Dear Parish Family,

This week will be reflecting on the Liturgy of the Word. This section begins with the First Reading and ends with the Prayer of the Faithful.

The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament, except during Easter Season when we hear the story of the beginnings of Catholic Church in the Acts of the Apostles.

Why do we read from the Old Testament? Isn't it just the story of the people of Israel? Yes – exactly! And that is the whole point. We read passages from the Old Testament so we can understand the context in which Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior grew up and his lived experience of God, the Father.

St. Augustine observed the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.

The First Reading is selected by the Church to correspond to the Gospel reading that weekend. This is done so we can see the unity of the Old and New Testament. Our story of faith is intertwined with the patriarchs, prophets, and Kings of the Jewish people. For example, the Passover is linked with the Last Supper, i.e., the Eucharist. The Exodus story is linked with baptism.

After the First Reading we sing a Responsorial Psalm. This psalm is meant to be the prayer of the community. We are responding to the voice of God we just heard in the First Reading. Alexis and Elijah, as well as those who accompany them in singing, have beautiful voices. During the Responsorial Psalm our voices should join with theirs in this beautiful moment of prayer.

The Second Reading comes from the New Testament. Mostly we hear from Paul's letters, but we also hear from other epistles (letters) written by Peter, James or John. There are also times during the liturgical year that we hear from the Book of Revelation.

While this reading is generally independent of the First Reading and the Gospel reading it does give us reflection on the mystery of Jesus Christ, His saving work and (hopefully) the meaning it has for our lives today.

After the First and Second Reading we, the assembly, respond to hearing the Word of God proclaimed by saying "Thanks be to God." In this bold statement we are expressing our gratitude to God for His goodness and His actions in history and in our lives today.

After the Second Reading we stand for the Gospel Acclamation, which must always be sung. Then the Gospel is proclaimed. Why do we sit for the other readings from Scripture but stand for the reading of the Gospel? First, we stand because standing is a more reverent posture. So the Gospels are more important than the rest of the Sacred Scriptures? Yes and no. The Church teaches that the Gospels have a special place *"because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior."* (Vatican II, Dei Verbum).

Secondly, by standing we are welcoming Jesus who is about to be proclaimed in the Gospel reading.

Think of it this way, when someone first walks into the room it is courteous to stand and great them. We are doing the same thing when we stand for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Before we hear the Gospel, we make the sign of the cross on our forehead, lips, and breast. In this ritual we consecrate thoughts, words, and actions to the Lord. We are asking that His Word in the Gospel always be on our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

Next, we have a homily. Hopefully, you have heard enough of them to know what they are about.

Next week we will conclude our discussion of the Liturgy of the Word with a reflection on the Creed and the
Prayers of the Faithful.

AMDG,

Fr. Tom