

Notes for Readers at Sunday Mass

"The sacraments are sacraments of faith, and faith has its origin and sustenance in the word."

"The Church is nourished spiritually at the table of God's word and at the table of the Eucharist."

General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass (GILM)

"Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action."

Pope Benedict

Reading in church

1 Reading in church is about **proclaiming** God's holy word. In this, more is required than simply reading a text aloud. The reader is a channel for communication of the inspired word of God in the scriptures to the whole assembly. This is a ministry of service which implies formation for the reader that is not only technical but also spiritual

Qualifications

2 Readers can be of any age so long as they are able to communicate God's word clearly and effectively, and give some evidence of living in accordance with the values inherent in what they are proclaiming. They should be baptised members of the Catholic Church (the Bishop may in exceptional circumstances waive this requirement.)

Preparation

3 Readers should prepare themselves as far in advance as possible, reading the text, studying it and reflecting on it and praying on it, as well as reading it **aloud** a number of times.

The ideal is for the reader to have read the text aloud a sufficient number of times to know sections of it virtually by heart and to have internalised it to some extent.

Read the passages carefully by yourself for meaning. What is the context, the style of writing (history, story, poetry, reprimand, encouraging) ?

Before Mass, check that the lectionary is open at the right page: the number of the Sunday (eg 27th) and the year (A,B or C).

Place in the church

4 Ministers should take their place among the general body of the people, somewhere convenient for reaching the sanctuary easily.

Dress

5 Ministers of the Word should dress in a manner appropriate to their holy ministry and one which is acceptable in the locality. No distinctive garb or insignia are used.

How many readers?

6 Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers (*GILM* 52). This not only helps avoid any possible monotony with the use of the same voice, but, more importantly, reflects the fact that the two readings will be different in literary form and will accordingly need a different style of proclamation.

When to approach the sanctuary

7 The best time for readers to move to the sanctuary is while everyone is seating themselves and getting comfortable. Readers should only start to move **after** the 'Amen' response to the Opening Prayer of the Mass has been said by all.

Both readers approach together. There is no need to rush.

The readers may bow to the altar, a symbol of the presence of Christ, as they pass, while remembering that Christ is also present in the very proclamation of the word. They do not need to genuflect towards a tabernacle or bow to the presiding priest.

For the General Intercessions, the reader should only start to approach the altar after the Creed has finished.

The Book of the Word

8 The readings are normally to be proclaimed from the Lectionary.

Pieces of paper or missalettes are not appropriate for the proclamation of the word, since they lack the necessary dignity (cf. *GILM* 37). In particular, pieces of paper should not be carried openly to the ambo or taken out of a pocket and unfolded at the ambo.

On special occasions, when a reading is not available in a Lectionary or bible, a piece of paper, ideally in a folder or some other suitable container, may be used, but it should be left on the ambo **before the service begins**. The same is true of the intentions for the General Intercessions.

Proclamation techniques

9 It is good practice for a reader to wait until the congregation have settled before beginning the reading. Communication requires the full attention of the people as well as the preparation of the reader.

Waiting gives readers a 'space' to prepare themselves to proclaim the word and make eye-contact with the people. Doing this may require practice to become natural to the reader.

Speak slowly and clearly projecting your voice (even with the aid of a microphone).

The manner of delivery should not be rushed (cf. *GILM* 28), and good use of variations of pitch, pace and volume will help to convey the meaning of the text.

Help the people to understand the reading by the careful way you read it.

The two extremes to avoid is the dead pan voice and the over-dramatic delivery.

It is the word of the Lord not that of the reader.

Don't worry too much about proper names - there is no one around from that time to correct you.

The trick is to be consistent and appear confident that your pronunciation is the correct one.

A significant proportion of all readers read too quickly, and begin before the people are ready to listen.

Some detailed points

10 It is not always necessary to begin the proclamation with the words "A reading from". In particular, saying "The First Reading is a reading" is telling the people twice over something that they do not actually need to know. Slight variations from time to time in the opening formula can draw people's attention and interest, and thus avoid the boredom of routine. For example, a reader might occasionally begin with just the words "From the prophet Isaiah".

11 A pause of at least 10 and preferably 15 seconds is strongly recommended between the proclamation of the actual scripture text and the reader saying "This is the word of the Lord". This not only gives the text that has just been proclaimed a chance to be absorbed by the listeners before the conventional concluding formula moves people's minds on to what comes next, but it also provides the reader her/himself with an opportunity to take the word on board and make it her/his own.

Such silent pauses are recommended in *GILM*. A silence of 10 or 15 seconds will at first seem very long to the person reading, but not nearly so long to those who are given this time to pray and reflect.

It may take some time for this to become natural to both reader and congregation.

12 Similarly, in the General Intercessions a 10-15 second pause is highly recommended after the announcement of the intention that the people are being asked to pray about, and before the invitation to respond (e.g. "Lord, in your mercy...").

The Responsorial Psalm

It is recommended that a significant gap always be left after the first reading to give time for reflection on that reading.

The psalm should **not** be introduced by a phrase such as "The response to the psalm is" or, after each verse "Response", but should be spoken immediately.

The Gospel Acclamation

13 The Alleluia or the Lenten Gospel Acclamation "must be sung and during it all stand" (*GILM* 23).

It should **not** be introduced

When to leave the sanctuary

14 In liturgy, every movement draws attention to itself. A useful rule of thumb is for ministers only to move when there is some other movement going on, to minimize distraction. (Cf. 7 above concerning when to approach the sanctuary.)

After the 2nd reading the practice is that no one stands until the priest stands. In such a case, the 2nd reader should remain standing quietly at the ambo until the Gospel reader and people all stand and then the Gospel Acclamation begins.

At the end of the General Intercessions, the person announcing the intentions should not move away until **after** the presiding priest has finished the concluding prayer. The movement will be 'covered' by everyone else sitting down, preparing for the collection, etc, etc.

Return slowly - no need to rush.