

Guidelines for Readers

THE BIBLE AND THE LECTIONARY

The Bible

The Bible, the Word of God, is one of the greatest treasures we have. Although contained in one volume, it is a collection of 73 different works by different authors, using different styles and perspectives, which was written over several centuries in Hebrew and Greek, with maybe the some of the New Testament beginning life in Aramaic.

The writings were gradually collected and went through a process of editing and tidying up. Nevertheless, we have a richness and diversity and you will often find the same story told at different times, from different perspectives, by different authors, for different audiences.

Underlying all the writing, however, is the authors' shared conviction that 'God's presence is felt in human history and that God invites the human family to respond with faith and integrity'. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal affirms:

When the scriptures are read in Church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel. The question of this 'presence' parallels the 'real presence' of the Eucharist.

The Lectionary

The Lectionary which is used during liturgical celebrations today is an ordered system of selected readings from the Bible.

The practice of choosing extracts from the books of the Bible began in the synagogues and was carried forward in the early Church.

The Lectionary we use today is a reform of the previous lectionary used until the Second Vatican Council. The Council had determined to widen the choice available for readings on Sundays. This resulted in the creation of a 3-year cycle for Sundays and a 2-year cycle for weekdays.

The General Instruction to the Lectionary is printed at the front of the first volume of the Lectionary. It is a worthwhile document to read. It can be downloaded at <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/Lectionary.pdf>.

THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION TO THE LECTIONARY

Biblical Formation

There are several places in the General Instruction to the Lectionary which shed light on how the readings are chosen for Sundays:

The New Testament lies hidden in the Old; the Old Testament comes fully to light in the New. (5)

The reading of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. For this, the other readings, in their established sequences from the Old to the New Testament, prepare the assembly. (13)

The principles governing the Order of Readings for Sundays... are called the principles of 'harmony' and 'semi-continuous reading.' (66.3) [For the Sundays of Ordinary Time] ... the texts of both the apostolic and Gospel readings are arranged in an order of semicontinuous reading, whereas the Old Testament reading is harmonised with the Gospel. (67)

The best instance of harmony between the Old and New Testament readings is the one that Scripture itself suggests. This is the case when the teaching and events recounted in the texts of the New Testament bear a more or less explicit relationship to the teaching and events of the Old Testament.

Having read the Gospel of the Sunday, it is useful to read the whole Old Testament story in its full scriptural context. This may mean reading the surrounding verses in the chapter from which the Old Testament reading is taken.

The second readings from the apostolic writings (the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James and Jude) do not follow the principle of harmony with the Gospel, but rather the principle of semi-continuous reading. Over a series of Sundays we hear the word of God, section after section, from the apostolic writings.

However, the semi-continuous reading principle is broken outside the Sundays of Ordinary Time. During the great liturgical seasons, Advent-Christmastide, Lent-Eastertide, and feasts, all three readings of the Mass are chosen to harmonise.

Spiritual Formation

As well as understanding how the readings for Sundays are chosen and arranged, there is also a spiritual side which should imbue the whole process of preparation. While reading the assigned passage in the Lectionary, the passage in its full context in the Bible, and the Gospel for the day, the reader should also be praying with the text, looking out for its meaning on a personal level.

If it is true that in the biblical readings during the celebration of the Mass, ‘even now, “God is speaking to his people” (12) then we as readers need to hear him speaking to us individually as we make our preparations. We must take the time to hear the message for us in the

passage we are preparing or we will not be able to make our reading meaningful for the assembly.

Let it not happen that anyone in the assembly is left in doubt about the power of the reading we proclaim, indeed the very presence of God in the Word as we read. By our preparation and by our prayer over the text, we can help to make clear God's message to those listening.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is as follows:

First Reading: from the Old Testament (except during Eastertide from Acts).

Responsorial Psalm: this should be sung. The Psalm, and particularly the response, deserves the reader's attention, since it is also in harmony with the readings and often gives the key to what the rest of the readings are about.

Second Reading: from the apostolic writings.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, except during Lent, and this should be sung.

