

Diocese of San Diego

GUIDELINES FOR READERS

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...¹ 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.² 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. See the "Order for Blessing of Readers," Book of Blessings, chapter 61.

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.

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.³

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.⁴ 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.⁵ A smaller lectern or cantor stand is best used for song leading and announcements.

Processions are important liturgical actions. Readers may 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 procession⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ Some catechesis regarding this silence should be offered.

SOME USEFUL HINTS

Readers should not add to the introductions to readings as given in the Lectionary for Mass nor 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, "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, or as held in their hands. It is not lifted up before the assembly while saying, “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 either in the sanctuary with the other ministers or 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 with a profound bow. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. When there are two readers each is seated while the other reads and both are seated while the psalm response is sung.

Because of the dignity afforded the proclaimed word of God, it is advisable that ministers of hospitality refrain from seating latecomers during the proclamation of the scriptures and the homily.

(Endnotes)

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

² *Lectionary for Mass*, Introduction, n. 55.

³ *Ibid.* n. 37.

⁴ *Ibid.* n. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.* n. 33.

⁶ *GIRM*, n. 120

⁷ *Book of the Gospels*, Introduction, n. 22.

⁸ *LMI*, n. 33. *GIRM*, n. 61.

⁹ *GIRM*, n. 63.

¹⁰ *LMI*, n. 28.