

And God Said . . .

Christ is present to us in the Mass in many ways. One way is through his Word—through the Scripture readings that are proclaimed and sung. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of Vatican II tells us that Scripture plays a particularly important role in Mass: “For it is from Scripture that the readings are given and explained in the homily and that psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration; it is from the Scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning” (24). The use of Scripture is one of the many ways in which God speaks to his people through the Mass, and in which Christ continues to proclaim his Gospel.

In calling for the renewal and promotion of the liturgy, the bishops at the Second Vatican Council encouraged a wider appreciation of and more varied use of Scripture. Prior to Vatican II, there was a one-year cycle of Scripture readings, meaning that you would hear the same readings repeated each year. The vast majority of the readings came from the Gospel and the epistles (or letters). Each year, people would hear about 22 percent of the four accounts of the Gospel, about 11 percent of the text of the epistles, and only .8 percent of the Old Testament (not counting Psalms). The bishops at the Second Vatican Council encouraged more use of Scripture in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. They promoted a “warm and living love for Scripture” (24), and requested that “the treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly” (51). As a result, we now hear three readings at Mass rather than two. For Sundays, we now have a three-year cycle of readings, meaning that the same readings are repeated every three years instead of every year. Now, in our cycle of readings, we hear about 58 percent of the four accounts of the Gospel, 25 percent of the epistles, and 3.7 percent of the Old Testament (not counting Psalms). The *Constitution*



on the Sacred Liturgy also encourages Catholics to engage with Scripture outside of Mass, such as through Bible study groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is there a particular Bible story that is important to you or someone in your family? Why? What does it mean in your life?
- The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* speaks, in some translations, of the

“table of God’s word” [51]. What does this image mean to you?

ACTIVITY

Look up the Scripture passages for the upcoming Sunday (you can find this information online on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ website www.usccb.org, or you can find this out from your parish). Spend some time reading and reflecting with them. What words or phrases strike you? Which don’t you understand? (Note: A study Bible can often provide helpful footnotes that explain the context of the passage or particular actions and symbols.) Do these Scripture readings connect to your life or experience? If so, how? Ask yourself what Christ might be saying to you through these words. Ponder the words you would speak to Christ in response. Write your thoughts down and review them before you go to Mass on Sunday. Take note of what it is like having already read the Scripture, and how this changes your experience of listening to the readings and to the Homily.