Homily: an extremely important part of the Liturgy of the Word, because its purpose is to lead the community of the faithful to celebrate the eucharist wholeheartedly. Whether the homily breaks open the biblical Word of God proclaimed in the readings or some other text of the liturgy, the Church's celebration of the day's liturgy will have greater impact. (24)

Silence: 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 second reading, after the homily. (28)

The Profession of Faith (Creed): proclaimed on Sundays and Solemnities serves as a way for the people to respond and to give their assent to the Word of God heard in the readings and through the homily and for them to call to mind the truths of the faith before they begin to celebrate the eucharist.

Universal Prayer (or ‘Prayer of the Faithful’ or ‘Bidding Prayers’): In the Universal Prayer the assembly prays for the needs of the universal church and the local community, for the salvation of the world and those oppressed by any burden, and for special categories of people.

They are placed at the end of the Liturgy of the Word so that in the light of the readings and homily we can better understand our dependence on God and God’s willingness to listen to and answer our prayer.

The General Instruction to the Lectionary explains the closeness of the relationship between the Word of God and the mystery of the Eucharist. It points out that from the beginning, the Church came together to read of the actions of Christ and to celebrate the paschal mystery as he instructed.

For 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; from the one it grows in wisdom and from the other in holiness... The celebration of Mass in which the word is heard and the eucharist is offered and received forms but one single act of divine worship. (10)

The place from which the Word of God is to be proclaimed is the lectern or ambo. The Liturgy of the Word must be read from the Lectionary provided for the celebration and not replaced by other pastoral aids such as the Parish Mass Book or a missal.

THE PREPARATION OF THE READER – BEFORE THE MINISTRY BEGINS

Listening

The General Introduction to the Lectionary states:

In the Liturgy of the Word, the congregation of the faithful still today receives from God the word of his covenant through the faith that comes by hearing. ... For their part, the faithful at the celebration of Mass are to listen to the Word of God with an inward and outward reverence that will bring them continuous growth in the spiritual life and draw them more deeply into the mystery they celebrate. (45, emphasis added)

The assembly is expected to come properly disposed to listen to the Word of God because they are aware of Christ's presence in the word. We are used to reverence for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Have we yet learned to show such reverence for his Presence in the Word?

How do you listen to the Word of God when you are not the reader? Are you listening to the proclamation of the Word or are you reading the text on the missalette without truly listening? When we make eye contact with the person reading it is often easier to concentrate on listening.

As a member of the assembly, and especially as a minister of the Word, you need to listen intently to the Word, because by doing so you become a model for receptiveness to the Word.

Basic assumptions about liturgy

Firstly, our public worship – our liturgy – matters greatly. Our Sunday celebration is the source and summit of the Christian life. We come together because we have been called since the time of the apostles to gather on the day of the Lord's resurrection from the tomb; and we

bring to the celebration all our hopes and fears, joys, triumphs and failures. We take from the celebration the strength given by grace to see us through the week until we return the following Sunday.

Secondly, God is present and speaks to his people when holy scriptures are proclaimed in the church.

Thirdly, good liturgy does not happen by accident – there is a direct relationship between preparing carefully and worshipping well.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Summarised as Reflection, Research, Rehearsal and Review.

REFLECTION

1. **Begin preparation early** – even 2 weeks before the Sunday you are scheduled to read.
2. **Listening and telling.** Before you can present the passage for the hearing of the assembly, you need to hear it yourself. Why not form a small Bible study group with two or three others. Listen to each person read aloud the passage you are preparing and take some silent time to consider the word, idea or image called forth by what you hear. When everyone has read the passage share your thoughts in discussion.
3. **Read the passage aloud many times.** There is an enormous difference between reading to yourself and reading out loud.
4. **Pray with the text.** Prayer extends the step of listening and telling. It helps you find the meaning of the passage for you, and to communicate the meaning when you proclaim it to others. A method to pray with scripture, *Lectio Divina*, is given on pages 11-12.

