



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last week, we began looking at the Liturgy of the Word, and I spent some time going over how the cycle of readings is set up. I want to emphasize again that the Sacred Scripture is the living word of God in our midst. When it is proclaimed at Mass, we encounter the risen Lord Jesus. It is so important to prepare ourselves for this encounter, which is why I keep encouraging people to read the readings throughout the week, and pray and become recollected before Mass. This opens us to hear Him speaking to us!

Sometimes people ask why we use the Old Testament, since we are a New Testament people. We still use the Old Testament readings because, they, too, are the word of God. While they may be harder to understand because of distance in culture, they still bear the word of God to us. The Fathers of the Church told us that there is an intrinsic harmony between Old and New Testaments – after all, it's the same God speaking. The New is concealed in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New. Without the context of the Old Testament, the New Testament makes no sense, and the New Testament brings fulfillment to the promises of the Old Testament.

After the readings are done, we move into the homily. The homily is not a sermon. A sermon can be about anything. The homily is a liturgical act, which means it is tied directly into the Mass. It may be on the readings, the season or feast of the day, or about the Mass in general (for instance, connected to the Eucharist), but it always must be part of the Mass, not somewhere out of left-field. The homily is not merely informational, but formational and transformational – helping us on our pilgrim way to the Heart of Christ.

On Sundays and solemnities, after the homily comes the Creed. This is usually the Nicene Creed, but could be the Apostle's Creed. I want to spend some time looking at the Nicene Creed over the next several weeks.

In the first centuries of the Church, the Church held fast to the revelation that there is only one God, and that Jesus is Lord. This led to two questions: 1) How can God be one yet three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); and 2) How can Jesus be two, yet one (God and man)? Over the centuries, the Church sought clarity on these points. There was much discussion, arguing, fighting, and some were exiled and others put to death because they held to the orthodox faith. In time, the Church clarified these points at different Councils, primarily at Nicaea (325), Constantinople I (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451).

Over time, we came up with language for our Trinitarian theology and dogmas, stating that there is one God – singular in nature – but three distinct persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are not comingled (different aspects of the same person), yet not separate gods – one, yet three; three, yet one. We also were able to come up with language for speaking of Christ – that He had two natures: He was fully human and fully divine. Yet, He existed as one divine Person, and that divine Person in His divine nature was joined to His human nature in a hypostatic union. (It's okay if the words are a bit much... we're talking about mysteries that are and will always be beyond our human intellect to comprehend!)

A theologian named Arius had claimed that Jesus was not fully divine – that He was a quasi-divine being, the first and highest creation of the Father. He also claimed that Jesus was not fully human. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople I worked to reverse this heretical thinking. Arius said that there was a time when he (Jesus) was not. The Council of Nicaea authoritatively stated, "There was never a time when He was not." People bled and died defending this teaching.

This is important background for the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, especially when we get to the part of "born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father." More on the Creed next week.