

Holy Family Parish Patchway Bristol Readers Meeting

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:1-4).

GUIDELINES FOR READERS

1. Theological Rationale of the Proclamation of the Word
2. Requirements
3. Preparation
4. Language
5. Ministers of the Word of Various Levels
6. Symbols in the Liturgy of the Word
7. Ministry of Music
8. Silence
9. Some Useful Hints
10. Seating
11. Prayers of the Faithful.

These guidelines are intended to help readers proclaim the Word of God in a prayerful and powerful way by offering some basic principles required by the very nature of the liturgy. They are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in practice.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Proclamation of the word of God is truly a service to the Church. Readers bring the living word of God to the assembled faith community. *When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people...[f]* The ministry of the word, therefore, should be treated with great dignity.

The word of God is not merely read, but proclaimed, within the liturgy. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate pace. It demands the ability to evoke faith in others by demonstrating one's own faith. As a ministry which presupposes faith it should

rouse faith in those who hear the word proclaimed.

Ideally, the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the scriptures and not read along in a participation aid. In the act of communal listening the worshippers experience not only unity among themselves, but the very presence of Christ speaking to them in his word.

REQUIREMENTS

It is necessary that those who exercise the ministry of reader...be truly suited and carefully prepared so that the faithful may develop a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the sacred readings. [11] The ministry of the word requires an understanding of the Scriptures, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and skill in public reading.

Readers are to be fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the word which they proclaim. Once readers have been prepared to exercise their ministry, it is highly recommended that they be publicly commissioned with a blessing, preferably during Sunday Mass. *The Parish Priest can give a dispensation for another to read.*

Family members or friends may be allowed to read during funeral or wedding liturgies even though they are not formally trained and commissioned as readers. The parish should then provide an experienced reader for guidance and instruction.

In special situations and for pastoral reasons, e.g. parish school and religious education liturgies, a young person who is not yet fully initiated, but properly prepared, may be permitted to read.

PREPARATION

Remote preparation for the ministry of reader includes spiritual, scriptural, and practical dimensions. Spiritual preparation involves prayer over the text and reflection on its message, either alone or in a group. Scriptural preparation involves understanding the text and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke response from the assembly. Such preparation includes reading the passage in context and referring to biblical commentaries and other study aids. Practical preparation involves mastering difficult words, learning the right pronunciation and practicing the delivery of the text aloud, ideally in the presence of someone who is able to critique the delivery.

Immediate preparation is also expected. This includes arriving in ample time before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary for Mass and checking the sound system. Readers are required to be a part of the entrance procession of the Sunday Masses and to be in the Sacristy at least 5 minutes before the scheduled time for Mass to begin.

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LANGUAGE

The ongoing revision of liturgical texts addresses the issue of language with great care. The reader is not at liberty to change texts approved for the liturgy.

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

According to the ancient tradition and teaching of the Church, the readings other than the gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers. A different reader for each reading is encouraged. It is not appropriate for several persons to divide a single reading with the exception of the Passion of the Lord.

The gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest celebrant proclaims it. At a concelebrated Mass when there is no deacon, the gospel is proclaimed by a concelebrant, rather than the presiding celebrant.

SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

To ensure the pastoral effectiveness of the liturgy of the word, it is important to pay attention to the symbols of the liturgy. **Symbols that are integral to any celebration of the word are: the reader(s), the book(s), the ambo, and processions.**

The reader ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to fully participate in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a reader to participate actively only in the liturgy of the word.

The word is contained in permanent, dignified and well-bound books: the **Lectionary for Mass** and the **Book of the Gospels**. **The readings are always proclaimed from official liturgical books.** *Because of the dignity of the word of God these books...are not to be replaced by other pastoral aids, for example, by leaflets printed for the preparation of the readings by the faithful or for their personal meditation.* [iii]

The place for the proclamation of the word of God is the ambo. It is to be somewhat elevated, fixed and of a suitable design and nobility to reflect the dignity of God's word. [iv] Candles and other decorative elements may be placed around it. The ambo is reserved for the readings, the responsorial psalm, and the Easter proclamation (the Exsultet). *It may rightly be used for the homily and the prayer of the faithful.* [v] A smaller lectern or cantor stand is best used for song leading and announcements.