RESEARCH

5. **Check the pronunciation of places and proper names.** A Bible pronunciation guide book is available for purchase. Or ask an authoritative person for help.
6. **Read the passage in its proper context.** Go to the Bible and read the whole story surrounding the passage chosen for the Lectionary.
7. **What was the author's intention?** How will the story be heard today? What type of reading is it/what is its literary style? With both the first and second readings, we need to know as we read the passage what the intention of the author was, so that our reading has the necessary depth and understanding. To do this well we may need to consult a study Bible or scriptural commentary. Note: It is a good idea to do your own reflection/prayer on the text before consulting a commentary to help work out what the passage is saying to you before adopting someone else's position.

REHEARSAL

8. **Body language.** Our bodies send messages to the assembly about how we feel and our estimation of what we are about to do. The reader(s) should come (together) from the assembly after the opening prayer in an unhurried way, commanding respect and attention. While at the centre of the aisle the reader(s) should bow towards the altar. While at the lectern the reader should have a sense of strong relaxation, without being casual, to communicate security of knowing what you are doing.
9. **Speed and volume of delivery.** Use the microphone well by standing close to it. The shield will prevent the p and b consonants being exaggerated. Amplification systems only deliver what is put in to the microphone! Breath naturally. Do not rush. Why not record your voice and listen to the recording to see how fast you read?

10. **Eye contact.** With experience, the listener can be drawn in by the reader, creating a sense of being included.
11. **On the day.** Arrive in good time for Mass – at least 15 minutes before. This lets those in charge know that you are there and looking for a replacement won't be necessary. Check the lectionary is at the right page and the microphone is working. Allow time to recall the main points of the reading. Put yourself in the care of the Holy Spirit. Join wholeheartedly in the liturgy. Be present for the whole of the celebration, not just the part you are reading.

REVIEW

12. **Evaluate your interpretations and delivery.** Some time after you have given your reading, think about how you did – whether the understanding you had at the time continues to feel right, or whether there is an aspect that didn't occur to you until later. Consider whether the way you delivered the proclamation could be improved; if so, what could be changed. What will you do differently next time?
13. **Get a trusted friend to give feedback.** This needs to be someone whose opinion you value, whom you trust to tell what may not always be comfortable to hear, who, while remaining your friend, will tell you clearly what can be improved.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF MINISTRY

If we do our work as ministers of the word with attention and focus, how can we not be changed by it? Such attention to the Word of God, spoken to us and listened to so that we can act as channels of God's message to his people – this is bound to bring us closer to God.

In choosing ministry, we must realise that we are choosing not just a way of serving our community, but a way of life. True, we are committed to this way of life by our baptism which summons all of us

to be Christ in the world, but by putting ourselves at the service of others at prayer through proclaiming the Word, we can no longer keep this choice on the back burner.

In the preparation outlined, one of the first things we do is open ourselves to the power of the Spirit working in us as we listen to hear the word. This openness and listening becomes part of our prayer which is the foundation of our ministry.

Then, having heard the Word of God, having proclaimed it to the best of our ability, it takes root within us and we have to do something about it. At the Sunday celebration, together with other members of the body of Christ, we respond to the word with prayer and song before the breaking of the bread and the offering of wine as a memorial of Christ's death and resurrection. Then, after sharing in communion, the assembly is sent forth to be Christ in the world, to continue his work in bringing all people to him. This is the lay ministry to which we are all called – to be living examples of faith, to embrace discipleship as a way of life. Our closeness to the word makes this vocation inescapable.

PRACTICAL POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND

Coming forward to read: First and second readers and the cantor (if there is one) should come forward and meet together in front of the altar and bow simultaneously.

Use of the microphone: the microphone only amplifies the sound that goes in. Indistinct or muffled words will only become more loudly distinct and muffled! Also, if the microphone is not in line with your mouth the amplification will not be of the quality required. The microphone should be in the centre, horizontally, of the lectern, but so also should be your mouth! Take care not to put your text on one side and move your head to see it. Vertically, the microphone should be at the height of your mouth – not above nor below. If you do not stand close enough to the microphone you may not be heard.

Conclusion of the reading: In 2010, the translation of the Order of Mass changed. Although the Lectionaries have yet to be reprinted, at the end of the reading the conclusion is “The word of the Lord” or “The Gospel of the Lord”. The words “This is” are no longer spoken.

