



# LECTOR GUIDELINES

*Effectively Proclaiming the Word of God*

**Saint Timothy's Catholic Church**

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# The Ministry of Lector

## I. Theology of Lectoring

### A. Responsibility and Role of Lector

1. Greatest preaching is our presence – our actions always speak louder than words
2. The Lector has the responsibility of making God present to the community – if we aren't effective, God's Word may not be received by the folks in the pews.
3. Remember, Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and we are Jesus' word made flesh (the church)
4. You are a disciple of Jesus when you proclaim the Word!

### B. History of the Office of Lector

1. Early church expected Jesus to return quickly – little concern about who could proclaim
2. By 200 AD, there was a list of who could proclaim the Word
3. Office of Lector – very special office and not many called

### C. Word of God in the Assembly

1. What we read are not simply words on a page – they are God's living word
2. The Lector must make the Word of God come alive
3. Lectors are not to become the focus of attention – these are not dramatic readings!

### D. Visible Sign of God's Word

1. Lector holds Lectionary (Book of Gospels) for all to see during the Entrance Procession because the Word of God is still in the book
2. After proclaiming the Word of God or at the end of Mass, the book is no longer held up because the Word is now amongst the assembly

## II. Preparation

- A. We are most effective when we have prepared in advance to proclaim – the earlier we start in the week the more effective we are
- B. Preparation involves reading for the literal meaning of the Word, but it also involves reading to understand the Word.
- C. Preparation doesn't mean memorization, particularly if memorization causes you to lose your feeling for what God is trying to say to you.

## H. Mistakes

1. Don't call attention to your mistake by saying things like "Excuse me."
2. Keep on going — don't go back and try to correct the mistake.
3. If you start to read the wrong reading: stop, find the correct reading and start again with "A reading from ..."

## Lector Checklist

1. Stress words
2. Sense units
3. Feeling words
4. Volume level
5. Change of pace
6. Keeping voice up at the end of a sentence
7. Body reverence

Practice!

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## Notes

9. Pace
  - a. When people are nervous, they tend to read too quickly.
  - b. Some sentences demand that you go slowly
  - c. Some sentences can stand being read more rapidly
10. Pitch – when people are nervous, the pitch of their voice tends to rise.

#### E. Pronunciation

1. Try the pronunciation guide in the sacristy if the guides in the Lector Workbook aren't sufficient
2. If you still have a question, ask the “oldest” priest to get a sense of the accepted pronunciation

#### F. Body Reverence

1. Cross your hands mid-torso (papal handshake) as you walk to the ambo
2. It is not necessary to reverence the altar before or after the reading unless you cross in front of the tabernacle (it calls too much attention to the reader).
3. Avoid dropping your crossed hands too low (What are you trying to hide?)
4. Place both hands on the top of the book
5. Use your finger to mark your place.
6. Keep your head down at the start, look up and announce the reading ... then pause before you start the reading
7. At the end, pause, look up, say “The Word of the Lord” and continue to look at the people before returning to your seat
8. Before returning to your seat, turn the page to the next reading.
9. After the Intentions, wait until the presider has finished the closing prayer before returning to your seat.

#### G. Microphone tips

1. If you are the first reader, adjust microphone *before* Mass
2. If you are the second reader, wait to adjust the microphone until after the presider or cantor has stopped speaking or singing.
3. Know where you want the microphone to be and adjust the microphone in one motion – do not work it back and forth.
4. Don't think you are too loud – you aren't (99% of the time)
5. Watch for the popping letters: “P” and “B”
  - a. “Soften” the volume on these words
  - b. Use them as an opportunity to slightly turn your head away from the microphone and make eye contact
5. Watch for the hissing letters: “s” and “z”
  - a. “Soften” the volume on these words
  - b. Use them as an opportunity to slightly turn your head away from the microphone and make eye contact

**D. Suggested Preparation Plan** – this is how Lectors are being taught to prepare to proclaim. You should adjust this plan to reflect your needs.

