

# Procession, proclamation of the Gospel

Q. In many churches I have noticed that the Book of the Gospels is carried in procession and placed on the altar. Is this something new and who should do it? And what do we say and do after the Gospel reading is introduced?

A. The Book of the Gospels carried in the entrance procession is mentioned in Roman liturgies as early as the fifth century. This custom disappeared for many centuries, particularly since there was no longer a separate book for the Scripture readings. The Lectionary was restored in 1969 and the Gospels were given a separate book a few years later. If there is a deacon, then he, as minister of the word is the one to process with it. Otherwise it is done by one of the lectors. Liturgical documents now state that the book is to be placed on the altar until the proclamation of the Gospel. This highlights the intimate connection between word and Eucharist. How it is placed there varies: lying flat or upright on a stand.

The Gospel Acclamation is sung while the presider or deacon takes the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo. It may be accompanied by candles and more formally by incense. In the fifth century, St. Augustine mentioned an acclamation being sung to accompany the Gospel procession, and Cyril of Alexandria gave evidence that the book was enthroned and carried in procession to the pulpit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that Christ is present in the proclamation of God's Word. (CCC 1373) Carried in procession, led by candles, kissed and incensed as it is introduced, our belief is affirmed that Christ is truly present in the proclamation of the Gospel from that precious book.

It has become a custom to make a threefold sign of the cross before the proclamation of the Gospel after responding "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ," as the deacon or priest makes a sign of the cross on the book. This gesture for the laity now appears for the first time as a rubric (instruction) in the soon-to-be-published new Roman Missal. Interestingly, there are still no specific words assigned to this gesture. Many of us were taught to say something similar to the following: "May the Word of the Lord live in our minds and on our lips and in our hearts."

At the end of the Liturgy of the Word, the book of the Gospels may be placed on a side table, on a book stand or a shelf, or better yet, enshrined in a special ambry or “shrine” in the wall, as is done with the holy oils. It is not processed out but remains until the Mass is ended and all have departed the worship space.

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