



GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS

INTRODUCTION

When Sacred Scripture is proclaimed in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are an element of high importance in the Liturgy (GIRM 29, 55).

A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ (cf. Rom 10:17), believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the Lord, both in the celebration of the liturgy and in their personal prayer and reflection.

The Commission for Liturgy has prepared the following guidelines for Lectors. These guidelines apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass, as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. These guidelines define the intention of liturgical law relative to the proclamation of the Word, the demands of proper liturgical practice, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

It is highly recommended that lectors in each community meet together regularly to discuss the theological as well as the practical and spiritual aspects of their ministry. These guidelines could serve as suitable material for study at such gatherings.

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

1. According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers called Lectors. “The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore, the readings are to be read by a reader, but the gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another priest. If, however, a Deacon or another priest is not present, the priest celebrant himself should read the gospel, and moreover, if no other suitable reader is present, the priest celebrant should also proclaim the other readings as well” (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #59).

The use of two readers – one for each reading – is encouraged. The parish community should strive for enough trained lectors to fulfil this goal (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #52). A single reading, except in the expressed case of the singing or reading of the Passion of the Lord, is not to be divided among another or more lectors (GIRM 99, 109).

The lector should not ordinarily exercise another liturgical ministry during the same Mass. Announcements and/or any commentaries during the celebration are ideally read by someone other than the lector (GIRM 99).

2. The Gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest proclaims the Gospel. In concelebrations, one other than the presiding celebrant proclaims the Gospel (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #49, 50; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #59).

3. The Universal Prayer (General Intercessions) is read by the deacon, the lector, the cantor, or someone else (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #53; GIRM 71). Announcements and/or any commentary during the celebration are read by the lectors or someone else—but not from the ambo.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

4. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. In and through them God speaks to the gathered faithful. The ministry of the Word, therefore, is treated seriously and with great dignity.

5. The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy. It is proclaimed. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction, and appropriate pace. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith and also rouses faith in those who hear the Word proclaimed.

6. Ideally, members of the assembly listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and do not read along. In the act of communal listening, the worshippers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ through the Word (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #45).

Properly there are no booklets for the assembly to follow the readings, although there may be Sunday Missals for the hearing impaired and for those whose language is different from the one used at Mass.

Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just my listening but our listening together for the Lord's word to the community.

REQUIREMENTS

7. All liturgical ministers, especially the ministers of the Word, must be properly trained for their ministry. The ministry of the Word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding and love of the scriptures. A basic knowledge of the Bible, Lectionary for Mass, and the Liturgy of the Word, as well as the necessary oral proclamation skills are additional essential requirements. A basic knowledge of Sacred Scripture includes: the plan of salvation, the organization of the books of the Bible, as well as the variety of genres and literary forms of its books. Some of the oral proclamation skills include: eye contact, enunciation, diction, inflection, pacing, projection, and pronunciation.

Lector training courses in basic lector formation are offered through the Archdiocesan Commission for Liturgy. Contact the Office for Liturgy for further details on lector certification.

Normally, only properly trained and commissioned lectors serve at Mass (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #55). Ideally, the readings at weddings and funerals are proclaimed by lectors of the parish who have been properly trained. However, for pastoral reasons, family members or friends may carry out this ministry. The parish should provide assistance and guidance so that God's Word is proclaimed with clarity and dignity. The reading of Scripture and Universal Prayer (General Intercessions) during a celebration of Mass in the Catholic Church is to be done by Catholics.

8. Lectors are fully initiated (baptized, First Communion, and Confirmed), practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim. In addition, they possess the human maturity expected of those called to serve in the Christian community.

On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated (i.e., not yet confirmed) may serve as lector during a liturgy. Proper training for this ministry is expected.

9. Normally, lectors are commissioned by their pastor for their ministry in their particular parish, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The rite of commissioning is found in the Book of Blessings. It is the responsibility of the pastor, chaplain, or his delegate to determine the suitability of the candidates who will exercise this ministry before they are commissioned.

10. Those who are presently lectors should annually participate in enrichment programs, such as lector enrichment classes offered by the Office for Liturgy, bible study courses, Bible Institute and other workshops on Scripture and/or proclamation techniques.

PREPARATION

11. In order that the service of the Word might be effective, all lectors are expected to be prepared for their ministry. Preparation should be spiritual, scriptural, and practical. Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message. Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke a response from the assembly. Practical preparation involves a correct knowledge of the biblical reading to be proclaimed, mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciations, and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery. It is unacceptable to rush into the sacristy just before Mass to “look at the readings” (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #55).

