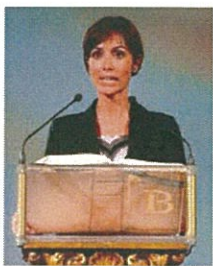


• The Ministry of the Lector



“Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and he read, “The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, “What you have just heard me read has come true today.”

Background for the Proclamation of the Word

With the revision of the **Lectionary**, the Sunday readings were organized into a Three Year Cycle: Generally, the cycle can be identified according to the Gospel which is predominantly used throughout that particular year.

Year A - Gospel according to **Matthew**

Year B - Gospel according to **Mark**

Year C - Gospel according to **Luke**

with **John's** gospel being read on the first Sunday of Lent, during the Easter Season and on certain Sundays during Year B.

Readings during the week follow a Two Year Cycle; the gospels remain the same but the first reading changes. Shortly after the community gathers for worship, it is called to listen to God speak through the Scriptures. We can then speak of the *faces of God’s Word*. There is the face of the **storyteller**, enchanting us with wondrous tales. The face of the storyteller is perhaps the most appealing face of the Word of God, for we all love stories. But God’s Word wears other faces: the face of the **prophet**; the face of the **lawgiver**; the face of the **poet**; the face of the **visionary**; the face of the **letterwriter**. The Word of God has many faces, profound and simple, attractive and frightening, exciting and commonplace.

The Liturgy of the Word - A Dialogue

Most people think that there are only two ministers involved in the liturgy of the word: the lector and the priest. But the **General Instruction of the Roman Missal** (GIRM) envisages more than two lectors for the Sunday Eucharist.

The primary dynamic of the **Liturgy of the Word** is that it is a **dialogue between lector and assembly**:

Lector	-	First Reading	
Cantor/Psalmist	-	Responsorial Psalm	- Assembly
Lector	-	Second Reading	
Cantor	-	Gospel Acclamation	- Assembly
Deacon	-	Gospel	
Priest or Deacon	-	Homily	
Assembly	-	Profession of Faith	- Assembly
Deacon	-	Intercessions	- Assembly

Notice that this dialogue involves **several** people or groups of people. The genius of our Roman rite allows for the participation of many people. Through the varied voices of lectors and the assembly, the richness of the word is reinforced.

Although this would be the ideal situation in the ideal parish, nevertheless, it should be the vision and goal in every parish which is serious about its proclamation of the Word.

Proclaiming the Scriptures - A Ministry

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council states that in liturgical celebrations lectors and commentators exercise a **genuine liturgical ministry**. To be a minister is to be a servant who, chosen and called by God, serves in the midst of the people.

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.

The **Lector** must combine faith and skill when proclaiming the Scriptures. The **Lector** ministers with the other liturgical ministers. All ministers, together with the assembly of believers celebrate the presence of God. (The ministers **do not do** this **for**, or **instead of**, but **with** the Christians gathered in worship.) The priest

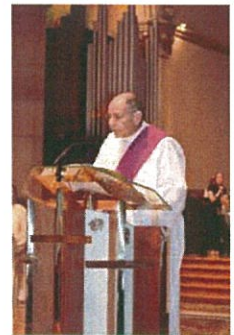
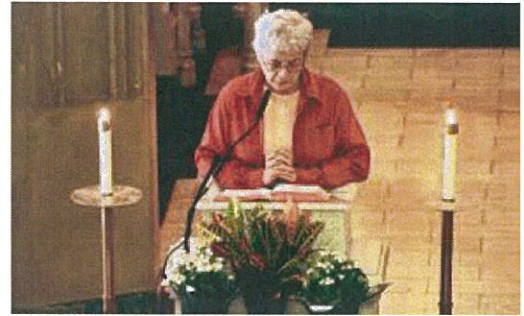
"presides over the assembly and;

- *leads in its prayer,*
- *proclaims the message of salvation,*
- *joins the people to himself in offering the sacrifice to the Father through Christ in the Spirit,*
- *gives them the bread of eternal life,*
- *and shares in it with them.*

At the Eucharist he should, then, serve God and the people with dignity and humility; by his bearing and by the way he recites the words of the liturgy he should communicate to the faithful a sense of the living presence of Christ."

