



The Catholic Community of St. John the Baptist

Proclaimers of the Word:
The Ministry of
the Reader



Lay Readers

*For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity,
as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 2:17



Proclaimer of the Word

Ministry: The act of sewing, ministration

The Mass is a ritual. There are things that must happen and happen in a certain way. As a Reader, you are asked to do things a certain way to enhance the rituals of the Mass.

We thank you for your willingness to serve the Church community in this special role.

Recommended Texts:

Introduction to the Lectionary (see the first pages of the Lectionary)

Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word (Yearly, LTP)



Prayer of a Minister of the Word

(In Preparation)

Lord, invest me with your power
as I prepare to proclaim the marvel of your message

I have prepared my reading,

I have tried to take within me the meaning of what I am about to proclaim.

Help me to proclaim, not just with my lips, but with my whole heart and soul.

Lord, make me a hollow reed so that your voice will be heard by all who hear me.

Free me of excessive concern over my performance.

Convert my feeling of nervousness and turn all my apprehension into an energy for proclaiming
your word with power and authority.

May your Spirit live in me and fill the holy word that I proclaim.

From the lectors of Our Lady, Star of the Sea Parish, Singapore <http://www.lectorprep.org/>

Mindset

“Christ is present in the liturgy through the Eucharist, the priest, and the assembly that prays and sings. He is also present in the Word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church” (Catechism, 1088, see also SC 7 and Mt. 18:20). Proclaiming the Word of God is much more complex than simply standing in front of the assembly and reading a text. It involves the proper understanding and appreciation of scripture, preparation, the use of the voice, and attention to acoustics and liturgical movement.

In order to put yourself in the perfect frame of mind, you should arrive at the church early and leave the entire outside world behind you. Your cares, your problems, aspirations, anxieties, plans, hobbies, hopes, and what's for dinner - all must stay outside. Find a quiet spot and sit or kneel and pray to the Lord whatever is in your heart. You might ask that He make you a worthy vessel for proclaiming His message and that His people hear His voice and not yours. Ask the Holy Spirit to be with you, that His flame be bright in your heart as you joyfully proclaim His Word.

Preparation

“You hit homeruns not by chance but by preparation” –Roger Maris

It is important that you are familiar with the reading prior to Mass time. St. John's provides each reader (or family if there is more than 1 reader per family) with a “*Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*” (LTP) . You should read through the

appropriate material at least two times during the week. Please note the commentary and proper pronunciation tips.

The most basic requirement: Readers should have a genuine love of scripture and belief in the truths found in the Word. The recommended texts listed above are the most helpful for preparing to proclaim the Word. Readers should become familiar with the bible and take advantage of the programs that the parish offers for bible study and reflection.

Those who normally fulfill the ministry of reader should be fully initiated members of the community--meaning you are a Catholic in good standing having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, and frequent the Sacrament of Penance/Confession--and of sufficient maturity and competency to undertake this ministry (Per Diocese of Orlando policy).

Use of the voice: The tone of voice used for proclaiming the Word should be clear and firm without exaggerated emphasis or monotone speech. The pace should be slow enough so that the text is understood. If the text requires pauses or emphasis on certain words or phrases, this should be done delicately.

Pronunciation guides can assist the reader with difficult words. Proper volume and distinct pronunciation of the lector helps the listener to easily hear the Word of God .

Please do not shout; use the microphone in order to be heard.

Pronunciation: There are basic pronunciation guides available that phonetically spell out the pronunciations of the Biblical names of people and places. For instance, Barrabus may be listed as buh-RAB-us or Capernaum as kuh-PER-num. Also, the reader's workbook provides guidelines for pronunciation for many, though not all, historical names and places in the readings. Please consult at least one of these sources as you prepare your reading and practice so you feel comfortable with the pronunciation. The congregation will appreciate your smooth handling of difficult words. On the other hand, lack of preparation is never as obvious as the reader who comes to a difficult word, stops and then stumbles through it. This can be easily avoided with careful attention to detail in advance and practice!

Enunciation: Enunciation is different from pronunciation. The latter involves using the tongue, lips and teeth to phonetically make the correct sounds of a word. Enunciation means that the speaker clearly articulates all the sounds that make up the word. For instance, a common mistake in enunciation is to drop the "d" or "t" sound from the end of a word. This is a dangerous practice in proclaiming because very often, it is precisely the inclusion of the "d" or "t" that separates one word from another. For instance, "mend" has a totally different meaning than "men". Likewise "sent" without a clearly enunciated "t" might be interpreted by listeners as "sin".

