

Lector Guidelines Diocese of Dunedin

Abbreviations used in this document

CSL - Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

GIRM - General Instruction of the Roman Missal

ILM - Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass

Introduction

The purpose of these lector guidelines is to provide some general observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. These guidelines 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. (CSL #37)

Ministers of the Word

According to the ancient tradition and the teaching of the Church, the readings **other than the Gospel** are proclaimed by lay ministers called lectors. The Gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the Deacon, or in his absence the presiding priest. In concelebrations, one other than the presiding celebrant proclaims the Gospel. General Intercessions may be proclaimed by the above mentioned or even another person. (ILM #49, 50, 52, GIRM #59)

Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly, and through them God speaks to the gathered faithful. The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy, it is **proclaimed**. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith and also rouses faith in those who hear the Word proclaimed.

Ideally, members of the assembly listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and do not read along in missalettes, although reading aids may be used by the hearing impaired. Listening is not an isolated moment. It is a way of life. It means openness to the Lord's voice not only in the Scriptures but in the events of our daily lives and in the experience of our brothers and sisters. It is not just **my** listening but **our listening together** for the Lord's word to the community.

Requirements

All liturgical ministers, especially the ministers of the Word, must be properly trained for their ministry. The ministry of the Word requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding and love of the scriptures. Lectors should be fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim.(ILM #55).

In order that the service of the Word might be 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 and interpreting it sufficiently so as to evoke a response from the assembly. 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. It is unacceptable to rush into the sacristy just before Mass to "look at the readings" (ILM #55)

Immediate preparation is also expected of all lectors. This requires arriving at least 15 minutes before the liturgy, locating the readings in the Lectionary, arranging the microphone, making sure that the sound system is properly functioning, and attending to any other duties as required by the parish. If the lectors are to read the petitions for the General Intercessions, these should be reviewed before the liturgy begins.

Symbols

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 these symbols. The symbols that are integral to any celebration of the Word are: the lector(s), the book(s), the ambo, and the processions.

Lectors - The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to participate in the entire liturgy, including prayers, songs, ritual actions etc. It is inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the Liturgy of the Word.

Books - The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. The readings are always proclaimed from these liturgical books, and never from a missalette or participation aid, both of which are transitory and made from throw-away materials.

Ambo - The ambo is the symbol of the presence of the Word of God just as the altar is the symbol of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word takes place at the ambo, always a permanent, solemn, dignified and prominent place. Candles and other decorative elements may be placed around it but without obscuring it. The ambo is to be used for the proclaimed Word, namely, the readings, the responsorial psalm, the Gospel and the Homily. It may rightly be used for the Prayer of the Faithful because of its close connection with the entire Liturgy of the Word. *A lectern or cantor's stand is best used for song leading and announcements.* All scripture readings take place at the single ambo, including the psalm, whether sung or spoken. (ILM #31,33)

Processions - Among the actions in the Liturgy of the Word, processions are important. Lectors are to take part in the entrance procession. They walk immediately in front of the deacon or presider and behind the altar servers. The Deacon or one of the lectors solemnly carries the closed Book of Gospels by holding it with uplifted hands so that it is displayed to the assembly and places it flat on the altar. The Lectionary is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins. If there is no Deacon, one of the lectors carries the Book of Gospels in the opening procession and places it flat on the altar. When carrying the Book of the Gospels (or any other object used in the liturgy), the lector does not genuflect or bow. If not carrying anything, the lector simply walks with hands at his/her sides and makes a profound bow to the altar before going to his/her seat (GIRM #120,128,172,194,195).

At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector approaches the ambo slowly and with reverence. The lector pauses before beginning the first reading while the assembly is settling. After completing the reading, the lector *remains in place for a period of silence* before leaving the ambo.

The first reader returns to his/her seat after the reading and before the Psalm is intoned. The second reader approaches the ambo after the Psalm and returns to his/her seat before the Gospel Acclamation, *after allowing for a period of silence, as described above.* When only one lector proclaims both readings, he/she is seated during the singing of the Psalm. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried. (GIRM # 128,130)

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.

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders recollection must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his

people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembled congregation, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer. Proper times for silence during the Liturgy of the Word are, for example, before the Liturgy begins, after the first and the second reading, and after the Homily (ILM #28).

Some Useful Hints

Ministers of the Word are not to add their own words to the texts. The words of announcement ("A reading from...") and conclusion ("The Word of the Lord") are intended to be read exactly as printed in the lectionary, and need to be distinguished from the reading itself. Lectors make this distinction by observing a pause of two or three seconds after the former and before the latter phrase. Both are stated in a matter of fact tone without special emphasis. If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, the lector begins the recitation with the antiphon in the Lectionary. Announcing, "Responsorial Psalm" is unnecessary.

Anything that might distract from the proclaimed Word or from the dignity of this ministry is to be avoided. Such distractions include: leaning on the ambo, placing hands in pockets, shuffling from one foot to the other, wearing inappropriate or immodest clothing or wearing anything that draws attention to the lector. The Lector or Gospel Reader does not lift the Lectionary or the Book of Gospels while saying: "The Word/Gospel of the Lord."

Conclusion

"When this word is proclaimed in the Church and put into living practice, it enlightens the faithful through the working of the Holy Spirit and draws them into the entire mystery of the Lord as a reality to be lived" (ILM#47).