

Weekly Message from Fr William for Fourth Sunday of Advent 2022

Dear People of St Mary's, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent I will be re-commissioning our Ministers of the Word, and newly commissioning two new MoWs. This follows the annual Advent refresh evening for MoWs that we held last Monday.

Ministers of the Word are not just 'readers'. Their role is not just 'reading'. Their role is to minister the Word of God to his people. There is a parallel here with Eucharistic Ministers who minister Holy Communion to his people.

So, what does it mean to 'minister the Word of God'? The Second Vatican Council reminds us that when the Word of God is proclaimed in the Mass, ie within the context of the Sacred Liturgy, it becomes God himself speaking to his people. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium – the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*). The Minister of the Word is specially commissioned and specially blessed to be the voice of God in the Sacred Liturgy of the Mass.

This is where the symbolism of the liturgy helps us to grasp the reality of what is taking place in the Mass. Just as the ALTAR is the symbolic place where the sacrifice of the mass takes place, so the AMBO is the symbolic place from which God speaks to his people. It's why we reserve these two key focal points of the liturgy for their divine functions, to preserve the symbolism, for the sake of everybody.

Think about physical direction in the Liturgy of the Word. This is also symbolic. God speaks to his people from the Ambo. We respond from the congregation with the 'responsorial psalm'. The psalm is deliberately chosen to 'echo back', usually in song, the words we have just received from God. Notice each Sunday how the words of the psalm are indeed an echo of the words of the first reading. The ongoing exchange between God and his people continues: God speaks again from the Ambo in the second reading; we praise God with 'Alleluia' (= 'praise to you O God') in anticipation of the Gospel; God speaks to us in the Gospel; and his people stand to profess their faith in Him, and in all his words, in our profession of faith. Backwards and forwards between God and his people.

This is how Pope Francis puts it in his teaching on the Liturgy of the Word: 'The liturgical proclamation of the Word of God is not so much a time for meditation or catechesis, but a dialogue between God and his people.' (*Evangelii Gaudium 137*)

The Proclamation of the Word is also itself a symbolic action – something not just to be heard, but to be seen. This looking and hearing is another example of the 'full, conscious participation in the celebration of the liturgy' called for by the Second Vatican Council. (*for Pope Francis and the role of symbolism in the liturgy: see Weekly Message 21 august 2022*).

Our Ministers of the Word serve us. They minister the Word to us, just as our Eucharistic Ministers minister Holy Communion to us. There will be an opportunity to pray together for them in their commissioning this Sunday.



Fourth Sunday of Advent, 18 december 2022