

Today's readings reminded me of how, in seminary, we had an opportunity to attend some Jewish synagogue services. Actually, we were required to attend some Jewish synagogue services, one of our Scripture professors insisted upon it! But I'm glad I went!

The first main part of the Catholic Mass, the part we're in now, the Liturgy of the Word, is based on the Jewish Synagogue service! The apostles continued it when they first started celebrating the Lord's supper. Though I'm not an expert at this, I believe, at the very beginning, they would go to synagogue services on the Sabbath, Saturday, and then the Christian Jews would meet again to celebrate the Lord's Supper the next day. That developed into the second main part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Nearly two-thousand years of development, amongst both Christians and Jews, but you can still see the foundations of our Liturgy of the Word in today's synagogue service. They do readings from the prophets or the other writings in Scripture, maybe a psalm, readings from collections of sayings of ancient Jewish Rabbis, all leading up to a reading from the Torah, the Law, the first five books of the bible. We do an Old Testament reading, a psalm, an epistle, all leading up to the proclamation of the Gospel. The two services are very much the same, only... I have to admit... they do a better job of it than we do.

For instance, we do pay special reverence to the Book of the Gospels, we carry it in special at the beginning, place

it on the Altar, carry it with music here to the ambo where it is proclaimed, then, here anyway, we can "enthroned" it. At the Jewish services I attended, when it came time to read from the Torah, the rabbi would go up and open these great big doors, behind which would be the Torah. It was a scroll, written in Hebrew, three or four feet tall and maybe this big around, all covered in an ornate cloth and the rabbi would carry it around the synagogue and some of the people would come up and touch it, or kiss it and get all emotional over it. Excitement filled the room! It was beautiful. It expressed such love for God's Holy Word.

In the first reading: "Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law." A little later it says "all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law."

In the Gospel, Jesus was at a synagogue service, as was his custom, and he took part in it. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he selected a passage and read from it, "Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him." Now, we'll hear 'the rest of the story' in next week's gospel but, for now, just sense the anticipation, the deep interest, the feeling of expectation present in both of these readings. The people listened attentively, they were all weeping as they heard the words

of the law, they looked intently at Jesus.

We need to approach the Liturgy of the Word with that same sense of anticipation, deep interest and expectation. We hear the Word of the Lord, it's the Gospel of the Lord! The Lord speaks to us, personally. The Lord has a message for us here at every Mass. It's like a post office, or His messaging app! Maybe a different message for each of us, the Lord is capable of doing that, but we won't get the message unless we are looking for it, unless we expect it, unless we listen with deep interest and anticipation.

Which isn't to say that it's going to be easy. Although today's passage from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was well laid out, humorous, applying to all kinds of human situations as well as what Paul was dealing with – and I'm going to leave that as an exercise for the listener – but, sometimes, we hear things from the Bible that make us say “What does that mean?” or “How can THAT be the Word of the Lord?”

So there's going to be some work to do! It can help to read the readings before coming to Mass, there's a listing in the bulletin each week, or you can go online, or use the parish app – though that doesn't seem to give the readings far enough ahead of time for my tastes. But actively listening to whatever God has to say, can't help but to make a difference in our lives. A difference we will greatly appreciate over time.

At the Jewish Synagogue services I attended I remember how wonderfully well they celebrated the Liturgy of the

Word, but, after the Torah, and the talk afterward, they were done, there was nothing more. We have another way of experiencing God. We need to be attentive to that too.