

The Gospel (Part 2)

Greeting, Proclamation, Secret Prayer

The Gospel Reading

The Deacon, or the Priest, then proceeds to the ambo, accompanied, if appropriate, by ministers with incense and candles. *There he says: The Lord be with you. The people reply: And with your spirit.*

The Deacon, or the Priest: *A reading from the holy Gospel according to N. and, at the same time, he makes the Sign of the Cross on the book and on his forehead, lips, and breast.* The people acclaim: *Glory to you, O Lord.*

Then the Deacon, or the Priest, incenses the book, if incense is used, and proclaims the Gospel. At the end of the Gospel, the Deacon, or the Priest, acclaim: *The Gospel of the Lord.* All reply: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

Then he kisses the book, saying quietly: Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away. (Roman Missal, *The Order of Mass*, nos. 15-16)

Scripture

Ancient Israelite Greeting: “The Lord be With You”

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem; and he said to the reapers, “*The Lord be with you!*” (Latin *Dominus vobiscum*) And they answered, “The Lord bless you.” (Ruth 2:4)

Paul’s Greeting to Timothy: “With Your Spirit”

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus... Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. *The Lord be with your spirit.* (2 Timothy 4:19-22)

Jesus’ Command to Preach “the Gospel”

And he said to them [the Eleven], “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.* He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:14-16)

Tradition

The Chanting of the Gospel by Deacons (6th Century)

Synod of Rome: *It has long been customary in the Roman church to ordain cantors as deacons, and, furthermore, to use them for singing rather than for preaching and caring for the poor.* As a result at divine services a good voice is more appreciated than a good life. Consequently no deacon may henceforth sing in the church except for the gospel at Mass. The remaining lessons and psalms shall be sung by subdeacons or, if necessary, by those in minor orders.¹

¹ *Synod of Rome* (July 5, 595 AD), Canon 1. This Synod was held during the pontificate of Pope Gregory the Great. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:58.

The Deacon's Blessing, the Secret Prayer, and the Sign of the Cross (9th Century)

Amalar of Metz: Now we should rise for the words of the Gospel... Then the bishop places incense over the coals in the censer, to bring forth a sweet odor... *After this the deacon seeks a blessing from the priest. The priest says to him: "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips."* Let the deacon listen carefully, that his heart may go forth with the words of the Lord and that the priest's prayer may not be fruitless. Let him keep in mind the Lord, whom he receives through the priest's blessing. *And that he may not breathe out the words he has received or introduce harmful words, he is fortified with the sign of the cross, made over his head by the priest.* Then he goes up to the altar to take up the Gospel book for the reading... Upon the deacon's greeting, all the people should turn toward him. *Afterward the priest and all the people turn to the east, until the deacon begins to speak of the Lord, and they make a cross on their foreheads.* This should not be considered purposeless: Each of the faithful strives to fix upon his own soul the same sign that the priest fixed upon the heart of the deacon through his prayer... *He who is not very quick should at least say—I borrow these words from the Gospel—"Glory to you, Lord"* [Luke 14:10, Latin Vulgate]. *After this prayer, let all fortify themselves with the sign of the holy cross to confirm all that they have planted in their mind by thinking and speaking well.*²

Secret Prayer of the Priest Before Reading the Gospel (11th Century)

Missa Illyrica: Through the words of this holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ may our Lord remit all of our sins.³

The Signing of Forehead, Mouth, and Breast (13th Century)

William Durand: After the reading of the Gospel has been announced to them, ...those hearers of the Gospel, rejoicing in the praise of their Savior, cry out together, saying: "Glory to you, O Lord..." *And when they are saying these words, they likewise fortify themselves against the Devil with the sign of the cross on their forehead, their mouth, and their breast, so that he will not prevent them from hearing the Gospel. On the forehead, because that this the locus of modesty and shame...* They do this on the mouth; they signify that they boldly preach the cross of the Lord.... The sign on the breast is done to signify that the words of the Gospel ought to strike us in our heart and mind. (William Durand, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, IV.24.28)⁴

Mystery

Christ Himself is Speaking to Us in the Gospel Reading (5th Century)

St. Augustine: The reading from the holy gospel, which I recently spoke to your graces about, is followed by the passage that was read today... *So then, let us listen to the gospel*

² Amalar, *On the Liturgy*, 3.18. In Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, 2:105, 107. Cf. *Missa Illyrica* 1, 4, IV.

³ *Missa Illyrica* 1, 4, IV (1030 A.D.). Cf. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:450 n. 62.

⁴ In Durand, *Rationale IV*, 208-209.

*as if the Lord himself were present here; and let us not say, “Oh how fortunate were those who could actually see him!” because many of those who saw him also killed him, but many of us who have not seen him have also come to believe. The precious words, after all, that fell from the lips of the Lord were written down on our behalf, and preserved for us, and have been read aloud for our sake, and will also be read aloud for our descendants, and right on till the end of the world.” (Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 30.1)⁵*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Whose job is it to read the Gospel in the tradition of the Roman Liturgy?

2. Why do the people make the sign of the cross over their forehead, mouth, and heart? How old is this custom? What is its purpose?

3. What is the “Secret” prayer of the priest after the Gospel? What do his words reveal about the power of the Gospel reading?

For Further Reading

Jungmann, Joseph, S.J. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. 2 Volumes. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. Reprint. Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012.

Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (21 January, 1981).

⁵ In Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40* (Works of Saint Augustine I/12; trans. Edmund Hill, O.P.; Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2009), 496.