Rate: What do you think are the two biggest complaints about readers? One is rate and the other is volume, i.e. "They read too fast" and "I can't hear them."

Rate refers to how quickly or slowly one speaks. (It does not mean how much time one takes between thoughts or phrases; that's pausing.)

The best rate for a particular passage depends on the content of the reading but as a general rule, lectors should proclaim at one-half their normal speaking voice. That's right, one-half.

Slowing down accomplishes several things. First of all, people do not listen as fast as you may speak. People need time to digest what you are saying to them. Unless you slow down, they may not be able to keep up and will simply tune out. At that point, you've lost them and all that practice and preparation would have been for naught.

Secondly, slowing down helps achieve clearer pronunciation and enunciation.

Very importantly, slowing down brings an added dimension of power to the reading. Try it and see the difference for yourself.

Volume: The other of the two most common criticisms that listeners have of readers is they cannot be heard. (The other one is reading too fast.) Sometimes, the problem is equipment-related but more often than not, it has to do with the lector's ability to project, voice quality and/or their use of the microphone.

Not all readers or aspiring proclaimers have the ability to create effective volume. Some have small or naturally soft voices; others do not breathe correctly and still others may not realize that the volume they hear in their own voice at the ambo is not nearly as loud beyond the first few pews as they may think.

In addition, elements throughout the worship space will absorb sound from carpeting to winter coats.

The key to projecting effectively 1) is proper breathing, 2) a natural gift of volume, 3) correct microphone usage, 4) confidence.

Microphone Usage: It is crucial to find just the right spot or zone that will enable you to maximize your volume without creating explosive or popping sounds. These distracting and unwelcome noises occur most often on "p" and "t" sounds and are created by speaking too closely to the head of the microphone. The rush of air that comes from your mouth on these consonants (and others as well) generates a strong force of air that is magnified unpleasantly through the sensitive head of the mike.

This can be easily avoided by positioning the microphone head a little above your mouth (nose level) or a little below (chin level) so the rush of air goes above or below the head. You can also stand a little back but not too far or your voice may fade out.

Chin level is preferred to nose level because the microphone may block the view of your face and facial expressions are an important component of proclaiming, but ultimately, you have to go with the mike position that best projects your voice.

Pausing: Silence is golden. At least in the right spots, and the proper use of pausing is essential to effective proclaiming.

Let's consider some obvious places to use the pause:

- ⇒ to provide a segue when the reading is changing direction
- ⇒ to allow listeners to absorb an important point
- ⇒ to provide space between multiple thoughts in the same sentence
- ⇒ to take a breath
- ⇒ before and after quotes to offset the quote from the character or narrator
- ⇒ after the announcement line "A Reading from."
- ⇒ before the closing line, "The Word of the Lord"

Please keep in mind that pauses used too frequently within a sentence or paragraph will create a choppy effect. Strive for smoothness and fluidity. Pauses that interrupt a phrase or grouping of words in the wrong places can change the meaning or intended feeling. Pauses that are too long or too frequent can kill the pace of the reading and create drag. Coaching and practice will help you recognize and overcome these challenges.

Action Words: When proclaiming, it should always be your goal to bring the Word to life. In order to do this, you should among other things, take advantage of action words. Action words have inherent life because people can generally envision the actions indicated. However, action words will remain dormant if you gloss over them, mumble or rush past them. Let's give them the attention they deserve.

Some words may require increased energy or force, others gentility or quietness; some may be drawn out, others hastened. Remember, action words are verbs (but not all verbs are action words and not all verbs are worthy of emphasis). Try to find those words that will help paint a picture for your readers. Underline the key words and consider how you might emphasize them to help bring the passage to life. Be careful though not to overreach in your attempt to add color. Otherwise, you may appear theatrical or insincere and that would be distracting for the

listener. Also, be selective in what you emphasize; if you choose everything to stress, the result is that nothing is stressed.


"The Word of the Lord": The closing line is actually the most important line in every reading because it reminds us that God is speaking directly to us. He/she may be using a human voice but the words and the message are God's. Take care with this line. Speak it loudly and clearly. Please do not hurry through it or mutter it as an afterthought. As with the announcement line, separate it from the body of the reading with a strong, healthy pause of three to four seconds. Look the assembly in the eye when you proclaim the ending; do not rush away. Give its significance time to sink in. After all, this message that you proclaimed is directly from God. It should leave them with a sense of awe.

