

THE MASS

Lesson Three: God Speaks Our Story

Introduction:

“Once you label me, you negate me...” - Soren Kierkegaard

How many times in our lives have we had the experience of believing that, on the basis of a fact or two, we know someone well enough to judge whether we would be interested in knowing them further? We see this all the time in politics, particularly in the US, which has become so mindlessly tribal in the service of ideologies, that a single comment, or supposed fact, in context or out, is enough to have someone quickly labeled and dismissed, as a great many assumptions are made about their character, intelligence, or even morality. Of course this is not just limited to politics. We might reject a book or film based on a single comment or label. We might actually choose to not live in a certain neighborhood because we once heard an opinion about the school system or crime rate from another person.

This “Kierkegaard principle” can even apply to the lives of the saints. Titles like “Little Flower” or “Thunderer” or “Mystic” can convince us to avoid reading more about the life of St. Therese of Lisieux or St. Jerome or St. John of The Cross. For years I avoided reading the writings of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, because I thought their politics or spirituality might not be in tune with my own.

Does this even make sense? In my own experience, when I took the initiative to step out of my comfort zone and actually got to know some of these people, I usually found they had something to say that was worth hearing, or were, in fact kind of smart, humane, ... even nice!

Love Follows Knowledge:

So what does this have to do with The Mass? A lot, as we have already seen. In my own case, I thought I understood all about the liturgy, but the past 4 weeks have shown me how little I have really delved into this mystery. And we’ve only covered the first five minutes! How many folks are either totally bored by the subject/ experience, and have simply abandoned it, or resigned themselves to a “Well, there’s another hour of my life I’ll never get back” attitude? It’s likely that the reason a

majority of Catholics – particularly young adults – stay away, is because they honestly don't know WHY they should be there. How many Catholics drop their kids off for an hour of "religion", and then quickly head home, or out to breakfast, or whatever? Like most of us who grew up in the 20th century Church, we were *sacramentalized*, but never truly *evangelized*. Many have never actually experienced a cognitive moment of encounter with Christ, and for that matter, don't really see a practical reason to experience it now.

This has been a parish reality in the US for at least the past two generations, so we probably can't place the blame only on the young. There is a tremendous obligation on those of us who know Christ to share our experiences with others...even if it's only a comment or a word. I can't begin to tell you how many of my high school and college chums who abandoned the faith years ago, and now assume that a reasonable stinker like me, has done the same, are shocked to hear that I still go to Mass, and am active in my parish. Beyond that, I know for a fact that a significant number of them have made the same choice, or at least given it a try, simply based on a consideration that "maybe Mark isn't so crazy"; and that's when the Holy Spirit can start to work in them.

One Who Knows More, Loves More:

So how do we Christians know God? Through His Word. The spoken Word of God has great power...it's how the world came to be (Gen 1:1-3). Likewise, Jesus Himself is called "The Word" in Jn 1:1. We are admonished by St. Jerome to know scripture, because it is the way God has chosen to reveal Himself to us: "*Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ*". Indeed, the written Word, the spoken words of interpretation, and the Living Word of Christ and His Church, make up the so-called "three pillars of The Catholic Church"... Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium. And so, the Mass readings are the surest way to encounter the Word of God – and God Himself - during the Mass.

"Let Us Enter Into The House of Knowledge of Ourselves":

In this next video, Bishop Barron reviews what might be called The "Five Words" – 1st Reading (OT), Psalm (The prayers of Christ), 2nd Reading (NT – usually from one of St. Paul's Epistles), Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia – "Praise The Lord), and The Gospel (Jesus speaks). Together they make up what The Church calls "*The Liturgy of The Word*".