THE MANNER OF PRONOUNCING THE DIFFERENT TEXTS

“In texts that are to be pronounced in a loud and clear voice, whether by the priest or the Deacon, or by a reader, or by everyone, the voice should correspond to the genre of the text itself, that is, depending upon whether it is a reading, a prayer, an explanatory comment, an acclamation, or a sung text; it should also be suited to the form of celebration and to the solemnity of the gathering. Consideration should also be given to the characteristics of different languages and of the culture of different peoples” (GIRM 38).

12. Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving at least 15 minutes before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary, arranging the microphone, making sure that the sound system is properly functioning, and attending to any other duties as required by the parish. If the lectors are to read the petitions for the General Intercessions, these should be reviewed before the liturgy begins.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

13. In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been encouraged. It is important to note, however, that the lector is not at liberty to change the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy.

In the preparation of other texts, such as the General Intercessions or commentary of any type, language which is inclusive is always used.

SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

14. God speaks to the faith community at worship through persons, actions, and objects. To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the Liturgy of the Word, it is important to pay full attention to these symbols. The symbols that are integral to any celebration of the Word are: the lector(s), the book(s), the ambo, and the processions. A brief word on each of these is in order.

15. The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to participate in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the Liturgy of the Word. The lector, as a baptized member of the liturgical assembly, is expected to participate fully in the Mass both for the benefit of himself or herself and also as an example to others.

16. The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. Both of these are available in permanent, dignified and beautifully-bound books, with large print for ease of proclamation. They are to be treated with care and reverence. The Lectionary and the Book of Gospels may be put into beautiful covers. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books, and never from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory and made from throw-away materials. This directive applies to the celebration of Matrimony and funerals as well. There are three volumes of the current lectionary: one for Sundays and Solemnities; one for weekdays in Ordinary Time and a volume of readings for Saints, Common Ritual and Votive Masses. The Book of Gospels is contained in one large volume.

17. The ambo is a symbol of the presence of the Word of God just as the altar is a symbol of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo, always a permanent, solemn, dignified, and prominent place. Candles and other decorative elements may be placed around it but without obscuring the ambo. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed Word, namely, the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel, the Homily, and the Universal Prayer. A lectern or cantor's stand is best used for song leading and announcements. All scripture readings take place at the single ambo, including the psalm, whether sung or spoken (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #31, 33).

RITUAL ACTION

18. Among the actions in the Liturgy of the Word, processions are important. Lectors are to take part in the entrance procession. They walk immediately in front of the deacon or Presider and behind the altar servers. The deacon or in his absence one of the lectors solemnly carries the closed Book of Gospels by holding it with uplifted hands so that it is displayed to the assembly and places it flat/standing on the altar. The Lectionary is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #120, 128, 172, 194).

It is advisable for all the members of the entrance procession to actively join in singing of the opening song.

19. When the Book of the Gospels is borne in procession by a lector there are no other gesture made by the lector such as a bow or a genuflection. The lector goes immediately to the altar, without a bow, and places the Book of the Gospels flat/standing on the altar, leaving sufficient room for the priest celebrant to venerate the altar. After the Book of the Gospels has been placed flat/standing on the altar, the lector bows profoundly to the altar and then takes a place in the nave.

If not carrying anything, the lector simply walks with hands at his/her sides and makes a profound bow to the altar before going to his/her seat (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #173, 195).

All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried (GIRM 42).

20. Since the lectors are a part of the worshipping community, it is most appropriate that they sit in the assembly in a location that gives them easy access to the ambo, and come forward from there to proclaim the readings.

21. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, after the Amen to the Collect, the lector (or lectors and psalmist) process into the sanctuary, bow to the altar profoundly, and move to the ambo. The lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. In proceeding to the ambo to proclaim the reading, the lector should not carry a missalette or sheet of paper. The Lectionary should always be carefully prepared at the ambo before the mass.

The lector pauses before beginning the first reading while the assembly is settling. The reading is announced using only the introductory text given in the Lectionary "A reading from...". The reading designation "First Reading;" "Second Reading" is not read, nor is the superscript written above the reading itself. After a brief pause, the reader proclaims the Word of God with a tone of voice and in a manner that corresponds to the genre and literary form of the Sacred Scripture.

