

St. Basil the Great Catholic Church

Meaning of the Mass

2018-12-23

The Ambo

The Biblical readings during Mass are proclaimed from a structure in the sanctuary of the church called the **ambo**. Many times throughout the Scriptures, God speaks from high places (Heaven, Mt. Sinai, Sermon on the Mount, etc.). For this reason, “Ambo” is a Greek word signifying a “mountain” or “elevation”. If you’ll notice, our ambo and altar have a very similar visual design. It’s not just to follow some rule of interior decorating - it’s to tie them together theologically. When a line from Scripture is included in both Old and New Testaments, it must be important, like this one: *“Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.”* Both Moses and Jesus said we need bread and word. The altar feeds us the Bread of Life and the ambo feeds us the Word of Life. We are nourished at both tables. If we read the Bible at home but never come to Mass to receive the Eucharist, then we’re missing out. We will be spiritually malnourished. Conversely, if we come to Mass each week but never crack open the Bible at home, then we are missing out. We are going to be spiritually malnourished. The prophet Jeremiah says to the Lord, *“When I found your words, I ate them; thy words were my joy, the happiness of my heart”* (Jer 15:16). Since we need both word and bread, the two major sections of the Mass are called the **Liturgy of the Word** and the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**.

As the deacon or priest approaches the ambo to proclaim the Gospel, he prays a quiet, personal prayer while the rest of us are singing “Alleluia!” He says, *“Cleanse my heart and lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.”* He makes the Sign of the Cross on the Gospel book and then traces the cross on his forehead, lips, and heart. We do the same, and the prayer we can say at that time is, *“May the Word of the Lord be on my mind, be on my lips, and in my heart”*. To add to the amazing mystery of it all, John tells us in his gospel that *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14).