

Listening to readings best way to hear Jesus speak

VATICAN CITY - The best way to hear Jesus speak to humanity is by listening to the Liturgy of the Word, said the preacher of the papal household.

Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, offering a Lenten meditation to Pope Benedict XVI and top Vatican officials Feb. 22, said, "During Mass, the Liturgy of the Word is nothing other than liturgically making present Jesus who preaches."

The Liturgy of the Word represents the place and time in which "Jesus speaks most solemnly and surely today," he said.

Father Cantalamessa said in light of the October world Synod of Bishops on the Bible, he was dedicating his four weekly Lenten reflections for the pope and Vatican officials to the word of God.

"Christ is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the church," he said, quoting the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

During a liturgy, readings from the Bible take on "a new and stronger meaning" than when passages are read on other occasions, such as at home or school, Father Cantalamessa said.

The liturgy's aim is not to help people understand the Bible better, but to help them recognize Christ who is present in the Eucharist and "to shine light on a particular aspect of the mystery that one is about to receive" with Communion, he said.

During Mass, the words and events read from the Bible are not just narrated, but are relived, he said. "Memory becomes reality and presence" and the people in the congregation are no longer listeners, "but interlocutors and actors in the word," he added.

Of everything the faithful hear during a Mass or the Liturgy of the Hours, he said

there is almost always a message or reflection “particularly destined for us.”

That is why when the word of God is proclaimed, the faithful should be expectant and attentive – ready to hear “the divine voice that turns to us every day” imploring those present not to harden their hearts but to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches, Father Cantalamessa said.