

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 8: Listen Up: This is Important!

What would happen if Jesus came to church next Sunday? I mean, if he showed up in his first-century garb—robe, sandals, beard—and walked up to the ambo and began to speak. What would you do? How would you react?

I suspect it's a safe bet that all of us would have our eyes fixed on him and our ears alert to every word he would speak. Of course, somebody would probably be on a cell phone alerting the media to this miraculous event!

Such an event should not strike us as so unusual, however. Though he does not appear in first-century dress, Jesus comes here every Sunday to speak to us. That's what the Catholic tradition teaches—that when the word of God is proclaimed in our midst, Christ speaks to us today. He comes in disguise, we might say, speaking through the lectors and deacons and priests who proclaim the readings. The Second Vatican Council put it this way in 1963: “[Christ] is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church” (CSL, # 7).

This is the third way that Christ reveals his presence during the Eucharist. Every time we gather in his name, Christ has something to say to us. Reverence for Christ present in his word calls us to attentive listening. Formed in the time when the Mass was in Latin and we had to read along, many Catholics still have a habit of reading the texts as they are proclaimed. The proper response is to put down the books and listen with open ears and open hearts to what the Lord is saying to us.

Listening does not mean being passive, however. Truly listening is a very active response when someone speaks to us. We show respect for anyone who talks with us by looking at the person and concentrating on what he or she is saying. That takes effort on our part, not allowing other thoughts or external distractions to claim our attention.

It may be helpful to realize, however, that our primary task is not to get every word that is spoken, but to listen carefully for whatever word the Lord wants each of us to hear that day. That will vary from person to person, but Christ offers each of us the message that we really need to hear. It's a good idea to read the readings at home before you come to Mass; that's why most parishes print the Bible references in the bulletin each week so that you can look them up. Then when the word is proclaimed, you can allow Christ to speak directly to you through the readings and the homily. If you are touched deeply by one word or phrase or idea every Sunday, and if you nurture that word in your heart through the week, then God's word will be effective in your life.

In the silence after the readings and after the homily, you might ask yourself two simple questions: What did you hear Christ say? And how will you live that word this week? The answers to those questions can change your life!