



VIII

Table of the Word

We actively and joyfully participate in the banquet of the risen Christ on the Lord's Day, on feast days, and whenever possible, even on weekdays. We nourish our faith at the table of the word of God, especially through the daily liturgical readings.

Rule of Life for Associates (ROLA), 7b

**Associates of the
Blessed Sacrament
Initial Formation Program**

Table of the Word

1. Opening Prayer

All: “Your word, Lord, is founded on truth,
your decrees are eternal.” (Ps. 119: 160)
During his entire life,
Father Eymard drew his strength and inspiration
from this fountain of life.
He lived your word with deep faith
and became for us a convincing witness of your love.
Place in our hearts an ardent desire
to know more clearly what you have revealed
and to live from it as our daily food.
Praise be to you, O Lord.

[Before reading the word of the Lord, a candle is lit before the Bible sitting on a stand.]

Scripture Reading: *Luke 6:46-49*

[Pause for a moment and ask if anyone has a reflection they would like to share about the reading].

Prayer (*Alternate stanzas*)

Word of God, made flesh to dwell among us,
there is a famine on earth, “not a famine of bread,”
nor a thirst for water, but a hunger to hear the words of God.

No one can live on bread alone, our real hunger is for,
“every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”
For without the truth of God’s word people continue to perish.
They are devoured by ignorance and injustice.

You feed us daily at the table of your word.
And, You send us forth,

*“to proclaim the good news to the poor...
and liberty to captives...
to announce a year of favor from the Lord.”*

Spirit of God, enflame our hearts to be eucharistic evangelizers. That nourished on your word we may be the food of your love to help satisfy the hungers of those around us. For many of them we may be the only way they have to encounter your living Word. Amen.

Leader:

Consider making a place at your table for the word of God. The presence of a well-read Bible can turn a table into an altar. You may enjoy the random opening of the Bible to read a verse or two when you are about to eat. Try to think of ways to have a short bit of scripture as the daily bread you pray for when you pray the Lord’s Prayer.

2. Introduction to the Theme

The word of God played a fundamental role for Father Eymard for his life of prayer, in his preaching and in how he ministered in his pastoral commitments. One will find a rich variety of biblical quotations throughout his writings. He was a man who knew the Bible.

“The word of God calls us and gathers us together; it accompanies us as a lamp for our steps.” (*Rule of Life*, 6) Father Paul Bernier, SSS, reminds us that the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist form but one act of worship. Father Frank O’Dea suggests that each of these parts of the Mass “has its own ‘table.’” The “table” for the Liturgy of the Word is the lectern where the readings are proclaimed and then commented on during the homily.

“It took Vatican II to remind us that there were only two parts of the Mass, and that both of them were essential . . .” (Bernier, *Emmanuel*, March/April 2011). Both of them share equal importance as constitutive elements of what it means to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Father Bernier tells us “the light of God’s word must precede the mystery of faith and illumine the way to it. This is as true today as it was from the beginning, as we see in the story

of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They were unable to recognize the Christ in the breaking of the bread, the Mass, until their hearts were set aflame within them by reason of the Liturgy of the Word that they had celebrated with Jesus on the road.” (112)

3. Eymard . . . *In His Own Words*

“It’s necessary for me to give preference to God’s word over the written word. The written word is necessarily silent, a dead letter. It needs the faith and prayer of those who read it to animate it, so to speak, with a breath of life and lend it a kind of voice to make it heard. But then, the word becomes living, afire from the heart and mouth of the priest, *sermo enim Dei vivus et efficax* (the Word of God living and effective). It speaks through the senses at once, to the mind of man, and goes to the very depth of his soul.”

1838 *The Word of God* (OC IX, 94)

“[Jesus] was the Word of the Father, [.....] He spoke it with authority, for it was meant to sanctify the world, to create it anew in the light of truth, to rekindle it in the fire of love, and to judge it one day. ‘*Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the road?*’” Luke 24:32.

“The words of Jesus Christ were the rays of the sun of truth. *I am the light of the world.*’ John 6:63. They were light in the midst of darkness. That is what I must be for my brothers and neighbors, *Verbum Christi*, the word of Christ.”

Retreat of Rome

February 24, 1865

4. Bible Texts

“When your words came, I devoured them; your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.”

Jeremiah 15:16, NAB

“Now your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

Psalms 119:105, NAB

5. Conversation – tell us your story

- It is necessary for us to prepare ourselves to receive the word of God. Please share ways in which you prepare yourself for the Sunday liturgy and in particular for hearing the Word of God.
- Share with us how the Scriptures have a place in your daily life and/or ways you have found to be helpful in deepening the message of the scriptures in your everyday life.