Acoustics: It is important to become familiar with how sound travels in your church. Churches with bright acoustics require more diction and slower paced reading than in a church that does not have bright acoustics. The reader should know about the proper use of a microphone. These devices, however, do not automatically make the lector sound better. They simply amplify what is already there. If the lector has poor diction to begin with, a microphone will not correct that inadequacy.

Liturgical Movement: Liturgical ministers should not become a distraction to the praying assembly. The role of the reader involves movement and postures that are standard for all Roman Catholic liturgies.

Body Language: The moment you step forward you are sending signals to your listeners. Are you reverent, dignified and sincere or hurried and anxious or cavalier? These signals come from how you carry yourself and what you wear.

You should adopt a good posture, if physically able to do so, and walk with hands folded or kept naturally at your side. Walk at a reverent pace, slower than usual. Do not bounce, swagger or sashay and above all, do not run or appear hurried. One can usually tell how a reading will go based on the reader's approach to the ambo. Those who race to the ambo will generally race through their reading. On the other hand, those who approach in a focused, deliberate manner will also proclaim that way.

Posture: Upon reaching the ambo stand squarely behind it. Stand on two feet, not one. Place your hands lightly on the lectionary or ambo or you may press them together as in a sign of prayer . 

Again, always strive to appear dignified, not nervous or casual. Do not put your hands anywhere other than on the lectionary or ambo or in front of you. Do not put your hands in your pockets, on your hips, behind your back or in folded arms. These gestures are cavalier, uninviting and distracting. Above all, do not use your hands at any point during the reading. It is theatrical, inappropriate and will annoy your listeners.

Announcement Line: The lead-in or announcement line tells the listeners from whom or from where the reading comes, i.e. the prophet Isaiah or the Book of Psalms. Proclaim the announcement line loudly and clearly as you see it. Do not add or subtract (I.E. Do not say "This is a reading", etc.) You will get the assembly's attention if you start out in a positive, determined manner. Also, make sure your mind is one step ahead of your mouth. Flub the announcement line and you're likely to mentally kick yourself throughout the rest of the reading. Why? Because quite often as goes the beginning, so goes the rest of the reading.

And always pause for a few healthy seconds after the line is read. This will give the assembly a chance to place the prophet, era or Biblical location in their minds and ready them to actively listen to the passage. It is a good idea to look up as you read the lead-in in order to grab the attention of those in the congregation.

Eye Contact: You may be doing everything else right - proper pace, effective pausing, speaking in a clear, engaging manner and so on, but if you do not look at your listeners, you will not connect with them. Anyone can stick his/her nose in a book and read, knees knocking together or not, but only those with the ability to look their assembly right in the eye will exude confidence and win credibility for the message they so urgently wish to embed.

Now let's consider some of the best times to look directly at your assembly:

- ⇒when you first get to the ambo
- ⇒when you proclaim the announcement/lead-in line
- ⇒at the end of a sentence
- ⇒during key words or phrases
- ⇒when changing gears (e.g. changes in mood, time, place, character, relationship, etc.)
 - just before the closing line (i.e. "The Word of the Lord" or "The Gospel of the Lord")
 - during and after the closing line.

Lector Dress: Ask yourself this question and be honest. How should you dress in the house of the King of Kings? If you went to Buckingham Palace or the White House, what would you wear? Why should you dress with any less respect for the only King that matters?

Also, what you wear sends signals to the assembly about how seriously you take your ministry. Dress how you proclaim - with dignity and respect. Never wear anything that will detract from the scripture. The focus must always be on the reading, not the reader.

Simple guidelines for dress:

- ⇒No shorts
- ⇒No tank tops/sleeveless tops (upper arm should be at least partially covered)
- ⇒No t-shirts
- ⇒No jeans
- ⇒No flip-flops

Below are some of the most asked questions regarding the movement of the reader at Mass:

Q: Should the reader carry up the *Lectionary* in the opening procession?

A: No. The *Book of the Gospels* is the only book that should be carried in the opening procession then placed on the altar. The *Lectionary* should be open to the readings of the day and placed on the ambo prior to Mass by the Sacristan. (You should check this prior to Mass)

Q: Does the reader genuflect while in procession with the *Book of the Gospels*?