Processions are important liturgical actions. Readers are now required to take part in the entrance procession. **The deacon (or reader if there is no deacon) should solemnly carry the Book of the Gospels which is always placed on the altar.** *The Lectionary for Mass is never carried in procession* [vi] and should have been placed beforehand on the ambo.

The gospel procession is an important ritual action in the liturgy of the word even though it may not be expressed fully at every liturgy. After the second reading and the pause thereafter, the deacon, or priest when there is no deacon, carries the *Book of the Gospels* from the altar to the ambo in procession. He may be preceded by the censer bearer, and, when appropriate, by servers with candles. When incense is used, the *Book of the Gospels* is incensed after the introductory dialogue and before the gospel is proclaimed. The *Book of the Gospels* is not carried out in the recessional. [vii] **The readers will be required to process out with the celebrant and servers and so will need to approach the altar after the blessing, and line up along the front row of benches, and will be joined by the Eucharistic Ministers.**

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

Psalmody is designed to be sung; it loses much of its power when it is recited. Since the responsorial psalm at Mass is a part of the liturgy of the word, a psalmist or cantor may appropriately sing it from the ambo, though it may be sung from another suitable place. [viii]

The gospel acclamation serves as the people's greeting to the Lord and as an expression of their faith through song. If not sung, the gospel acclamation may be omitted. [ix]

Music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. Readers do not function as cantors of the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamation. It is advisable for readers to check with the musicians before the Mass as to what will be sung.

SILENCE

To enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the word proclaimed, moments of silence may appropriately be observed after the first and second reading, and after the homily. [x]

SOME USEFUL HINTS

Readers should not add to the introductions to readings as given in the *Lectionary for Mass* not should they add any of their own words to the text.

The introduction to the reading such as "A reading from the Book of Exodus" and the ending, "This the word of the Lord," should be distinguished from the reading itself by a slight pause.

If the responsorial psalm is recited, readers should begin the recitation with the antiphon and should always repeat the antiphon with the assembly after the initial recitation and after each verse. Announcing, "The response is..." or "responsorial psalm" is unnecessary.

Readers proclaim the word from the *Lectionary for Mass* as it rests on the ambo. It is not lifted up before the assembly while saying, "This is the word of the Lord." **Readers should never do anything to draw attention to themselves. Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion, modest, and in keeping with the dignity of the ministry.**

SEATING

Readers are seated in a place in the assembly that allows easy access to the ambo. At the time of the liturgy of the word, the reader approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. If the altar is passed it should be revered. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. **The readers will approach the altar and when all are gathered will bow and move reverently to the ambo and bench. The server will no longer escort the readers to the ambo. After the recitation / singing of the Gospel acclamation, the readers will return to the front of the altar, bow and return to their seats.** This will coincide with the Gospel book procession to the ambo..

When there are two readers, each is seated while the other reads and both are seated while the psalm response is sung.

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

It is essential that the reader delegated to read the Prayers of the Faithful, read them through before the Mass begins, so as to get the gist of the prayers and the phrasing right. This will also give the reader the opportunity to ensure there are no typing errors etc. **Readers must consult with the priest before altering the Prayers. It would also be sensible for the reader to take the folder with the Prayers of the Faithful with them to their seat, so they can ensure their confidence in proclaiming them.** Please leave the folder on the ambo when finished with it.

[1] *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, n.29.

[1] *Lectionary for Mass*, Introduction, n.55.

[1] *Ibid.*, n. 37.

[1] *Ibid.*, n. 32.

[1] *Ibid.*, n. 33.

[1] *GIRM*, n. 120.

[1] *The Book of the Gospels*, Introduction, n. 22.

[1] *LMIn*, n. 33; *GIRM*, n. 61.

[1] *GIRM*, n. 63.

[1] *GIRM*, n. 56.

Biblical pronunciations website:

<http://netministries.org/bbasics/bbwords.htm>

Go before us O Lord, in this our sacrifice of prayer and praise, and grant that what we say and sing with our lips, we may believe in our hearts. And that what we believe in our hearts, we may practice and show in our daily lives, through Christ our Lord. Amen.