

GUIDELINES FOR LECTORS

St. John the Evangelist, Vancouver

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines apply to those ministering during Sunday Mass, as well as other liturgical celebrations. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide some general observations and principles on this important liturgical ministry of the Church. These guidelines also 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. These are produced in a spirit of helping our parish experience the proclaimed Word of God as a powerful celebration by offering some basic, essential principles required by the very nature of the liturgy (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #29). Servers, lectors, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought, therefore, to discharge their office with the sincere piety and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God's people.

Consequently, they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, each in his own measure, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.

It is highly recommended that lectors meet together to form communal bonds and discuss the theological as well as the practical and spiritual aspects of their ministry. These guidelines may serve as suitable material for study at such gatherings.

MINISTERS OF THE WORD

1. 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 practice of ordained ministers proclaiming these readings is improper (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #51). The use of two readers – one for each reading – is encouraged. For this reason, the parish community of St. John the Evangelist strives for enough trained lectors to fulfill this goal.

2. The Gospel is ordinarily proclaimed by the deacon. In the absence of a deacon, the priest proclaims the Gospel. In con-celebrations, one other than the presiding celebrant proclaims the Gospel (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #49, 50; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #59).

3. Announcements and/or any commentary during the celebration are read by someone other than the lectors. General Intercessions may be read by the deacon, the cantor, the lector or someone else (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #53).

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

4. The proclamation of the Word of God is truly a ministry in the Church. Lectors bring the living Word of God to the liturgical assembly. In and through them God speaks to the gathered faithful. The ministry of the Word, therefore, is to be treated seriously and with great dignity.

5. The Word of God is not merely read during the liturgy. It is proclaimed. Effective proclamation involves the delivery of the message with clarity, conviction and appropriate pace. Proclamation is a special ministry which presupposes faith and also rouses faith in those who hear the Word proclaimed.

6. Ideally, members of the assembly listen to the proclamation of the Scriptures and do not read along in missalettes. In the act of communal listening, the worshipers experience not only unity among themselves but also the presence of Christ speaking to them through the Word (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #45). Properly there are “no booklets for the assembly to follow the reading, although by the front doors there are Sunday Missals for the hearing impaired and for those whose language is different from the one used at this Mass” (Today's Missal, Eng. / Span. - OCP) 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

7. 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. Normally, only properly trained and commissioned lectors are scheduled for liturgy (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #55). Lector training courses in basic lector formation are offered through the parish. Ideally, the readings at weddings and funerals are proclaimed by lectors of the parish who have been properly trained. However, for pastoral reasons, family members or friends may carry out this ministry. The parish provides assistance and guidance so that God's Word is proclaimed with clarity and dignity.

8. Lectors are fully initiated, practicing Catholics whose lives witness to the Word which they proclaim. On special occasions and for pastoral reasons, a young person who is not yet fully initiated (i.e., not yet confirmed) may serve as lector during a liturgy with proper training.

9. Normally, lectors are commissioned for their ministry, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The rite of commissioning is found in the Book of Blessings [Chapter 61, p. 691].

10. Those who are presently lectors should periodically participate in enrichment classes, bible study courses, parish or Archdiocesan workshops on Scripture and/or proclamation techniques.

PREPARATION

11. 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. Rushing into the sacristy just before Mass to “look at the readings” is to be avoided. The readings for every Sunday and weekday of the liturgical year can be found on the website of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops at: www.usccb.org. Additionally, lectors will receive an annual Workbook for Lectors.

12. 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.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

13. In recent years sensitivity for inclusive language in the liturgy has been encouraged. It is important to note, however, that the lector is not at liberty to change the approved scriptural and prayer texts for the liturgy. In the preparation of other texts, such as the General Intercessions or commentary of any type, language which is inclusive should be used.

SYMBOLS IN THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

14. 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. A brief word on each of these is in order.

15. The lector ministers as one of the worshipping assembly and is expected to participate in the entire liturgy. It is inappropriate for a lector to participate actively only in the Liturgy of the Word.

16. The Scriptures for Mass are contained in the Lectionary and the Book of Gospels. Both of these are available in permanent, dignified and beautifully-bound books, with large print for ease of proclamation. There are six volumes of the current lectionary: one for each of the three cycles of Sunday and holyday readings; two weekday volumes and a volume of readings for ritual and votive Masses and Masses for various needs and occasions. The Book of Gospels is contained in one large volume.

17. 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 the ambo. 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.

RITUAL ACTION

18. 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 and the Eucharistic Ministers. The deacon or in the absence of the deacon, the 1st reader solemnly carries the closed Book of Gospels by holding it with uplifted hands so that it is displayed to the assembly and places it on the altar. The Lectionary is never carried in procession, but is placed on the ambo before Mass begins (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #120, 128, 172, 194).

19. When carrying the Book of the Gospels (or any other object used in the liturgy), the reader does not genuflect or bow. If not carrying anything, the reader simply walks with hands at his/her sides and together genuflects or if physically unable to genuflect, makes a profound bow to the altar before going to his/her seat.

20. Since the lectors are a part of the worshipping community, it is most appropriate that they sit in the assembly in a location that gives them close easy access to the ambo, and come forward from there to proclaim the readings.

21. At the time of the Liturgy of the Word, the lector walks forward, reverences the altar with a bow then approaches the ambo 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 brief period of silence before leaving the ambo (General Instruction of the Roman Missal #128, 130; Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28). After stepping down, the first reader reverences the altar with a bow then return 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, in the same manner as described above. When only one lector proclaims both readings, he/she is seated behind the ambo during the singing of the Psalm. All movements in the liturgy are performed with dignity and grace; they are never hurried.

22. 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. On occasion, he may be accompanied by acolytes and thurifer. The Gospel procession is an important ritual action in the Liturgy of the Word. All remain standing for the Gospel. The posture of standing highlights the fact that the Gospel reading enjoys a pre-eminent place among the scripture readings. Incense may be used in the Liturgy of the Word. When incense is used, traditionally the Book of Gospels is incensed before the Gospel is proclaimed.

23. The General Intercessions are introduced from the chair by the presiding celebrant and read by the deacon, lector or other minister. The person reading the intercessions remains in place until the presiding celebrant has concluded the prayer.

24. The lector joins the presider and other ministers in the closing procession. Neither the Lectionary nor the Book of Gospels is carried in the recessional.

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

25. Integral to the celebration of the Word of God is the Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia, except in Lent). Psalmody is designed to be sung and loses much of its beauty when it is recited. The Responsorial Psalm is part of the Liturgy of the Word and is sung or read, preferably from the ambo. The psalm can be sung in a variety of ways – responsorially, antiphonally or part sung/part recited. Lectors may need to check with the musicians beforehand as to whether anything is expected of them (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #20-22). The Gospel Acclamation is an acclamation which is always to be sung. If not sung, it is omitted (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #23; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #63d).

26. The leadership of music ministry properly belongs to the musicians. Lectors do not normally function as cantors of the Responsorial Psalm and/or the Gospel Acclamation.

SILENCE

27. In order to enable the assembly to ponder and reflect on the Word proclaimed, a period of silence follows each of the readings (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #128). Also, there is a brief period of silence after the Psalm. 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 this Liturgy begins, after the first and the second reading, after the homily (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass #28).

SOME USEFUL HINTS

28. 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.

29. If the Responsorial Psalm is recited, the lector begins the recitation with the antiphon in the Lectionary. Announcing, “Responsorial Psalm” is unnecessary.

30. The announcement of the reading (“A reading from . . .”) and the ending, (“The Word of the Lord”) 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.

31. 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.

32. 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” (Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass). TM