At the conclusion of the reading the lector pauses and without making any hand or arm gestures nor lifting up the Lectionary then says, "The word of the Lord." Then the lector remains in place for a period of silence before leaving the ambo (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #128, 130; Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28).

The first reader returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the Psalm is intoned. The second reader approaches the ambo after the Psalm and returns to his/her seat before the Gospel Acclamation, after allowing for a period of silence, as described above.

When only one lector proclaims both readings, he/she is seated during the singing of the Psalm.

All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried.

22. After the second reading and the accompanying pause, all stand for the singing of the Gospel Acclamation. During that time, the deacon or priest carries the Book of Gospels from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be accompanied by acolytes and thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the Liturgy of the Word.

All remain standing for the Gospel. The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the scripture readings.

Incense may be used in the Liturgy of the Word. When incense is used, traditionally the Book of Gospels is incensed at the ambo before the Gospel is proclaimed.

23. The Universal Prayer is introduced from the chair by the presiding celebrant and announced by the deacon, or in his absence by the lector or other minister. The intercessions may be announced at the ambo or from another suitable place such as a lectern or cantor stand (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #31, 33, 53).

The person announcing the intercessions remains in place until the presiding celebrant has concluded the prayer.

24. At the conclusion of the Mass, the lector does not process with the Book of the Gospels. The Lectionary is never carried in procession. The lector may join in the procession at the end of Mass in the same order as in the procession to the altar.

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

25. Integral to the celebration of the Word of God are the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia, except in Lent). Psalmody is designed to be sung and loses much of its beauty when it is recited. The Responsorial Psalm is part of the Liturgy of the Word and is sung or read from the ambo. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways – responsorially, antiphonally or part sung/part recited. Lectors may need to check with the musicians beforehand as to whether anything is expected of them (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #20-22).

The Gospel Acclamation is an acclamation which is to be sung. “the Alleluia or the verse before the gospel, if not sung, may be omitted” (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #23; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #63c).

26. The leadership of music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. Lectors do not normally function as cantors of the Responsorial Psalm and/or the Gospel Acclamation.

SILENCE

27. In order to enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, a period of silence follows each of the readings (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #128).

Also, there is a period of silence after the Psalm.

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembled congregation, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer.

Proper times for silence during the Liturgy of the Word are, for example, before this Liturgy begins, after the first and the second reading, after the homily (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28).

SOME USEFUL HINTS

28. Ministers of the Word are not to add their own words to the texts. The words of announcement (“A reading from...”) and conclusion (“The Word of the Lord”) are intended to be read exactly as printed in the lectionary.

29. If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, the lector begins by announcing, “Our Response to God’s Word is....”, then follows the recitation with the antiphon in the Lectionary.

30. The announcement of the reading (“A reading from”) and the ending, (“The Word of the Lord”) need to be distinguished from the reading itself. Lectors make this distinction by observing a

pause of two or three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase. Both are stated in a matter-of-fact tone without special emphasis.

31. Anything that might distract from the proclaimed Word or from the dignity of this ministry is to be avoided. Such distractions include: leaning on the ambo, placing hands in pockets, shuffling from one foot to the other, any excessive movement, wearing inappropriate or immodest clothing or wearing anything that draws attention to the lector.

32. The Lector or Gospel Reader does not lift the Lectionary or the Book of Gospels while saying: “The Word/Gospel of the Lord.”

ATTIRE

33. The lector dresses (wearing appropriate and dignified clothing) in a manner that expresses the dignity associated with the role of proclaiming the Word of God. Recreational and athletic clothing are considered inappropriate. The lector should never dress or do anything to draw attention to her/himself at any time (GIRM 339).

FORMATION

34. Lectors should be familiar with the following documents:

Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy 1963)

Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation 1965)

General Instructions of the Roman Missal (2011) General Introduction to the Lectionary (1981)

Verbum Domini (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 2010)

Aperuit Illis (Apostolic Letter instituting the Sunday of the Word of God 2019)

Lectio Divina (Gospel Reflection)

Meditation on the Scriptures, Bible Classes

CONCLUSION

“When this word is proclaimed in the Church and put into living practice, it enlightens the faithful through the working of the Holy Spirit and draws them into the entire mystery of the Lord as a reality to be lived”(Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #47).

“The Lord is standing at the door and knocking. If anyone should hear his voice and open for him, he will come in and eat with them” (Revelation 3:20). Christ Jesus is knocking at our door in the words of sacred Scripture. If we hear his voice and open the doors of our minds and hearts, then he will enter our lives and remain ever with us.

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