



Lector (Reader) Guidelines

The Office of Sacred Liturgy has prepared the following guidelines for parish laypersons who publicly read scripture, referred to as Readers or Lectors. These are to apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass, as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these notes is to provide some general observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. They 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.

Ritual practices may differ from parish to parish, reflecting the variations allowed by law. Determination in this regard comes under the Pastor's authority. These guidelines, therefore, are not intended to impose absolute uniformity in liturgical customs. Instead, they are produced in a spirit of helping our parishes experience the proclaimed Word of God as a powerful celebration by offering some basic, essential principles required by the very nature of the liturgy.

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

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

1. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a service to the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. The ministry of the Word should, therefore, be treated seriously and with great dignity. (GIRM 55)
2. The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy. It is proclaimed, yet not with theatrical show. 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. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith. It also rouses faith in those who hear the Word proclaimed. (LM Intro 55)
3. Ideally, the assembly should listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and not read along in a missalette. In the act of communal listening, the worshippers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the Word. Pastors and lectors need, however, to be attentive to special needs of the hearing impaired. (LM Intro 7, 37)

REQUIREMENTS

4. All liturgical ministers, especially lectors, must be properly trained for their ministry.

This ministry of the Word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding of the scriptures. Only properly trained and commissioned lectors should be scheduled for liturgy. (GIRM 101, LM Intro 14)

For pastoral reasons family members or friends may be allowed to read during funeral or wedding liturgies even though they are not formally trained and commissioned as lectors. The parish should provide assistance to them so that God's Word is properly proclaimed.

5. Lectors are fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim.

On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated (i.e. confirmed and has received first Eucharist) may be permitted to lector during a liturgy. Proper training, however, is expected.

6. All lectors should be commissioned for their ministry, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The blessing used for this commissioning is found in the Book of Blessings. (Chapter 61)
7. Those who are presently lectors should periodically participate in enrichment programs.

PREPARATION

8. To make the service of the Word 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. Practical preparation involves 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.
9. Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving in ample time before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary, arranging the microphone, making sure that the sound system is properly functioning.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

10. In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been recognized.

However, the lector **is not at liberty to change** the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy to accommodate a personal desire for inclusive language. (LM Intro 111)

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

11. According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings other than the Gospel are proclaimed by lay ministers. (GIRM 59)

Since the use of two lectors -one for each reading- is encouraged, the parish community should strive for enough lectors to fulfill this ideal. (GIRM 109, LM Intro 52)

12. The Prayers of the Faithful are part of the Liturgy of the Word. When no deacon is present, the lector or cantor announces the intentions from the ambo. If the intentions are sung, a cantor is to be assigned the function of announcing the intentions. (GIRM 138, LM Intro 53)

SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

13. 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 the symbols of liturgy. 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.

14. The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to participate in the entire liturgy. Within the Mass, each lector must participate actively in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the Liturgy of the Word. (GIRM 91)
15. The Word is contained in permanent, dignified and well-bound books: the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books. Non biblical readings are never to be substituted for the readings or Responsorial Psalm. (GIRM 57, 349, LM Intro 12, 35, 36)

The Word of God is not to be proclaimed from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory or throw-away materials. (LM Intro 37)

16. The ambo is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God in the Church just as the altar is the symbol of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo. The ambo, therefore, should be permanent, solemn, dignified and prominent. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed Word, namely, the readings from Sacred Scripture, the Gospel, the homily and the intentions of the Prayers of the Faithful. The Responsorial Psalm is from the Sacred Scripture and ideally is chanted from the ambo or another suitable place. (GIRM 61)

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

17. An integral part of the celebration of the Word of God is the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia). Psalmody is designed to be sung: it loses much of its power when it is recited. Since the Responsorial Psalm at Mass is part of the Liturgy of the Word, it is appropriate that it be sung/read from the ambo. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways—responsorial, antiphonally, part sung/part recited—lectors should check with the musicians beforehand as to whether anything is expected of them. (GIRM 61, LM Intro 20)

The Gospel Acclamation is an acclamation and it is always to be sung. If it is not sung it may be omitted. (GIRM 63c)

18. The leadership of music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. It is preferable for a cantor to sing the Responsorial Psalm or at least the people's response. If the Responsorial Psalm cannot be sung, then it is to be recited by the lector in such a way as to foster meditation. (GIRM 61)

RITUAL ACTION

19. Among the actions in the Liturgy of the Word, processions are important. In a Mass without a Deacon, the lector may take part in the entrance procession; solemnly carrying the Book of Gospels slightly elevated, makes a bow upon reaching the altar and places the Book of Gospels upon the altar. Or, the Book of Gospels may be placed on the altar before Mass. The Lectionary is not carried in procession, but is resting on the ambo at the beginning of Mass. (GIRM 44, 120 d, 195)

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 even though it may not be expressed fully at every liturgy.

