



Episode 23: A Word on the Word

SUMMARY

If you want to say the word, “word” in Latin, there are two choices. You can say “*scriptum*” or you can say “*verbum*.” There is a very important distinction between the two words and the Church is very specific about the way she uses them in the text of the Mass.

“*Scriptum*” means the written word, the text on the page. “*Verbum*,” on the other hand, refers to the spoken word. The word said out loud has wings and can fly. While the word on the page is static.

This is why when we say “The word of the Lord,” we are referring to the spoken word. The Latin is “*Verbum Domini*.” We believe that the word of God is alive and active. The proclamation of the Word of God is an act of communication between God and the Faithful through the instrument of the reader who has a duty to proclaim the word clearly and with meaning. The hearers must be open to receiving it and letting it sink into their hearts. Every sacramental celebration includes the proclamation of the Scripture, as Psalm 119 says, “Your word, O Lord, is a lamp for my feet!”

The Roman Missal

After each reading, whoever reads it pronounces the acclamation, and by means of the reply the assembled people give honor to the Word of God that they have received in faith and with gratitude.

General Instruction, n.º 59

After the Collect, all sit. The Priest may, very briefly, introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word. Then the reader goes to the ambo and, from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass, proclaims the First Reading, to which all listen. At the end, the reader pronounces the acclamation The word of the Lord, and all reply, Thanks be to God.

Then a few moments of silence may be observed, if appropriate, so that all may meditate on what they have heard.

General Instruction, n.º 128

Alberto Manguel

“The classic phrase *scripta manet, verba volat*—which has come to mean, in our time, ‘what is written remains, what is spoken vanishes into air’—used to express the exact opposite; it was coined in praise of the word said out loud,

which has wings and can fly, as compared to the silent word of the page, which is motionless, dead. Faced with a written text, the reader had a duty to lend voice to the silent letters, the *scripta*, and to allow them to become, in the delicate biblical distinction, *verba*, spoken words—spirit.”

IN THE TRADITION

“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.”

Hebrews 4:12

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we preach), for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Romans 10:8-9

“Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”

Romans 10:17

“John is the voice, but the Lord is the Word who was in the beginning. John is the voice that lasts for a time; from the beginning Christ is the Word who lives for ever. Take away the word, the meaning, and what is the voice? Where there is no understanding, there is only a meaningless sound. The voice without the word strikes the ear but does not build up the heart.”

Saint Augustine
Sermon 239

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “...Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. [...] He is present in His word [...] He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings...”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

God our Father,
who, by sending into the world
the Word of truth
and the Spirit of sanctification,
made known to the human race
your wondrous mystery,
grant us, we pray,
that in professing the true faith
we may acknowledge
the Trinity of eternal glory
and adore your Unity, powerful in majesty.

Collect, Votive Mass for the Blessed Trinity

May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips,
that you may proclaim his Gospel
worthily and well,
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit.

Blessing of Deacon, Order of Mass

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are you aware of the extent to which the texts of the Mass are drawn from the Bible?
2. What liturgical texts resonate most with you?

FOR FURTHER READING

Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, (New York: Viking Press, 1996).