The Lectors and Deacon, on the other hand, proclaim the Word—which is God present. There is an intimate link between **Word** and **Sacrament**. God, of course, is present regardless of the personal style of the ministers. But the reality of God's presence can be made plainer and stronger when the style of the ministers is gracious and full of faith.

Lectors proclaim the Word of God. The ability to read well is only one aspect of the lector's role. Lectors add their own faith convictions to lifeless print. They lend their Christian conviction to a word written thousands of years ago so that the Spirit may bring Jesus alive in the hearts of those who listen to the Word.



Everything in the **Liturgy of the Word** either builds up or detracts from the hearing of the word. Only **diligent preparation** and **prayerful practice** will enable lectors to proclaim well. In November 1964, the Bishops' Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate stated:

"All Scripture readings are to be proclamations, not mere recitations. Lectors and priests should approach the public reading of the Bible with full awareness that it is their honoured task to render the official proclamation of the revealed Word of God to the assembly. The character of this reading is such that it must convey that special reverence which is due the Sacred Scripture."

To be effective ministers of the word, men and women of faith must come, as Pope Paul VI suggested, to develop *"a warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture"*. This will happen only if a **Lector** has a sense of ministry and a desire to study the word of God in order to become familiar with it.

Lectors serve the community as well as the Word of God. Because they are proclaiming the Word of God to an assembly of people, they must be aware of their audience and its needs. The Word of God can best be heard and grasped in an environment of reflection, prayer and silence. **Allowing the congregation sufficient time to settle and prepare to listen is an important feature of proclamation: it is a sign of respect for the assembly as well as for the word of God.** After each reading, silent reflection with no distracting movement enables the congregation to reflect on what has been proclaimed, respond in silence, and ask help to carry out God's will.

You were probably encouraged to become a lector in your parish or community by someone who knows you well and appreciates your love of God, or by someone who has witnessed your skills at public speaking. Or perhaps you volunteered for this ministry, moved by God's Spirit to share your gifts with others. Whatever brought you here, you are now **part of the team** of those who minister at liturgy. Some ministers have visible positions, such as the music director, the presider or the choir members, while others labor quietly behind the scenes: the members of the liturgy committee and its director, those responsible for the decor and presentation of the worship space, bread bakers, ushers and church maintenance crew members. Even the work of the pastoral ministers—RCIA catechists, religious education instructors, counsellors, youth ministers, those involved in sacramental preparation—all comes together in the Liturgy, the central event of our life as **Church**. It is through our gathering for prayer and praise that we celebrate who we are as God's people. When we come together for liturgy, we encounter God—

in one another,

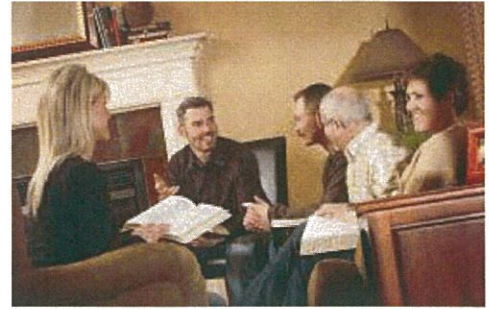
in the sacramental actions (such as baptism or Eucharist),

in the proclamation of the word of God.

Personal Preparation of the Lector

I. ***Prepare*** for Sunday by **reading** and **reflecting prayerfully**

on the Scriptures at home — every day is best, but at least three times during the week. Study editions of the Sunday lectionary (available through the Diocesan Centre) are superior to missalettes for preparation since the readings are printed as they appear in the lectionary. Preparation to proclaim the word of God ideally takes place in a group



setting. Participants, usually other lectors and gospel readers, gather to discuss and summarize the readings, to practice together and to provide practical tips for one another. The sessions are most effective if a skilled leader directs them. If group meetings of lectors are not the norm in your parish, you might want to suggest that a group be formed or offer to organize one yourself. If you are unable to prepare with others, practice individually, **but always try to have another person listen to you and offer suggestions at least once.**

II. ***Know what you are talking about:*** Find out the context of the reading. The best way is to **read the entire chapter** from which the passage is taken.

