

## The Book of the Gospels

In the celebration of the Mass, different objects, signs and symbols are used and each of them has a particular meaning and interpretation but all aimed at letting the faithful to see the glory of God who is the Trinity and experience His mystery and the mystery celebrated and manifest what the Church truly is: nature and mission. Among those objects used during the Mass are the liturgical books: the Missal (Sacramentary), the Lectionary (Book of the Reading), the Book of the Gospels, Psalter and Hymnals. In this article I want to talk about the Book of the Gospels.

The Book of the Gospels is distinctive from the books of other readings. The Book of the Gospels contains all the gospel texts for all the Sundays of all the three liturgical circles, gospels for all solemnities and some feasts which can be celebrated with the same dignity as solemnities.

You have noticed a new practice in our celebration of the Mass with the Book of the Gospels carried by the lector (reader) during the entrance procession and placed at the center of the altar, a practice that is different from what you were used to when a lector/reader carried the book of readings/Lectionary and directly placed it at the ambo/lectern. You have also seen the priest carry the Book of the Gospel from the altar to the ambo during the singing of alleluia or other sequence and after the Gospel proclamation it is taken to a special place reserved for it. This is a very symbolic and significant ritual together with other rituals around it.

This practice is in response to and application of what the Church teaches and recommends in the Roman Missal that during entrance procession “*a lector, may carry the Book of the Gospels (though not the Lectionary), which should be slightly elevated*” (cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 120; Ceremonial of Bishops n. 128), in the same text it is stated that “*It is a praiseworthy practice that the Book of the Gospel be place upon the altar*” (n.122), The Ceremonial of Bishops states that “*The Book of the Gospels is place upon the altar*” (n.129). Therefore, the deacon or priest or lector/reader without bowing, goes directly to the altar and place the Book of the Gospel on it, at the center. After the first and second readings, during the singing of alleluia or other sequence a priest or a deacon carries the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* nn. 133, 175).

The Book of the Gospel during Mass enjoys some special rituals that surround it which express and emphasizes its venerable place in the entire liturgy of the Word as underscored by another procession from the altar to the ambo, the change in the posture by the assembly, the tracing of a cross at the beginning of the gospel text of the day and the triple signing of ministers and people before the gospel proclamation, the optional use of incense, and the very kissing of the Book of the Gospels.

Many may be asking themselves that why the Book of the Gospels in entrance procession and why must it rest on the altar and privileged place in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Second

Vatican Council gives a clear answer in its document on Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7 and states: “*To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the Cross, but especially under the Eucharistic species’ (bread and wine). By his power he is present in the sacraments. . . **He is present in the Word**, since it is he himself who speaks when Holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings. . .*”.

Therefore, the veneration of the Book of the Gospels attests to a Christological symbolism for it signifies and symbolizes Christ the true Word of God, who comes to the New People of God, present amidst them and with his Mystical Body, the Church to nourish her with his life and word. Because of its venerable place and honor, the Book of the Gospels is the only liturgical article allowed on the altar before the preparation of the gifts. Resting on the altar signifies the connection of the two hinges and major parts of the Mass, that is the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It shows that these two parts complement one another and form but one liturgical event. Symbolically unites the two tables of the Word and the table of the Eucharist.

I have wished to write about this because it is a new element in our worship at Annunciation and it is in line with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council expressed in the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The Council says that "*the Church, . . . , earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body. . .*" .

I hope and pray that becomes renewing to us all.

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