

The Word of God Transforms

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A good storyteller can inspire, sadden, or elicit emotions or reactions from the audience. My grandfather was the great storyteller in the family. Those of us who lived close to him took this almost for granted. We saw him daily, and he always had a story to tell. When other relatives visited, they eagerly told his stories from the last visit or two. Unfortunately, their stories did not have the same power. Knowing this, they asked our grandfather to retell the stories, both to make sure the details were correct and to have the master storyteller elicit joy. The outcome of this was a transformation. We grew closer to our grandfather as he revealed something about himself in the telling of these stories. Today, I rarely get the stories right, but I recall the powerful memories of deepening communion and a desire to be more like my grandfather. The Word of God is analogous to this type of storytelling.

The Second Vatican Council called for a great opening up of Scripture in the reformed liturgy. Prior to Vatican II, the readings for Mass were from a one-year cycle of readings and consisted of an epistle and the Gospel text. Since the reforms, the Lectionary (the book that contains the readings for Mass) provides three readings for Sunday: one from the Old Testament, an epistle or reading from the Acts of the Apostles or Revelation, and a Gospel, along with a psalm. There are two cycles to the Lectionary. The first cycle is a three-year ordering of readings for Sundays and solemnities. The second cycle contains the readings for weekday liturgies over a two-year period. Today, in many parishes, lectors or readers are trained to proclaim the readings at Mass. This preparation is not only on techniques but how to pray with the Scriptures. Lectors, deacons, or priests who are skilled and prayerful proclaimers can draw the liturgical assembly into the biblical stories.

Theologically, the proclaimed words of the readings are formational as well as informational. These words invite the assembly to be drawn into the very life of the Word, Jesus Christ, and to shape their lives according to his ways, ways that are known from biblical proclamations. Taking to heart



the life Christ desires for each member of the assembly, there begins a gradual transformation. The words can comfort or challenge to gradually deepen the assembly members' relationship and communion with Christ Jesus and one another. Just as the stories of my grandfather gathered our family members and brought us closer together, so too the readings of the liturgy have an even greater power, to gather the assembly into deeper communion as members of the local Church, and to Christ Jesus. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (a Second Vatican Council document that guided the renewal of the liturgy) states that when the Word is proclaimed in liturgy, it is Christ himself who speaks. Christ imbues the words with his very presence. We take these words into our heads and

hearts and begin to live what Christ desires (transformation). Though the stories we hear over and over do not change, we change. The power of Christ working through the proclamation of Scriptures can open us to his transforming presence and help us to grow and deepen our knowledge and relationship to Christ.

The Scriptures are powerful stories when proclaimed in the liturgy because they are imbued with Christ himself. Aided by the well-prepared homily, we are called to actively live the Word as we pray for the needs of the world, governments, people who are ill, and various other needs in the Prayer of the Faithful. For many of us, these words reveal the power of the Storyteller, Christ Jesus, the one we want to know more and with whom we seek to enter into deeper communion.

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