

The Lector at Mass

(2010, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

General Principles

Reading and Explaining the Word of God

When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the gospel. The readings of God's word must therefore be listened to by all with reverence; they make up a principal element of the liturgy. In the biblical readings, God's word addresses all people of every era and is understandable to them, and a fuller understanding and efficacy are fostered by a living commentary on it, that is to say, by the homily, understood as an integral part of the liturgical action (GIRM 29).⁽¹⁾

Vocal Expression of the Different Texts

In texts that are to be delivered in a loud and clear voice, whether by the priest or deacon or by the lector, or by all, the tone of voice should correspond to the genre of the text, that is, accordingly as it is a reading, a prayer, an instruction, an acclamation, or a liturgical song; the tone should also be suited to the form of celebration and to the solemnity of the gathering. Other criteria are the idiom of different languages and the genius of peoples. (38).

Silence

The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. For this reason, any kind of haste, which impedes recollection must be clearly avoided. Brief moments of silence are appropriate during the liturgy. Such moments should be suitable for the gathered assembly, in which the Word of God is taken into the heart by the fostering of the Holy Spirit, and its response is prepared through prayer. Such moments of silence are opportunely observed after the first and second reading, and then, at the completion of the homily (56).

Scripture Readings

- In the readings, the table of God's word is laid for the faithful and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, the arrangement of the biblical readings must be observed, whereby the unity of each Testament and of the history of salvation is demonstrated; nor is it permitted that the readings and responsorial psalm, which contain the word of God, are substituted by other, non-biblical texts (57).
- In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always given from the ambo (58).
- By tradition, the office of reading the Scriptures is a ministerial, not a presidential function. The readings should be delivered by a lector, the Gospel being proclaimed by the deacon or by a priest other than the celebrant. If, however, a

deacon or other priest is not present, the priest celebrant proclaims the Gospel. Further, if a suitable lector is not present, then the priest celebrant also delivers the other readings. After each reading, whoever does the reading proclaims the acclamation. Responding to it, the gathered people honor the word of God, which they have received with faith and grateful hearts (59).

- The lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the gospel reading. He may also announce the intentions for the *General Intercessions* and, in the absence of the psalmist, sing or read the psalm between the readings. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the lector has specific duties which he alone ought to perform, even though ordained ministers may be present (99).
- In the absence of an instituted lector, other lay people may be designated to proclaim the readings from the Sacred Scriptures. Such designated lectors must be truly qualified and carefully prepared for this office, so that the faithful will develop a warm and lively love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the reading from the sacred texts (101).

Liturgy of the Word

- After the opening prayer, all sit. The priest may, in a very few words, introduce the faithful to the liturgy of the word. Then the lector goes to the ambo and proclaims the first reading from the *Lectionary* already placed there before Mass; all sit and listen. At the end, the lector makes the acclamation, *The Word of the Lord*, with all responding, *Thanks be to God*.
- Then a brief period of silence may be observed as appropriate, so that all may meditate on what they have heard (128).
- The psalmist or the lector sings or recites the psalm verse and, as a rule, the congregation makes the response (129).
- If there is a second reading before the Gospel, the lector proclaims it from the ambo with all listening and making the acclamation at the end, as above (128). Then, as the occasion allows, a brief period of silence may be observed (130).

Functions of the Lector

Introductory Rites

- In the procession to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing the appropriate vesture, ⁽²⁾ may carry the *Book of the Gospels* elevated slightly. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest, otherwise with the other ministers (194).
- Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. ⁽³⁾ If the lector is carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the lector goes to the altar and places

the *Book of the Gospels* on it. Then, the lector takes up a position in the sanctuary with the other ministers (195).

Liturgy of the Word

- At the ambo the lector proclaims the readings that precede the gospel reading. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also sing or recite the responsorial psalm after the first reading (196).
- After the priest gives the introduction to the *General Intercessions*, the lector may announce the intentions from the ambo when no deacon is present (197).
- If there is no opening liturgical song or communion song and the antiphons in the Missal are not said by the faithful, the lector may recite them at the appropriate time (198).

Liturgy of the Eucharist

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

Notes

1. All subsequent citations are from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), unless otherwise noted.
2. GIRM, no. 339: *Lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing.*
3. *Ibid.*, no. 274. *If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself.*

Resources

1. For the readings, the USCCB website: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings>.
2. For the liturgical guidelines, the General Instruction on the Roman Missal: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/index.cfm>.
3. For the rubrics of the Order of the Mass: <http://old.usccb.org/romanmissal/order-of-mass.pdf>.
4. For the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*): http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.
5. For practical tips, the Lector's Notes website: <http://www.lectorprep.org>.