6. Teaching – drawing on the following reading

- Excerpt from *Emmanuel* article by Father Paul Bernier, SSS

Table of the Word – Key Points

- The Scriptures both inform us about God’s presence and action in time and transform us as we are reshaped by God’s word into a faith community whose lives are conformed to live as members of the body of Christ.
- The message of the Scripture brings comfort and consolation when needed just as it challenges and confronts us out of our complacency toward continual conversion.
- Both elements of our worship, word and sacrament, are integral: the word proclaimed and preached, the Eucharist offered as a living sacrifice of praise are essential to the transformation of our lives and our world.
- Unfortunately few people take the time to pray the scriptures and prepare for the reception of God’s word. Personal and communal *lectio divina* helps us to receive the Word into our hearts and put it into action, *actio divina* in our daily lives.
- The Eucharist remains incomplete if we fail to live as disciples of the word and show it forth through our lives. The Gospel is a living word made flesh in our lives.



Reading

Liturgy of the Word by Paul Bernier, SSS

The Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist form but one act of worship. Why is it only recently that we have given them equal importance as constitutive elements of what it means to celebrate the Lord's Supper? Here is a portion of Father Paul's article from Emmanuel Magazine.

It took Vatican II to remind us that there were only two parts of the Mass, and that both of them were essential: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The light of God's word must precede the mystery of faith and illumine the way to it. This is as true today as it was from the beginning, as we see in the story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They were unable to recognize the Christ in the breaking of the bread, the Mass, until their hearts were set aflame within them by reason of the Liturgy of the Word that they had celebrated with Jesus on the road.

It has always been the conviction of the church that the Scriptures are more than a human book. Paul was able to say of his proclamation, "for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received it not as a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe (1 Th 2:13). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, "For this reason, the church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's word and Christ's body" (103). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures are a source of nourishment and strength. As we read in Hebrews, "Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" (4:12).

We might summarize the general purpose of the Liturgy of the Word under three headings. It is meant to be informative, transformative, and to be unitive.

1. The informative function of the Liturgy of the Word. Being steeped in the knowledge of the truths contained in the Scriptures tells who we are

as God's people. Our baptism has incorporated us into a people, indeed a people born from the side of Christ as he hung on the cross. As such our relationship with God is mediated through the living experience of that people and their understanding of Christ and of God. The Bible is a record of the living faith of those who have gone before us. The new birth we have experienced in baptism has made us ecclesial beings.

The Eucharist we celebrate is, first of all, an assembly of people, a community, a whole network of relations. The deeper awareness of this reality enables us to see and define ourselves not in terms of biology, nationality, race, or profession, but in terms of the relationship that we have with each other and with Christ. It is in the telling and retelling of our stories, as contained in the Scriptures, that we can come to see ourselves as part of salvation history, as members of a covenant people, in relationship with one another. These stories also engender a particular way of thinking, as we come to assimilate the values and ideals of Christ.

Awareness of both the Old and New Testaments also enables us to see people growing in their understanding of God, and at the same time to see the progressive unfolding of God's plan for the human race. We need only compare our understanding of God with that of the ancient Egyptians or Greeks, or any pagan culture, to see the difference that biblical revelation makes. Unlike gods created in our own image and likeness, with all the human faults and foibles of which we are only too aware, ours is a revelation of a God who wants us to know that it is we who were created in God's image and likeness, that he is a God who cares, who loves us evenly, and who was willing to enter our world to save us from ourselves. How much there is to learn from the word of the Lord!

2. The transformative aspect of the Liturgy of the Word. The purpose of the Liturgy of the Word is not simply to give us a deeper knowledge of who we are, and who God is in our lives. It is not mainly to make us feel good that we are loved by God and that he desires only to grace us with his love. It is to make us be good, to make us more Christ-like in our thoughts and actions. It is to rob us of our complacency, of our being too comfortable in our relationship with God. It is too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because we pray, celebrate the Eucharist, and observe the commandments, we are pleasing to God, that we have, in a sense, earned his favor, and that we have nothing more to do to be pleasing to God.

Religious practice can easily deaden one to the ethical implications of being Christian. Long before Christ, even, the prophets condemned religious practice that was devoid of concern for the poor, or that masked lives of injustice and exploitation (cf. Is 1:11-20; 29:13-14; 58:1-8; Jer 6:20; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Jl 2:13; Mic 6:5-8). This concern for having religious practice have a concrete effect in our lives is found as well in the New Testament. Religion otherwise becomes merely a set of external practices.

The purpose of our religious practice is to challenge us to growth, not to make religion as comfortable as an old shoe. The aim is not to have a comfortable gospel, but a true one. Unless the gospel message enables us to see how God is working in us as well as in the world around us, and how God expects his children to continue the mission of his Son, we are blinding ourselves to the continual call to conversion that is at the heart of the Gospel.