- **Use a commentary** (such as *The Word Among Us*); know something about the writer and his purpose in writing.
- **Learn about the reading.** Commentaries are intended to help you understand something about the purpose of the author who wrote the passage, as well as the historical setting out of which the passage arises.
- You might wish also to **turn to your Bible** and read the verses that precede and follow your selection, so that you can better understand its context.
- It might be helpful as well to **read any introductory material in your Bible** about the book from which the selection is taken, or consult a Bible commentary. The more you know about the reading, the more effectively you can share it with others.
- Read through **all of the readings for the Mass.**
- What type of literature is the writing? This is called the literary form. Knowledge of the literary form of a passage is a pre-requisite for understanding.

Is it prophecy? If so, get acquainted with the prophet you are reading: each prophet was a unique, strong, and often strange individual. Nearly all of them spoke with thundering power. Make the people feel as if the prophet were speaking right to them.

Is it a letter? Each letter has its own tone. Each letter will have its own demands. Look closely at what is demanded. Make sure that you give each statement is given sufficient time to sink in.

Is it poetry? Since poetry is the most expressive literary form of all, put great expression into it. being alert to parallelisms. Mood changes are swift in Hebrew poetry, particularly in some psalms. Be sure to allow a pause between moods. Poetry often contains beautiful images. Let these images take form in the minds and imaginations of the assembly.

Is it history? Find out what kind of history best describes the passage you are reading. If it is factual, you may have to read it like a newscast. If it is more colourful, stress the phases that give the passage life.

Is it a story? As a **Lector**, you are entrusted with some of the most wonderful stories to come down through the ages. You must understand each story simply as a story. Put the mood of the story in your voice. Make the details clear. Change your voice for different characters in the story. Make the personalities come alive. Don't rush through it.

Is it biography? Get acquainted with the subject of the reading. When you read biographical passages aloud, stress phrases that point up the personality of the subject.

Do not worry if the text does not make complete sense to you. Biblical scholars have long argued about the precise meanings of some passages and continue to find new information that adds to our understanding of the text. In addition, do not be alarmed if you find the reading confusing or bothersome. "***There is nothing comfortable about the Bible***" if we are truly engaged with it, as Thomas Merton has said. Remember that God has communicated this word to fallible human beings who sometimes inserted some of their own interests and biases into the text. Trust that God is bigger than any uncertainty or difficulty you have with the reading. If you are open to the movement of the Spirit of God in your life, you will enable the Spirit to move in your listeners in ways beyond your imaginings.



- III. ***Identify the most important sentences and phrases:*** Try to communicate them above all else. Emphasize the subject and the verb in this phrase. Most of us have a tendency to emphasize the adjectives which leaves the listener unsure of "who is doing what". Use your imagination to visualize actions and the surroundings in which they happened. Articulate deliberately the consonants at the end of words – the "d's" and "t's", for example, as in **God** (rather than Gaw) and **not** (rather than naw). Despite the power of God's word, many of us adopt a monotone whenever we read before an assembly. Reading the **word** of God is unlike any other public proclamation, but it requires some of the same skills that are necessary for

effective speeches, oral interpretation or debate. For many of us, the time we are most likely to put great expression into our oral reading is when reading children's books to a captive audience. Try adopting some (*but not too much*) of the inflection and exaggeration of reading to a child in your public proclamation. Although you may feel you are adding too much emphasis and inflection, it probably sounds quite differently to your listeners. A small minority of people tend to exaggerate when reading in public. Although most of us need to "ham it up" more than might make us comfortable at first, we all need to remember that **we are not entertaining**. Proclaiming the word of God is a formal task, one requiring dignity and restraint. Avoid anything that might draw attention to you and away from the word you proclaim. **This is not a performance but a noble ministry**, entrusted to you by God and by your community.

