



LITURGICAL GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS

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The Guidelines that follow are intended to offer a synthesis of ecclesial documentation concerning the role of the lector within the celebration of the sacred liturgy. As well, they highlight several aspects of this ministry as it is to be carried out within the parish.

INTRODUCTION

When Sacred Scripture is proclaimed in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are an element of high importance in the Mass.¹

A profound bond links sacred Scripture and the faith of believers. Since faith comes from hearing, and what is heard is based on the word of Christ (cf. Rom 10:17), believers are bound to listen attentively to the word of the Lord, both in the celebration of the Mass and in their personal prayer and reflection”.²

Saint Paul the Apostle Church has prepared the following guidelines for Lectors. These guidelines apply to those ministering during daily Mass, Sunday Mass, Holy Days of Obligation, as well as other liturgical celebrations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide 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.

In current practice, most instituted Lectors are seminarians and candidates for the permanent diaconate. However, recognizing the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgy and the genuine need for persons to perform this liturgical action, the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM)* provides for others to serve in the role of Lector as well:

*In the absence of an instituted Lector, other lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from sacred scripture, people who are truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared, so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for sacred scripture.*³

The guidelines that follow refer to those persons who serve as non-instituted Lectors in parishes, schools, and other institutions within the Diocese of Columbus.

¹ *GIRM*, 29, 55

² *Aperuit Illis* 7

³ *GIRM*, 101

PART I: BECOMING A LECTOR

As noted above, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states that Lectors should be “truly suited to carrying out this function,” and that they should be “carefully prepared.”⁴ In the Diocese of Columbus, for an individual to be regarded as “truly suited” for this role, it is required that the Lector be:

- ❖ of Confirmation age;
- ❖ a Catholic who has received First Holy Communion and Confirmation, as well as one who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be assumed;
- ❖ free from any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;
- ❖ reverential, respectful of his/her faith, and of good moral character;
- ❖ possessed of the necessary ability and talents to proclaim the Word of God in a clear, dignified, and effective manner; and
- ❖ if married, be in a valid marriage according to the law of the Catholic Church.

PREPARATION

The Diocese of Columbus requires that a person participate in a program of formation before being commissioned as a Lector. This program is conducted by the parish. Topics covered will include:

- ❖ Sacred Scripture as the Word of God
- ❖ Introduction to the *Lectionary*: Contents and Structure
- ❖ Techniques for Effective Proclamation of the Word of God
- ❖ Pastoral and Liturgical Considerations Related to the Role of Lector

All Lectors must be properly trained for their ministry. The ministry of Lector requires skill in public reading, knowledge of the principles of liturgy, and an understanding and love of the scriptures.⁵

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 desire for inclusive language.⁶

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass [LM]* 52, 55; *GIRM* 101

⁶ *LM, Intro* 111

CONTINUING FORMATION

Lectors should strive to develop their abilities as proclaimers of God's Word beyond this initial training. Preparation, prayer, study, and practice are key to one's development as an effective minister of God's Word, and these practices should be fostered by the parish where a Lector serves. Initially, a parish will provide opportunities for a new Lector to practice reading from the ambo and to become familiar with the acoustics and amplification of a particular setting. Workbooks that provide scriptural commentary and aids to pronunciation may be given to Lectors during their term of service. Further opportunities for study and reflection may include afternoons or evenings of recollection, with a lecture or prayerful reflection on some aspect of sacred scripture or the ministry of Lectors. An introduction to different techniques for praying with scripture (e.g., *lectio Divina*, Ignatian method, scriptural rosary) can also serve as a helpful means of integrating one's personal devotion to God's Word with one's service as a Lector.

PART II: GENERAL INFORMATION

DRESS

No special vesture is necessary for the Lector. However, Lectors should be dressed in a manner which reflects the dignity of the Word of God. Athletic wear is not appropriate, as Lectors are expected to wear their "Sunday best" when serving in this role.

LITURGICAL BOOKS

The readings at Mass are to be taken from the *Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary* in a translation currently approved for use in the United States. It is unlawful to substitute other non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial psalm, which contain the Word of God.⁷

Bound copies of the *Book of the Gospels* and the *Lectionary* bespeak the permanence and beauty of God's Word. For this reason, readings should be proclaimed directly from these liturgical books, and not from a missalette, printout, or electronic device.⁸

STYLE OF PROCLAMATION

The *Introduction to the Lectionary* states, "a speaking style on the part of the reader that is audible, clear, and intelligent is the first means of transmitting the Word of God properly to the assembly."⁹ An "audible, clear, and intelligent" proclamation of God's Word requires an appropriate use of inflection, pause, projection, phrasing, articulation, posture, and pace.

⁷ *GIRM*, 57

⁸ *LM*, 37

⁹ *Ibid*, 14

Lectors are to be trained in a reading style that is clear, audible, and intelligent, for it is the first means of properly transmitting the Word of God to the assembly. The voice of the Lector should correspond to the genre of the text itself and should be suited to the form and the solemnity of the celebration.