3. The unitive aspect of the Liturgy of the Word. The call of the Gospel is not aimed at human perfection, or achieving nirvana here below. It is one of total transformation, so that we can truly become the body of Christ in this world. The New Testament image we have of Christ is of one who lived, loved, and died for others. To join in his Eucharist is to allow ourselves a depth of discipleship whereby we join Christ in his life of sacrificial love.

Saint Paul reminded us that as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup of Christ, we proclaim his death until he comes again (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34). This cannot be done unless our lives are so one with his that we become extensions of his love to the world. This implies, of course, that our celebrations help us develop a deep love and intimacy with the Lord, intimacy that is symbolized explicitly in the rite of communion. Only this profound love made possible by the Holy Spirit, will prevent us from merely speaking to others about the Gospel or about God, and allow us to reflect to others our own deep experience of Christ himself.

Finally, the importance of the Liturgy of the Word and its relationship to the Liturgy of the Eucharist is based on a simple theological principle. It is that if we separate our core ritual, the Eucharist, from the scriptural matrix that gives it meaning, we risk reducing ritual to magical words and actions. The Eucharist is torn away from the matrix that gave it rise, and becomes

an independent ritual—hocus pocus. The priest becomes one whose main power and responsibility is to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist, however, does not take place in a vacuum. The Liturgy of the Word is the biblical matrix in which the transformation of the gifts into the body and blood of Christ allows us to focus on more than the naked fact of the real presence of Christ in the elements, but to ask what is the purpose and finality of that presence. What does it mean for the personal transformation the sacrament is meant to effect, as well as the transformation of the world in which we live?

Divorcing the Liturgy of the Eucharist from the Liturgy of the Word reduces the Mass to a private devotion, whereby it is seen mainly as a way of personal sanctification, a means of grace, rather than a conscious participation in the sacrifice of Christ. The relation between word and sacrament is a symbiotic one. The sacrament is not only rooted in the word of God, the word of God presupposes the sacrament as its fulfillment; without this it can be reduced to mere doctrine.

If we wonder at times why so many eucharistic celebrations fail to have a real effect in people's lives, why there seems to be such a split-level Christianity in many places, perhaps it is because Catholics are not overly familiar with the Bible. Neither do they consider it important enough to study, reflect on, or make the basis of their prayer. Lacking this appreciation, the celebration of the Eucharist becomes a ritual that is divorced from its power to transform. The Liturgy of the Word is not considered important enough to prepare for or reflect on and discuss afterwards. Perhaps, we all could make an effort to renew our appreciation of this element in our worship—one that has not been given the importance it deserves.

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7. Closing Prayer

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came to be through God's Word, and without him nothing came to be. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: The word of the Lord came to me: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you." "I know not how to speak; I am too young." The Lord answered me: "Say not, 'I am too young.' To whomever I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak."

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. A hearer goes off and forgets, but a doer acts on the word. Such a one shall be blessed.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Blessed are you, O Lord, I will never forget your word. Be kind to your servant that I may live, that I may keep your word. Open my eyes to see clearly the wonders of your teachings.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Let the prophet who has a dream recount his dream. Let the one who has my word speak my word truthfully! My word is like fire, says the Lord, like a hammer shattering rocks.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: We give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness, as you stretch forth your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. The community of believers was of one heart and mind.

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith that we preach. Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for “Their voice has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

Leader: Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.”

All: ***Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.***

8. Additional Reading Material

- Foley, Edward, OFM Cap. “Which Jesus Table? Reflections of Eucharistic Starting Points.” *Emmanuel*, March/April 2009.
- Bernier, Paul, SSS. “Saint Paul on the Eucharist (I), (II) and (III).” *Emmanuel*, January/February, May/June, July/August 2009.
- Bernier, Paul, SSS. “Reading Scripture Properly.” *Emmanuel*, March/April 2007.
- Benedict XVI. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, *Verbum Dei* (30 September 2010) Online: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html#The_Word_Of_God_And_The_Church
- O’Dea, Frank, SSS. *Eucharist: The Basic Spirituality*. An E-Book, January 28, 2011. Available free online at: theeucharist.wordpress.com



*Prayer in Honor of Saint Peter
Julian Eymard*

Gracious God of our ancestors, you led Peter Julian Eymard, like Jacob in times past, on a journey of faith. Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit, Peter Julian discovered the gift of love in the Eucharist which your son Jesus offered for the hungers of humanity. Grant that we may celebrate this mystery worthily, adore it profoundly, and proclaim it prophetically for your greater glory. Amen.

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