A: No. A slight bow of the head is made by those carrying something in procession.

Q: Should the reader bow to the altar before proclaiming and after?

A: Yes. A profound bow (bending at the waist) is appropriate when passing in front of the altar for the first time you cross the altar. A slight bow (bow of the head) is then the proper protocol each time you pass the altar thereafter or enter/exit the sanctuary.)

Q: Why is the *Book of the Gospels* not carried in the closing procession?

A: The Word of God has been proclaimed to the assembly and is placed upon their hearts. The assembly then goes out into the world to live out the message they have heard.

Q: When do I enter the Sanctuary?

A: After the Collect, all sit. The priest may, very briefly, introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word. Then the reader goes to the ambo and, from the *Lectionary* already placed there before Mass, proclaims the first reading, to which all listen. At the end, the lector says the acclamation *Verbum Domini (The word of the Lord)*, and all respond, *Deo gratias (Thanks be to God)*. GIRM 128. The reader may not add or delete any words from the subscribed acclamation. The reader should enter the Sanctuary during the last paragraph of the Creed if he/

she is to proclaim the Prayers of the Faithful--remember to bow.

Concluding Rites: When the priest begins to move, the reader may come forward and bow with the other ministers. All the ministers then turn and leave in procession in the same order and manner as at the beginning of the Mass (GIRM 186). Neither the Book of Gospels nor the Lectionary is carried out in the concluding procession.

SPECIFIC TO ST. JOHN'S/THE DIOCESE OF ORLANDO

FUNCTIONS OF THE READER

INTRODUCTORY RITES

In the procession to the altar, when no deacon is present, the reader, wearing the appropriate vesture, may carry the *Book of the Gospels* elevated slightly. In that case, the reader walks in front of the priest, otherwise with the other ministers (194).

Upon reaching the sanctuary, the reader makes a profound bow with the others. If the reader is carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the reader goes to the altar and places the *Book of the Gospels* on it. Then, the reader takes up a position in the sanctuary with the other ministers (195).

LITURGY OF THE WORD

At the ambo the reader proclaims the readings that precede the gospel reading. If there is no psalmist, the reader may also sing or recite the responsorial psalm after the first reading (196).

After the priest gives the introduction to the *General Intercessions*, the reader may announce the intentions from the ambo when no deacon is present (197). The reader should approach the ambo during the last paragraph of the Creed.

If there is no opening liturgical song or communion song and the antiphons in the Missal are not said by the faithful, the reader may recite them at the appropriate time (198).

******At the Prayer of the Faithful, please speak up--you need to be heard over the organ.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

At the conclusion of the Mass, the reader does not process with the *Book of the Gospels*. The *Lectionary* is never carried in procession. The reader may join in the procession at the end of Mass in the same order as in the procession to the altar.

SEATING

The proper place for the seating of readers is within the assembly distinguished clearly from those of the clergy (GIRM 310). They should be seen coming forth from the assembly and returning to it when their ministry has been completed.

TECHNICAL/PROCEDURES

The reader should arrive at Mass **at least 15 minutes** prior to the start of the celebration (It is recommended that you arrive 20-30 minutes prior to the beginning of Mass so that you have time to prepare and pray).

The reader should check in with the Sacristan and check (ü) their name off on the official schedule in the sound room.

The reader should test the ambo microphone and make necessary adjustments prior to the introduction/welcome. If necessary, the reader should adjust the volume of the ambo microphone by using the soundboard in the sound room.

The reader should check that the correct readings are prepared in the Lectionary and review them one more time.

The reader is to review the Prayers of the Faithful prior to Mass beginning.

Do not read anything that has been written in to the opening/welcome or the prayers

of the faithful. These items have not been approved by the Pastor.

Do not read or proclaim any announcement that is requested by a parishioner. The only additional announcements proclaimed should be given to the reader by the Pastor.

At the beginning of a Scripture reading, the Reader proclaims the book: “A reading from the

(Letter of Paul to the Corinthians; Book of Wisdom; etc.)”

Do NOT read the chapter or verse.

At the end of the reading, the reader proclaims, “The Word of the Lord”.

Do not add any other words to this proclamation. Example: Many wrongly proclaim, “This is the word of the Lord.” This is not in align with the theology and teaching of the Catholic Church nor a correct translation from the Latin.