- III. ***Believe in what you are saying:*** If a lector is a person called to make God present in a special way among God's people, then it is important not only for the lector but also for the people, that he/she both know and believe God's Word. This takes **more than five minutes before Mass**. In fact, it takes more than reading - it takes meditating. Meditative study helps one discover the interior meaning of the word. Allow the Scriptures, more and more, to influence your daily life. This is the best part of being a lector; the Scriptures begin to form you.
- IV. ***Pray:*** Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and proclaim God's word as well as you can. Pray that God will open me hearts of the people to listen to God's Word in a spirit of faith.
- V. ***Read the passage several times:*** *The Study Edition of the Lectionary* should be used at home to prepare the readings. It contains the same text and format as the Sunday Lectionary; so this will be familiar to the lectors when they arrive at Church. The reading should always be from the lectionary, not from a missalette or piece of paper. This is the Word of God, not something composed for the occasion. Respect for the presence and permanence of God's Word is shown in the bound book, which is solemnly carried in procession. The Study Edition also contains a pronunciation guide at the back so that the lector can look up any difficult words for the correct pronunciation.
- VI. ***Break the passage into thought units:*** Underline the words you want to stress. Underline with a wavy line, feeling words. Use a vertical lines for phrasing or pausing. Read the Gospel of the day, this gives the thrust of the day's Liturgy. The First Reading leads into the Gospel; the Responsorial Psalm throws further light on the meaning of the First Reading. The Second Reading is often not related to either the First Reading or the Gospel.
- VII. ***Appearance and posture:*** **Lectors** are seen before they are heard. If they do not wear liturgical vesture—and this is not necessary, *they should be dressed neatly and appropriately, in a way that expresses the respect and dignity proper to the Liturgy of the Word within the Eucharist, and the*

Eucharistic Assembly. Your physical appearance should convey your respect for your ministry. Dress comfortably but nicely. Remember that you are not trying to draw attention to yourself, either by dressing shabbily or by trying to turn the liturgy into a fashion show. Before the liturgy begins, check your appearance in a mirror one last time so that you do not have to worry about how you look prior to or during the reading. And know that it is very difficult for your community to concentrate on your words if you have a tuft of hair sticking straight up during your proclamation. The **Lector's** gestures should not focus attention on himself/herself rather than on the Word. But dress is not as important as posture and movement.

According to experts, we convey

- by our body language
- by the way we hold our head, what we do with our hands,
- by our manner of sitting, standing or walking,

friendliness or insecurity, as well as many other positive and negative attitudes. **Lectors** who are overly preoccupied with their position "up there before the people" will likely communicate nervousness. The simplest way, although not the easiest, is to concentrate on the people and God's Word instead of on ourselves. Consider yourself a "**proclaimer of the Word of God.**" It is the skills of a proclaimer you will be learning and fine tuning, not those of an actor or radio announcer. Walk upright and with confidence as you approach the lectern; stand up straight. Approach the lectern as reverently as you would approach the altar. **Christ is present in both the Word and the Eucharist.** Be careful, then, how you communicate through your body language. Stand erect and hold your head high. Move slowly and deliberately.



VIII. *Eye contact:* Lector s should look at the people. If knowing and believing what you say is the first principle of communication, eye contact is the first practical skill. If the speaker is good at this practice, people feel that he/she is talking right at them. That precisely is the point; God is speaking right to his people. Cardinal Manning once said, "**Be full of your subject and forget yourself.**" Think only of your

subject and your audience. You will know if this communication is successful by the response you get from the congregation. There is "feedback" from any audience when someone speaks or reads to them. Signs of successful feedback are attentive and understanding looks on the faces of the people in the assembly. Look at the congregation for a second before you begin. Look at some individuals directly in the eye as you proclaim.

