



Fr. Daniel's Corner

Mass Moment: Part 12

The Second Reading:

The second reading is always taken from one of the New Testament Epistles (another word for Letter, in reference to the New Testament Letters) or the book of Revelation. The New Testament authors continue the story of God's plan of salvation and discerned in the Old Testament stories- the Exodus, the desert, the promised land, the temple- the unfolding and fulfillment of God's promise in the life of Jesus Christ, the center of the history of Israel. Meanwhile, his own life itself has a center. We have said already what it is: his death and resurrection.

Historically, the second reading was a semi-continuous reading of the Bible at Mass which goes back to the earliest centuries of the church. In fact, it is the origin of our response "Thanks be to God" at Mass! When a bishop would preside at a Mass, one of the younger clerics would read the Epistle, starting where he left off the previous week. When the bishop had heard enough of the Epistle, he would exclaim "Deo Gratias!" (Thanks be to God!) When we, too, reach the end of the reading, our response should be filled with joy at hearing God's Word: "Thanks be to God!". Because the second reading follows a semi-continuous pattern, the second reading does not always align in with the first reading or the Gospel.

Again, God speaks, and we listen. But now God's language is no longer the creation and the history of Israel, but the reflective writings of his chosen apostles. Where would we be without these letters in which great saints and apostles like Paul, Peter, James, and John share their wisdom and pastoral good sense with the early Christian communities? It is in these letters, even more than in the Gospel narratives, that we learn what it means to be Church: to live with each other, in the world yet not of the world, in these days after the Lord's resurrection. Each New Testament letter was written by a particular leader for a particular community at a particular time. We are reminded of this at the beginning of the proclamation – "A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians," or the Corinthians, or the Thessalonians. These letters offered support, encouragement, correction, and guidance to a young church finding its way in a society that did not support them. We also need the direction of the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, as we make our way through a society that does not always support us in living our faith! These texts were shaped by their particular historical and cultural context, but at the same time, through the liturgy, these letters are written to us, here, today. They speak to the realities of Christian living no matter where – or when – we live. They are truly "the word of the Lord" for us

During the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, the direction of the second reading becomes more intentional. During these seasons, the readings are selected to highlight the theme of the season. A second reading during Advent might talk about the need to watch and prepare, while a second reading during Easter might talk about the glory of the Resurrection. Also, the practice of having a different lector for each reading is strongly encouraged. This practice not only allows more people to share in the ministry of proclamation, adding variety to the proclamation, but also is demanded by nature of good proclamation.

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.