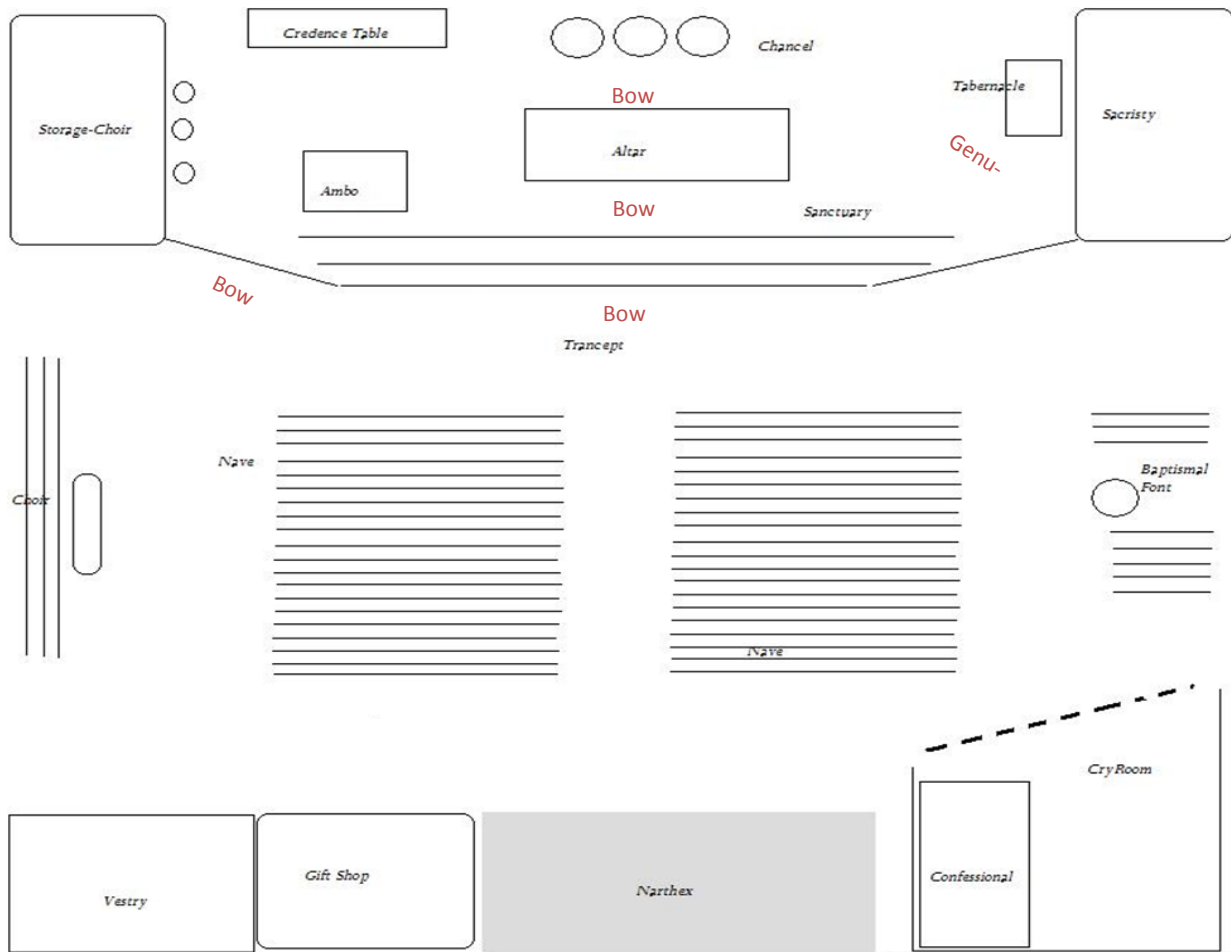
Notes

1. All subsequent numbers are from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) unless otherwise noted.

2. GIRM, no. 339: "Acolytes, readers and other lay ministers wear the alb or other vestment that is lawfully approved in each region by the Conference of Bishops."

3. Ibid., no. 274. "If there is a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon and other ministers genuflect to it when they approach or leave the altar, but not during the celebration of Mass itself."

Taken in part from : <http://www.greatlectors.com/proclaimingtips.html> & the guidelines for readers from the Diocese of Orlando



Not to scale.