he noted that it was as if the congregation forgot to say their most important prayer.

As I mentioned last week, I would like to spend a few homilies here with you trying to examine and determine what is the most important prayer—the most important response of the congregation that Fr. Donovan was asking about. When he posed that question, I didn't want to answer it right away, so I asked you to reflect on that as well. So, what is it?

Last week, we looked at the Mass as a sacred story presented to us in four parts. The first part is the Introductory Rites, during which we come together, are greeted by the priest, and say a beautiful prayer during the long-form of the Penitential Act, the Confiteor. What I love about that prayer is that we acknowledge we are not perfect people, and we ask for mercy. This theme of mercy is central to the Mass.

Today, I'd like to examine part two of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word. Fr. Peter spoke about this yesterday in his homily. This is the time when we really come together after the Introductory Rites and this time of

prayer and reflection to sit and listen to our story—the story of our faith within the broader context of the Mass. During the homily, we listen more than we speak, but there are also important parts where we participate.

We started today with the Gospel story from Luke, where Jesus chooses the Twelve Apostles. We see how Jesus prays—He goes up the mountain, is quiet, and then comes down to choose these Twelve and calls them Apostles. The word "Apostle" means "the ones who are sent." So, what are they sent to do? We learn from Matthew that they are sent to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, cast out demons, but most importantly, they are sent to proclaim the Good News that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

How do we, as modern-day disciples, proclaim that Good News? It is crucial for us to understand the Good News, the story. N.T. Wright, a well-known Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, describes the Bible as a story in five acts: Act One is Creation, Act Two is the Fall, Act Three is the People of Israel, Act Four is about Jesus, and Act Five is the Church. What I appreciate about his description of Act Five is that it is unfinished because we are continuing that mission today.

We need to understand the story, and it is in the Liturgy of the Word that we hear those stories. Normally, the first reading comes from the Jewish Scriptures, covering Creation, the Fall, and the People of Israel. After the first reading, we say, "The Word of the Lord." This response affirms that this is our story, the Word given to us directly from God.

On Sundays during solemnities, there is usually a second reading that comes from the epistles. Today's second reading was from Paul, who often attempts to resolve disputes in the early Church. The Church is an ongoing act, as you heard in today's reading. Following the first reading, we have the Responsorial Psalm, which gives us the chance, especially

during the refrain, to respond powerfully to the Word of God we have just heard.

We then move into the Gospel, a very special time when we come together to proclaim it with a Gospel acclamation. The Gospel tells us the story of Jesus Christ through the four evangelists. One of my favorite writers on this subject is Alexander Shaia, who wrote *\*The Heart and The Soul: The Four-Gospel Journey to Radical Transformation.\** He offers a unique perspective on how we move through the Gospel stories.

Shaia emphasizes that one of the first challenges Jesus presents in the story is the necessity of change. How do we change? Matthew's Gospel helps us address this fundamental question by leading us to the great mountain of the Sermon on the Mount. Once we decide to change, we must venture into the world, which will undoubtedly involve suffering. In Mark's Gospel, we learn how to navigate suffering, represented by the tapestry of crossing Mark's stormy seas.

From suffering, we move toward joy, depicted in John's glorious garden. However, we cannot remain in that garden. We are called, just as the Apostles were called, to go out into the world. Luke's Gospel guides us on how to mature in service, as many stories take place on the road, reflecting Luke's extensive ministry with Paul.

This exploration of the second part of the Mass—the stories we hear—culminates in a unique way. After the homily, we pray the Creed on Sundays and solemnities, which reflects our story and ties everything together. The Creed was originally created for those who lacked books and education, allowing them to recount the story repeatedly. In it, we profess our belief in God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the fundamental aspects of our faith, affirming that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, ascended into Heaven, and will come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church, the communion of saints, and most importantly, we affirm the forgiveness of sins, instilling faith in life everlasting. So, that is our prayer—the prayer found in the second part of our story: the Liturgy of the Word.

If I am here next week, I would like to explore the third part of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist—the main part of the Mass, where we come together to celebrate the mystery at the very center of our salvation. This is what enables us to leave each Mass in peace and embrace the mission of the Apostles in modern times by glorifying the Lord through the way we choose to live our lives. God bless.