Readings do not need introduced by number: There is no need to say “The First/Second reading is a reading from...” nor to say “Responsorial Psalm” or “Gospel Acclamation” before the Psalm or Gospel Acclamation. The order of these readings never changes so people can work out which is the first/second/gospel reading! Simply read “A reading from the book of Genesis”, “A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians” without numbering the reading.

Responsorial Psalm: There is no need to say “The response to the Psalm is...” – again people already know that this the first line spoken is the response. Simply read the psalm response after the first reading is over and people will repeat it.

Gospel Acclamation: At weekday Mass, if you can, begin singing the Alleluia or Lenten acclamation when you are reading. Otherwise remain silent and the priest or another member of the congregation can intone it.

Gospel Acclamation during Lent: Take care not to speak the acclamation again if it has already been sung. “Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory” takes the place of “Glory and praise to you, O Christ!”, “Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!”, as well as “Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!”

Gospel Acclamation verse: Where, on a Sunday, there are two options for the Gospel Acclamation, please use the second one.

Universal Prayer (“Bidding Prayers”): The reader should be in place at the lectern to continue as soon as the priest introduces the Universal Prayer. These take place after the Creed on a Sunday, with the exception when there is a baptism during Mass. During the week if you sit near the back of the church, why not sit at the front after the Gospel Acclamation, so that you are nearby to come forward again to be in place for the Universal Prayer. Then you can return to the back of the church. Readers should remain until the priest finishes the conclusion of the Universal Prayer before returning to their place.

Also, when a name is to be inserted to indicate the Mass intention, please use the form of words given in brackets on weekdays. On Sundays the name will probably be inserted already. Take care only to insert the name of a deceased person in the final prayer for the dead – indicated in the bulletin by RIP or Ann (for anniversary) after their name. Special intentions are not to be included in the final prayer for the dead – the special intention is often for a person who has not died!

And this may sound simple: make sure you have read the Universal Prayer in preparation to proclaim it aloud!

THE READINGS FOR MASS

The readings for Mass are contained in the Lectionary. You can also buy a Sunday Missal from, for example, CTS or Redemptorist Publications (or the stall!) to have the readings of the day at hand for prayer and preparation.

You can download an App called Universalis to your phone or tablet which provides the readings for Mass every day and much more including the Divine Office.

Sunday readings for the three-year cycle (in English and other languages) can be found at http://www.virc.at/texte/aktuell_e.htm

LECTIO DIVINA

“**Lectio Divina**”, a Latin term, means “divine reading” and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups but Guigo’s description remains fundamental.

He said that the first stage is **lectio** (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long.

The second stage is **meditatio** (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is **oratio** (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is **contemplatio** (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. Obviously this transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live and the way we live is the test of the authenticity of our prayer. We must take what we read in the Word of God into our daily lives.

Lectio Divina Prayer for Yourself

- Choose a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. Many Christians use in their daily lectio divina one of the readings from the Eucharistic liturgy for the day; others prefer to slowly work through a particular book of the Bible. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God’s hands, not yours.
- Place yourself in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved “prayer word” or “prayer phrase” they gently recite. For some, the practice known as “centering prayer” makes a good, brief introduction to lectio divina. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

- **Lectio:** Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savour each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In lectio divina, God is teaching us to listen to him, to seek him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, he gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.
- **Meditatio:** Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorise it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during lectio divina, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.
- **Oratio:** Speak to God. Whether you use words, ideas, or images –or all three– is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to him what you have discovered during your experience of meditation. Experience God by using the word or phrase he has given you as a means of blessing and of transforming the ideas and memories that your reflection on his word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.
- **Contemplatio:** Rest in God’s embrace. And when he invites you to return to your contemplation of his word or to your inner dialogue with him, do so. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

Sometimes in lectio divina, you may return several times to the printed text, either to savour the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder.

At other times, only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for lectio divina. It is not necessary to assess anxiously the quality of your lectio divina, as if you were “performing” or seeking some goal. Lectio divina has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.