In applying these techniques of proclamation, the Lector should consider that his/her primary task is to present the Word of God in all its richness and meaning. Hence, the Lector should never proclaim God's Word in a dull or robotic manner, but should always work to accurately reflect the genre, tone, and style of the scriptural passage in one's own manner of proclamation. As well, a style of reading or the use of physical gestures that would turn the proclamation of scripture into a dramatic act directing the attention of the assembly from the Word of God to the reader should be strictly avoided.

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.¹⁰

LECTORS & OTHER MINISTRIES

The celebration of the Mass calls for the use of many different ministries. In general, it is preferable that a different person performs each liturgical function. If, however, a shortage of properly trained individuals makes this impossible, it is permissible to have one individual perform multiple roles.¹¹

DIVIDING READINGS

"Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available."¹² However, it is not permitted that two Lectors should divide the reading of the same scriptural passage between themselves.¹³ An exception to this rule concerns the reading of the passion narrative on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. For these readings, Lectors may read the roles of the narrator and the voice while the priest-celebrant reads the part of Christ.

¹⁰ *LM* 4, 55; *GIRM* 38, 101

¹¹ *GIRM*, 110

¹² *LM*, 52

¹³ *GIRM*, 109

PART III: THE ROLE OF LECTOR AT MASS

PREPARATION

Lectors should thoroughly prepare themselves to proclaim the Word of God through study, prayer, and practice. Familiarity with the text, its role within the context of the whole of sacred scripture, and its relationship to the other readings for the day should be carefully considered. The Lector should set aside a time for prayer with the text to be proclaimed. As well, the proclamation of the readings should be practiced aloud prior to the celebration of Mass, and special attention should be paid to the pronunciation of difficult words or phrases.

Please check in at least 15 minutes prior to Mass at the check-in desk so that the “Greeter” knows you are there.

APPROACHING THE AMBO

The first pew in the South transept (closest to the Ambo) is where the Lectors are to sit. Sitting here will speed up the process of getting to the Ambo. After the Collect (Opening Prayer) is finished, and the priest sits down, the first Lector approaches the sanctuary stairs, bows, ascends the steps, and enters the Ambo. Following the Reading, the Lector goes back the way they came to their seat. If there is only one Lector at a Mass, following the First Reading, the Lector exits the Ambo, and stands near the back wall for the Responsorial Psalm. After the conclusion of the singing, the Lector re-enters the Ambo for the Second Reading. At the conclusion of the Second Reading, the Lector closes the Lectionary and places it to the side and then returns to their seat.

For daily Mass, the Lector may be called upon to read the Responsorial Psalm.

PROCLAMATION OF THE READINGS

The readings at Mass should be proclaimed from the ambo.¹⁴ When the Lector is already in the sanctuary, he or she proceeds directly to the ambo. If the Lector is entering the sanctuary, he/she makes a profound bow to the altar.¹⁵

Readings should always be introduced with the text provided in the *Lectionary*, "A reading from...". As well, readings should be concluded with the phrase, "The Word of the Lord". Readings must be read integrally and without any additions, omissions, or changes to the text as given in the *Lectionary*. In order to foster meditation on God's Word, the readings may be followed by a brief period of silence.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid, 196

¹⁵ *Ceremonial of Bishops*, 72

¹⁶ *GIRM*, 45, 56; *LM*, 28

THE PSALM

It is preferable that the responsorial psalm be sung.¹⁷ However, if there is no psalmist, the Lector may proclaim the responsorial psalm after the first reading.¹⁸ In this case, the Lector should follow the first reading with a short pause. The response to the psalm should then be recited, without any introductory words (*e.g.*, "The response is..."). The psalm itself should be recited in a manner that is conducive to meditation on the Word of God.¹⁹

THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

When no deacon is present, a Lector may announce the intentions of the universal prayer from the ambo.²⁰ When announcing the intentions, the Lector should consider that these texts are the prayers of the entire gathered community. Hence, a Lector should not add his/her own personal intentions into the universal prayer. Towards the end of the Creed, the second Lector (if there is one) enters the Ambo. The priest will read the opening prayer to the petitions. The Lector will then read the petitions. After the last one, the priest will recite a closing prayer. Remain in the Ambo until the prayer is completed, then return to your pew.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2021, the first Lector will be reading announcements prior to the beginning of Mass. These announcements will be found in the sacristy prior to Mass. Please pick them up in the sacristy, read over them, and ask the priest or deacon for any clarification. At three minutes prior to the start of Mass, the first Lector will enter the Ambo and read the announcements. At the conclusion of the announcements, please return to your pew.

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¹⁷ Ibid, 61

¹⁸ Ibid, 99

¹⁹ Ibid, 61

²⁰ Ibid, 197