

The Church has long recognised that at every Mass we are fed from two tables, not just one: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body” (*Dei Verbum*, Vatican II). The *General Introduction to the Lectionary* stresses the gift each table brings: “from the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness.”

In every church there is a visual reminder of the importance and unity of the two tables: the ambo and the altar. The ambo or reading desk from which the Word is proclaimed “should reflect the dignity of God’s word and be a clear reminder to the people that in the Mass the table of God’s word and of Christ’s body is placed before them” (*Consecrated for Worship*). It is advised that where possible the relationship between the altar and ambo be shown by both being made from the same materials, and sharing some aspects of design.

*The Word and the Eucharist: two tables,  
different in nature, inextricably linked, equal in value.*

*Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.*  
Psalm 119:105



III

## The Two Tables



© The official logo for the Sunday of the Word of God was unveiled at the Vatican January 17 2020 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization.’ The colourful logo depicts “The Road to Emmaus” and is based on an icon written by the late Benedictine Sister Marie-Paul Farran.

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When are you late for Mass? Before or after the Gospel? The focus of these questions, recollected from childhood, was on the technicality of fulfilling one's Sunday obligation rather than on hearing the Word. But they are a reminder that the Liturgy of the Word is often considered far less important than the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This attitude has been summed up by an Australian writer as follows: "Some people seem to consider the Liturgy of the Word at Mass as akin to the preliminary event before the main game, so it doesn't really matter if you arrive after the start." Similarly Irish sports fans will recall All-Ireland final days when many of the spectators did not bother to turn up for the Minor match. Thomas O'Loughlin even more graphically likens this perspective to "Soup before the main course," as if the Word is an optional extra. It is as if we have forgotten that "when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel."



Sister Marie-Paul Farran (1930-2019), *The Road to Emmaus*

The icon from which the logo for the Sunday of the Word of God is derived reflects the equal importance of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. On the left, the resurrected Christ is depicted holding in his left hand a scroll of the Scriptures and by his side are the two disciples: possibly Clopas and his wife, Mary. As they walk together with Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27). On the right, Jesus is at table with the two disciples: "he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him"(Luke 24:30-31). It is noteworthy that when the disciples realise who Jesus is they immediately hark back to the experience on the road: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" ( Luke 24:32). For them, they are the two sides of the one coin: there is an essential link between the two chief experiences of this transformative encounter. For us, the two events, the breaking of the Word and the breaking of the Bread, are mirrored in the two chief movements at Mass. As Vatican II declared, "the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship."



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