

Proclaiming the word of God

Guidelines and suggestions for ministers of the word

From the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (April 2005)*:

“In the readings .. God is speaking to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit; and Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word.” (n55)

PREPARATION

As with all ministries exercised on behalf of the Christian community, it is important to prepare carefully by PRAYER. This is, essentially, the principal necessary ingredient in fulfilling any calling from the Lord. If the minister of the word prepares with prayer he or she, when exercising their ministry, will be helping others to pray.

THE ROTA

If you are unable to make your turn, **please** ensure that a replacement is found in good time. This must be a fellow reader whose name also appears on the rota. It may be best to arrange a straight swap.

PREPARING YOUR READING

The best way to do this is to look at the reading well in advance. Consider the passage prayerfully and reflectively, making sure that you understand its contents and how to pronounce difficult words or phrases. It will also help if you attempt to put the reading in context – why it comes where it does in the Bible, what comes after it, and so on.

ARRIVE IN GOOD TIME

This will allow you an opportunity to pray, and for you to ask any questions that you may have. Please remember to check the lectionary and ensure that your reading is the one you expect it to be.

If you are doing the first reading, discover from the priest or music ministers whether the responsorial psalm and Gospel acclamation will be sung, or read by you. This will vary from Mass to Mass, particularly concerning the psalm. However, the Gospel acclamation will usually and normally be sung. You may return to your place in the assembly as soon as the alleluia is begun.

AFTER THE OPENING PRAYER

The readers approach the sanctuary and reverence the altar. The first reader then goes to the lectern.

AT THE LECTERN

Make yourself comfortable and stand tall. Take time to gather your thoughts. Ensure that the microphone is at an appropriate height for you. There is no hurry. Make eye contact with those to whom you will be proclaiming the word of God.

INTRODUCING THE READING

When introducing the reading, please do not use any unnecessary words. There is no need, for example, to tell the gathered assembly that this is the first/second reading – that is stating the obvious! Simply and clearly read exactly what the Lectionary provides, saying:

- A reading from the book of ...
- A reading from the prophet ...
- A reading from the letter of ...
- A reading from the letter of ... to ...

DURING THE READING

Three basic rules should be borne in mind:

- 1 Eye contact remains important throughout – it is an essential tool of communication.
- 2 You can never read too slowly.
- 3 You can never read too loudly.

Additionally, do not be fooled by the microphone – it is a devious animal! It will not do your work for you, but may fool you into thinking that it does. It remains necessary, throughout your reading, to proclaim audibly, clearly, reverently and slowly, with faith and understanding – as if, in fact, the microphone did not exist. This is particularly important in a large building. Always imagine that you are reading to someone sitting on the back bench. Even so, the microphone is there to help you: do speak into it and allow it to assist you in your ministry.

ENDING THE READING

At the conclusion of the actual reading, make a pause of several seconds, allowing your hearers to reflect on and receive what you have proclaimed (you could say, silently, one Hail Mary). After this short pause, say confidently:

This is the word of the Lord. *(See concluding note 1)*

Remain at the lectern until the people have responded with ‘Thanks be to God’.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

If the psalm is to be sung, return to your place on the sanctuary. If the psalm is to be said, remain at the lectern. It is not necessary to introduce the psalm. Having paused briefly after ‘Thanks be to God’ (perhaps another silent Hail Mary?), simply announce the text of the response without introduction – everybody is aware that they are expected to respond. Phrases like ‘The response to the psalm is ..’ are clumsy and unnecessary.

When the psalm is concluded, return to your place on the sanctuary.

SECOND READING

After the psalm, the second reader approaches the lectern (or, if it is sung, towards the end of the music). Guidelines all apply as above.

AT THE END

After ‘Thanks be to God’, the reader returns to their place in the church, making an appropriate reverence on the way. (*See concluding note 2*)

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The alleluia, also called the Gospel Acclamation, will usually be sung. On Sundays the music ministers will lead the singing. On weekdays, the reader (or the priest) will usually lead the intoning of the alleluia for everyone to join.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

If you are reading the Prayer of the Faithful (also called the General Intercessions or Bidding Prayers), please ensure – before Mass begins – that they are placed on the lectern in readiness. You will probably want to spend a few minutes looking through them and familiarizing yourself with them. Read them carefully. Ask about any unusual names or pronunciations – especially among the sick and dead. It is important to take as much care over the Prayer of the Faithful as with scripture. Pray.

In good time before the end of the Creed (also called the Profession of Faith), make your way back to the lectern. When announcing the intentions, please pause sufficiently to allow people the chance to make the prayers their own, before saying ‘Lord, in your mercy’ or ‘Lord, hear us’. Do not rush the prayers. Remember that you are simply bidding people to pray and then leaving them time to do so. For example:

Reader: We pray for peace in the world.
 [Pause for 5 – 10 seconds]
 Lord, in your mercy/Lord, hear us.

SILENCE

Silence has a pre-eminent place in the liturgy of the Church. Do not be afraid to leave reasonable spaces for silence before, during and after your reading. It is particularly appropriate between readings.

Some concluding notes

- 1 The new *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (available from Easter 2005) concludes the reading thus:
‘The word of the Lord’
This is a better translation of the Latin and concurs with usage in the rest of Europe and the USA. Although it is permitted to use this form now confusion may be caused if different readers say different things. Technically, it is now the norm with the publication of the *General Instruction* in Latin and will feature in the publication of the new Roman Missal. However, perhaps it’s best to wait until the actual text appears in print in the new Lectionary – which is still some years away from publication. Interestingly, it provides a mirror-text for receiving Holy Communion (i.e. ‘The word of the Lord’/‘The Body of Christ’) and so emphasizes the unitive element of the two essential components of the celebration of Mass: word and sacrament. For the moment, then, parish practice remains the same: the reading will conclude **This is the word of the Lord.**
- 2 Please note that it is always the altar that you are reverencing, so a bow to the centre is most appropriate. Please do not bow to the priest – it’s not good for his ego!
- 3 To give due emphasis to the readings there should always be two proclaimers when there are two readings. If a person on the rota is not present, it is preferable to find a replacement from those present rather than asking one person to proclaim both readings.
- 4 The word of God is an important focus for prayer. It is most appropriate that readings should be proclaimed from the Lectionary at the lectern and not from a missal or a photocopy.
- 5 The line given in italics at the top of the reading is a focus for personal prayer and meditation. It is not intended that it should be read aloud.
- 6 **THANK YOU** for sharing so generously and faithfully in this important ministry!