20. Incense may be used in the Liturgy of the Word. When incense is used, traditionally the Book of Gospels is incensed before the Gospel is proclaimed. The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the scripture readings. (GIRM 134, 276 LM Intro 17)
21. The Book of Gospels is not carried in the recessional.

SILENCE

22. In order to enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, "haste that hinders recollection" is to be avoided. A pause should be made after stating "A reading from..." and before "The Word of the Lord". Another period of silence should be observed after each reading before the lector moves away from the ambo; also, a brief period of silence should be allowed after the Responsorial Psalm. Some

catechesis on the purpose and appropriate use of this silence should be offered. (GIRM 56, LM Intro 28)

THE SEATING OF LECTORS

23. Lectors need to be seated in a place which allows for easy access to the ambo, preferably among the assembly. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. If the lector must pass in front of the altar, he/she bows to the altar before proceeding to the ambo. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. After the reading, the lector returns to his/her seat in a similar manner. (GIRM 310)

When there are two lectors, the first returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the Responsorial Psalm is intoned. The second lector would then approach the ambo after the Psalm and return to his/her seat before the Gospel Acclamation.

When only one lector proclaims both readings, he/she should be seated during the Psalm response.

24. Lectors begin to read by saying, “A reading from the Book of Exodus” as written in the Lectionary. It is inappropriate to add words such as: “The first reading...”
25. If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, lectors should begin the recitation with the antiphon. Announcing “Responsorial Psalm” is unnecessary.
26. Ministers of the Word should not add or change any words of the texts.
27. The title of 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. Lectors do this by observing a pause of about three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase. The same tone of proclamation should be maintained for “The Word of The Lord”.
28. While proclaiming the Word, a lector may hold the Lectionary in his/her hands, or place in on the ambo and rest his/her hand on it. Anything that might distract from the proclaimed Word, such as leaning on the ambo, hands in pockets, or shuffling from one foot to the other should be avoided.
29. The Lectionary or the Book of Gospels should not be lifted off the ambo while saying: “The Word of the Lord”.

30. The lector should never do anything to draw attention to her/himself at any time. Exaggerated dramatic presentations and overly intentional eye contact is unnecessary in the proclamation of readings.

Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion, modest and in keeping with the dignity of the ministry.

INSTITUTED MINISTRY OF LECTOR

The lay ministries (they are no longer called minor orders) of lector and acolyte were established by Pope Paul VI in 1973 with the apostolic letter “Ministeria Quaedam.” They are to be given to all candidates for orders. These ministries are also open to male laity not aspiring to sacred orders.

Canon 1035 says the following:

“§1. Before anyone is promoted to the permanent or transitional diaconate, he is required to have received the ministries of lector and acolyte and to have exercised them for a suitable period of time.

“§2. There is to be an interval of at least six months between the conferral of the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate.”

The duties of the lector:

“Introductory Rites

“194. In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing approved attire, may carry the Book of the Gospels, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest but otherwise along with the other ministers.

“195. Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. If he is carrying the Book of the Gospels, he approaches the altar and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then the lector takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers.

“The Liturgy of the Word

“196. The lector reads from the ambo the readings that precede the Gospel. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the responsorial Psalm after the first reading.

“197. When no deacon is present, the lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce from the ambo the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful.

“198. If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons in the Missal are not recited by the faithful, the lector may read them at the appropriate time (cf. above, nos. 48, 87).”

Prepared by the Office of Sacred Liturgy in the Diocese of Birmingham, Alabama. Adapted from published guidelines from the Dioceses of Orange.

ABBREVIATIONS

- GIRM: General Instruction of the Roman Missal
- LM: Lectionary for Mass