

This House of Prayer

5th in a series of 5

August 27, 2006

Our Cathedral is a tangible invitation to prayer and reflection. During the past few weeks, we have visited different places in the Cathedral, and explored how they call us to prayer. This week, the series concludes as we take a closer look at the ambo, the place of the word. Read the whole series online at www.stjames-cathedral.org

Master, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life (John 6: 68)

THE GIFT OF THE WORD

In today's Gospel, many find it hard to accept Jesus' gift of his own body and blood. Even many of his disciples leave him. But the Twelve remain. Peter speaks for them all when he asks, who else has words like Jesus? His words are not easy; but they are *alive*.

The scriptures have always been revered in the Church. Jerome, the 4th-century saint and doctor who translated the entire Bible into Latin (then the most widely-spoken language in the known world), said that "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." But over the centuries, the scriptures got rather short shrift (so to speak) in the Catholic Church. While Protestant scholars took leaps and bounds in the understanding of the scriptures and their historical context, Catholics were left behind. That began to change at the end of the 19th-century, with Pope Leo XIII, and continued with the Second Vatican Council. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Council Fathers called for a total overhaul of the readings proclaimed at Mass. "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare maybe provided for the faithful at the table of God's word" (51). The resulting Lectionary, with its three-year cycle of Sunday readings, was so rich that it has since been adopted by many Protestant churches.

Why is scripture so important? Because "Christ is present in his word" as he is present in the Eucharist. "The Church has honored the word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with the same reverence.... The Church is nourished spiritually at the twofold table of God's word and of the Eucharist: from the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness." (*Introduction to the Lectionary*)

THE AMBO AT ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

The importance of God's word requires a dignified place for the proclamation of the scriptures. The ambo at St. James Cathedral is elevated, so as to be visible from every seat in the building. The ambo platform is formed of the same materials as the altar—white marble and black terrazzo, forming a visual link between the "two tables" at which the Mass is celebrated. The ambo itself is an artistic tour-de-force, carved from a single piece of Honduran mahogany by Long Island sculptor Randall Rosenthal. The front of the ambo depicts an incredibly lush landscape: clouds and rain, trees and undergrowth, leaves and vines



bursting out of the margins. It's a scene we who live in the Pacific Northwest see almost every day! But what does it have to do with the word of God?

The inscription provides the answer. God says to Isaiah: "just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down, and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." God's word is a living word, bringing life wherever it goes. The ambo is a visual challenge to us. As we hear the scriptures proclaimed Sunday after Sunday, do we let them become a living word? Do we let them take root in our lives, and change us?

FOR REFLECTION

What are some of your favorite Bible stories? How have they shaped your decision-making, your approach to life?

"When they hear the word of God and reflect deeply on it, Christ's faithful are enabled to respond to it actively with full faith, hope, and charity through prayer and self-giving, and not only during Mass but in their entire Christian life." (*Introduction to the Lectionary*)

PRAYER

Everlasting God, bless these readers.
As they proclaim your words of life,
strengthen their faith,
that they may read with conviction and boldness,
and put into practice what they read.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

From the *Blessing of Readers* in the *Book of Blessings*

A Year of Prayer and Renewal