

The reader of God's word



In the readings ... God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present through his word in the midst of the faithful.

—*General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2011, §55*



Reading and proclaiming God's word

A reader (sometimes called a 'lector' or 'minister of God's word') is the person who proclaims the first or second reading during the Liturgy of the Word. The ministry of the Church requires a person who is of good character and serious about the practice of their faith. Readers who believe that sacred Scripture is the word of God and have respect for God's presence in that word will help to convey these beliefs to the congregation. The reader has an appreciation that he or she is proclaiming God's word and that when this word is read with clarity, sincerity and conviction, it has the power to touch lives and change hearts. The Liturgy of the Word is one of the two principal parts of the Mass. Just as the assembly is fed at the table of the Eucharist with the Body and Blood of Christ, so it is fed at the table of the Word with the words of God in Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). The word of God is like water to the thirsty soul. Therefore, the quality of the reader's proclamation determines whether his or her service will help or hinder the assembly in its listening and faith response to God's word.

Who can read?

- A person who is in full communion with the Catholic Church
- Men, women, young and old who are committed to the practice of their faith
- A person who is willing to undertake formation—all experienced and new readers, no matter how well educated or trained, can benefit from formation in the ministry of proclaiming God's word

Appropriate dress

Although a specific form of dress is not required of readers, the dignity and noble simplicity of the sacred liturgy requires that those accepting the call to such a ministry dress in a manner that reflects the profound nature of the call. Dress that draws undue attention to the reader rather than the Word proclaimed should be avoided.

To prepare a reading

- **Read the Scriptures** on a regular basis in a small group or as a private study with resources.
- **Pray!** Visualise the congregation. Ask God to touch their hearts. Be a witness to God's word.
- **Consider how your assigned reading** relates to the gospel. A number of workbooks are available to help with this preparation.
- **Read your text silently** several times, getting a sense of the pace and flow.
- **Identify the type of passage** you are to read. For example, is it a story? a prophecy? a parable? an instruction? a song? poetry?
- **Consider the meaning:** What does the text mean? Where is the climax? What is the tone and spirit: comforting? warning? informing? intimate?
- **Check pronunciations and words for emphasis.** Decide upon important phrases and words to emphasise (for example, nouns and verbs).
- **Practise reading aloud**—several times! Read to another person or into an audio recorder for feedback.
- **Pray again** for personal growth and for your ministry as a reader of the word of God.
- **Arrive ahead of time** on the day you are scheduled to read so that you can enter into a spirit of prayer before the liturgy begins. Make certain that the Lectionary is correctly marked and that the microphone is adjusted properly.

The Liturgy of the Word at Mass

The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favour meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided. In the course of it, brief periods of silence are also appropriate, accommodated to the assembled congregation; by means of these, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Readings, and lastly at the conclusion of the Homily.

—*GIRM, §56*

After the opening prayer has been completed, the reader moves towards the sanctuary, reverences the altar (and the presiding celebrant if he is a bishop) by making a profound bow (from the waist) and then goes to the lectern for the first reading.

First reading

Wait for the assembly to settle, then, making eye contact, confidently announce the reading with 'A reading from ...' *Do not* change this formula in any way. For example, *do not* begin 'Our first reading today is ...' or with any similar beginning. And *do not* read the short heading to the reading (printed in italics).

Particular significance is to be given to a period of silence after reading the word of God before stating 'The word of the Lord'. If the responsorial psalm is being sung by a cantor at the lectern or led by a psalmist from another microphone, the reader should move away from the lectern to a seat close by so that the congregation can focus on the cantor or psalmist. The musical introduction to the psalm should wait for this movement to occur and thereby create a momentary pause for silent reflection.

Responsorial psalm

The response to the psalm links the readings and is a key to the Liturgy of the Word. In a few simple words, it helps to summarise the meaning of the readings. Ideally, the psalm is led by the cantor, either from the lectern or from another location at the front of the assembly, in order to lead their response. When not sung, the psalm after the reading is to be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God (*Lectionary for Mass: Introduction*, §22). *Do not say*, 'Responsorial psalm' or 'The response to the psalm is ...'. Instead, look at the congregation and announce the response with confidence. *Do not say* 'response' at the end of each verse. As you read the last line of the verse, lower your tone and look up at the congregation.

Second reading

The second reading is proclaimed at the lectern and follows the same pattern as the first reading.

In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them.

—*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963, §51*



Gospel acclamation

A period of silence is to be observed before the singing of the gospel acclamation. This is often led by a cantor from a microphone separate from the lectern to facilitate the procession of the gospel book from the altar to the lectern.

Common criticisms of readers

- Inability to hear the reading (too soft, muffled speech, etc.)
- A fast pace that makes it impossible to understand the reading
- Inadequate expression or emphasis, causing lack of interest
- Wrong pronunciation of words

Strategies to assist proclamation

- **Breathe.** Breathe deeply from the diaphragm (tummy).
- **Pace.** Speak at a pace that expresses the sense of the reading. Change the pace as needed, reading neither too fast nor too slow.
- **Pause.** Pause to emphasise the meaning of important points in the reading.
- **Project.** Hearing the Word helps to enkindle hope. Project your voice into the microphone.
- **Express.** Use a tone of voice appropriate to the nature of the reading and the spirit of its message.

- **Pitch.** Good proclamation uses a variety of pitches. Use a lower pitch when appropriate to aid easier reception.
- **Pronounce.** Check pronunciations of unfamiliar words (see *Break Open the Word* or consult an online pronunciation guide such as the one at www.netministries.org) and practise aloud.
- **Engage.** Looking at God's people helps to engage them in the Word proclaimed.

Prayers of blessing

Everlasting God,
when he read in the synagogue at Nazareth,
your Son proclaimed the good news of salvation
for which he would give up his life.
Bless all readers.
As they proclaim your words of life,
strengthen their faith
that they may read with conviction and boldness,
and put into practice what they read.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

—from *Book of Blessings*, 1989

Gracious God,
source of all light and all goodness,
you sent your Son, your living Word,
to reveal to humanity the mystery of your love.
Look with mercy on all who are preparing
to proclaim your word and to lead your people
closer to your teaching.
Bless them in their service
so that they may be nourished by your word,
be transformed by it and faithfully announce it
to their brothers and sisters in your Church.
We praise and thank you, Father,
in the name of Jesus your Son,
and in the love of your Holy Spirit,
God of glory for ever and ever.
Amen.

—from *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition*, 2005

Acknowledgment

The prayers of blessing for readers are adapted from the *Book of Blessings*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1989, p. 777 and from *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition*, CCCB, Ottawa, 2005, p. 94.

Further reading and resources

Break Open the Word: The book for readers. Liturgy Brisbane, Brisbane, published annually.

Cameron, Michael, Corinna Laughlin, Virginia Meagher and Paul Turner, *Guide for Lectors and Readers*, 2nd edn, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2021.

Lectionary for Mass: Introduction (1981), in *The Liturgy Documents: A parish resource*, vol. 1, 5th edn, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 2012.

Powerful Points for Liturgical Ministers, CD-ROM, Liturgy Brisbane, Brisbane, 2007.

Rosser, Aelred, *Proclaiming the Word: Formation for readers in the liturgy*, DVD (40 mins), Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, n.d.

Wallace, James, *The Ministry of Lectors*, 2nd edn, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2017.