Eye contact is essential in a reading before an assembly. If you have practised the reading well, you will be able to address your listeners directly during important phrases, and glance back at your text during

pauses. You might want to keep your finger at the spot from which you are reading so that you do not lose your place, if you can do this without drawing attention to your movements. But remember that this is a reading of God's word, not a speech; there is no need for constant eye contact. Trying to establish some eye contact can aid in achieving another objective of most readers: slowing down. In order for the members of your community to reflect on what you are proclaiming, they need time to digest the message

- IX. *Read slowly and with expression:*** Many of us in our nervousness, rush through a reading and return our seats hurriedly and we forget that God's people need time to hear what is being said. Do not be afraid to put yourself into the reading. In everything that you do, act slowly and deliberately, as is fitting for a proclamation of the majestic Word of God. Your goal is to capture the assembly's attention so completely that its members will be transfixed by your words, experiencing God in their midst. If you are reading a passage from Genesis, tell a good story. If the passage is a warning of a prophet, make it thunder. Modulate your voice – its pitch and volume. Those who have the habit of reading along from a missalette will leave the printed page behind and truly listen, with ears attentive to God's voice speaking through yours.
- X. *Speak up:*** Read as if there were no microphone. The presence of a microphone should not give the lector a false security that it will do all the work. It is still necessary for the lector to project the voice, so that even those in the back of the church will hear.
- XI. *Check the sound system:*** It is a good practice to stop by the Church during the week if you are new and to practice reading into the microphone, if this is permissible. Practice opening the book so this can be executed with the microphone on and still be done quietly. Be careful because reading in an empty church is different from reading in a church full of people (the bodies and clothing absorb some of the sound.). It is important that someone else listen to you and give you feedback when you are practicing with the microphone
- XII. *Pause:*** Observe a pause between the Scripture text and the declaration: "**The Word of the Lord**". There should also be a **significant period of silence** before moving away from the ambo/lectern. The **Lector** should bow the head slightly and rest the hands on the lectionary while everyone observes a brief time of silent reflection on what has been said. **Remain in place as the congregation responds in unison.** It is sometimes helpful to recite a short prayer during this period to give some sense of the appropriate length of the pause. Do not be afraid of the silence.

Suggestions for personal preparation of the lector

Monday	read First Reading silently
Tuesday	read Psalm silently
Wednesday	read Second Reading silently

- Look up words that you find difficult in the dictionary. Perhaps read a commentary such as "**The Word Among Us**".

Thursday	re-read First Reading, but out loud
Friday	re-read Psalm, but out loud
Saturday	re-read Second Reading, but out loud

Go over any " tongue twisters " and check the pronunciation of proper names. Read everything over again, taking several deep breaths before each reading. As you prepare for Saturday evening or Sunday morning, remember it is **God's Word** - not your word. It is **God's work** - not yours. **God will help you.**

Saturday/Sunday pray the Reader's Prayer before you leave home

Be at the church well ahead of time. Do some deep breathing exercises to relax and open your lungs. Let the presiding Priest know that you are there and check if there are any special instructions. Read over the Intercessions and Parish Announcements. Check for difficult words and pronunciation of proper names. Make sure the booklet is returned to the lectern.

Pray for your ministry and for all others who will be serving in any capacity. Pray for the people coming that they will come in peace and safety and that they will be able to hear the Lord speaking to them through your ministry and the ministry of others.

Then - " **Let go and let God** ". Work through the celebration for your benefit and for the benefit of all.

The Role of the Lector at St. Joseph's Church

It is important that the **Lector** arrive at the Church early to look over the readings and the prayers of the faithful. If you are unsure of the meaning or pronunciation of any of the words ask Father.

Lectors should not serve in any other capacity (i.e. extraordinary minister of the eucharist, leaders of song, ushers, greeters, ministers in the offertory procession) at the same celebration.