1. Sunday/Monday
  - a. Read through all of the readings to gain a sense of the underlying theme uniting the readings.
  - b. Use this theme to help you meditate on the readings during the week as time permits
2. Tuesday/Wednesday
  - a. Without becoming overly concerned with how you will proclaim it at Mass, read aloud the reading you have been assigned. Think about what is going on in your community of faith (family, neighbors, coworkers, parish, etc.)
  - b. Ask what is God saying to all of us in the reading.
3. Thursday/Friday
  - a. Begin reading aloud with an ear as to how you will read at Mass.
  - b. Think about how to divide up the phrases in the sentences to convey the meaning
  - c. Think about what words you will stress
  - d. Think about where the pauses belong
  - e. Think about where you can “read ahead” and maintain eye contact as you proclaim the Word.
  - f. Revise your approach as you continue to practice.
  - g. Remind yourself about the underlying theme uniting the readings – has it changed in your mind during the course of the week?
4. Saturday
  - a. Finish practicing by continuing to read aloud think about the decisions reached on Thursday/Friday
  - b. A total of 10 times reading it aloud during the week may not be too many times to practice reading aloud.
5. Sunday
  - a. Practice reading aloud
  - b. Pray for the presence of God to guide you while you proclaim His Word.

### III. Analyze the Readings

#### A. Scripture is composed of different literary forms and often need to be proclaimed differently

1. Historical narrative
2. Story telling
3. Liturgical proclamation
4. Theological teaching – often requires the most effort to convey the meaning
5. Dialog and drama – how will you convey the different voices?
6. Psalms -- parallelism

## B. Watch and listen how others read aloud

1. Children's programs – lots of feeling, clearly different voices, pauses
2. Newscasters – generally matter-of-fact, sincerity
3. Some evangelical preachers (perhaps not a positive example)

## C. The Readings

1. Stress words
  - a. Identify *stress* words
  - b. Example: "I never said he stole your money."
  - c. Stress nouns and verbs rather than articles and prepositions
2. Sense units
  - a. Break sentences into the groups that will convey the real meaning of the readings
  - b. Punctuation can give you a good clue, but sometimes that is not enough – you must think through how your reading will convey the meaning
  - c. In Psalms and other poetic reading, the end of a stanza does not always signify the end of the thought
  - d. Example: A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.
3. Feeling words
  - a. You are bringing God's Word alive
  - b. Your reading is not a dramatic interpretation – leave that to the Holy Spirit
4. Pauses
  - a. Identify the location of pauses to match your stress words and sense units
  - b. A rule of thumb: A pause cannot be "too long"
  - c. Example: For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, "Sit here, please," while you say to the poor one, "Stand here," or "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs?

## IV. Wardrobe

- A. Not distracting
- B. Respectful and appropriately reverent

V. **Techniques** – these techniques seem to work well for most people, but, if necessary, you must adjust them to suit your style and to maximize your effectiveness

### A. Keeping Your Place

1. Use your finger to mark your place
2. This technique gives you confidence to look up and know that you can find your place again when you look back down

### B. Eye contact

1. Practice the reading aloud to gain confidence
2. Practice the reading with the text at the same elevation as in the ambo – the Billy Graham technique probably doesn't work for most of us.
3. Memorize the attribution of the reading (e.g. "A reading from the Book of Acts") so you can look at the congregation as you say it.
4. Read to the end of a line (a sense unit) and look at the people as you say it.
5. Avoid being a "windshield" wiper as you mechanically scan from one side of the church to another
6. Avoid bobbing the head
7. Avoid undue localization of eye contact
  - a. The Sheep and the Goats (side to side as well as near and far)
  - b. "Adulterers, liars, cheats, and thieves ..."

### C. Volume Level

1. It is unusual for someone to be *too loud!*
2. Need a balance between "quiet" and "loud" words – relative volume level
3. Keep your voice up at the end of a sentence

### D. Pauses and Pace

1. Don't rush!
2. Use pauses effectively
3. It is unusual for a pause to be *too long*
4. Your pauses allow the Word of God to "swirl" throughout the assembly
5. Take some time when you look back down before you start reading again
6. With a long sentence, you may need to add pauses in addition to those provided by punctuation (keeping in mind your sense units)
7. Pause *after* saying "A reading from ..."
8. Pause *before* saying "... The Word of the Lord" and keep your head up looking at the congregation.