Before the Mass Starts

When **everything** in the **Sanctuary** is ready (candles are lit, bells in the appropriate place) and all of the servers have their **instruments**, and all of the **ministers** (the celebrant, deacon, lectors, altar servers) are ready, **the Lector will take the Lectionary, go out to the ambo/lectern and read the short announcement** that has been prepared for that Mass. The announcement usually informs the congregation of the;

- week of the Liturgical year
- the "theme" of the Gospel
- the intention of the Mass

and invite the congregation to join in the Entrance hymn.

Once the announcement has been read the Lector will return to the Sacristy.

Entrance Procession

The **Lector** takes his/her place in the procession immediately behind the altar servers. The Deacon carrying the Book of the Gospels will walk immediately behind the **Lector**. The entire procession moves around the Communion Rail and enters the Sanctuary from the north. The entire group will gather near the Tabernacle and those who are not carrying anything will genuflect.

The Lector should proceed immediately to his/her seat. Do not wait for the servers to place their candles on the stand since the server may or may not be going up onto the altar.

The Celebrant and the Deacon will approach the altar. The Deacon will place the Book of the Gospels on the altar and both he and the Celebrant will venerate the altar.

The celebrant will proceed with the **Greeting**, the **Penitential Rite**, the **Gloria** (*if applicable*) and the **Opening Prayer**. He will then be seated.

The Lector will then proceed in a dignified manner to the ambo/lectern.

- Do not move until the celebrant has completed the Opening Prayer.
- Do not bow in the direction of the Priest who is presiding.

The main focus at this point in the celebration is the **Word of God** which is represented by the book.

First Reading

Get set, take a few deep breaths and wait for calm and quiet in the church.

Do **not** say " The first Reading is ... ". **Nothing that is printed in red ink should be read.**

Speaking slowly and clearly simply start; " *A reading from* "

Pause.

Read the text.

At the end of the Scripture passage, the **Lector** should pause, look at the congregation and proclaim "*The Word of the Lord.*"

Wait for the Assembly to respond "*Thanks be to God*" and then return to your seat.

Responsorial Psalm (at St. Joseph's Church the Responsorial Psalm is usually sung; except at weekday Mass)

The **Lector** will normally be seated while the Responsorial Psalm is sung.

Second Reading

The **Lector** should wait a few moments after the choir has finished proclaiming the Psalm, and then proceed to the ambo/lectern. Once again wait for calm and quiet in the church.

Do **not** say " The first Reading is ... ". **Nothing that is printed in red ink should be read.**

Speaking slowly and clearly simply start; " *A reading from ..* "

Pause.

Read the text.

At the end of the Scripture passage, the **Lector** should pause, look at the congregation and proclaim "*The Word of the Lord.*"

Wait for the Assembly to respond "*Thanks be to God*".

The lector will close the Lectionary and place it on the top shelf beneath the lectern/ambo.

That is the limit of the duties of the **Lector**.

Receiving Communion

After the Celebrant has offered the Deacon the Body and Blood of Christ, the Lector should stand and prepare to receive the Eucharist. The Celebrant will approach the **Lector** and offer the **Body of Christ**. The Deacon will then approach the Lector and offer the **Blood of Christ**. The **Lector** will respond, “**Amen**” and either take the cup or not. The Deacon will respond accordingly. The **Lector** should **not** say “**No**”, or **shake their head**, or **not respond**. The congregation is watching what you do and will often take their lead from you.

Recessional Procession

Nothing should be taken away from the altar after the celebration of the Eucharist. This means that the candles, the processional cross, the lectionary and the Book of the Gospels all stay in the Sanctuary.

After the Celebrant and the Deacon have venerated the altar, the servers will leave their seats and gather near the tabernacle. The **Lector** will go down the steps and join the servers.

The Lector is not to carry the Lectionary back into the Sacristy. The altar servers will look after that.

The Celebrant and the Deacon will join the group.

The entire group will genuflect toward the Tabernacle and the servers and the **Lector** will proceed to the Sacristy.

The Celebrant and the Deacon will go to one of the doors to greet the congregation.