Lay Ministers of the Word



*Please note that this booklet draws together resources produced by the Diocese of Westminster with some practical notes from the Parish of St Thomas of Canterbury, Royston.*

In proclaiming the word of God from Sacred Scripture, readers exercise their responsibility in mediating the presence of Christ. God speaks to the assembly through them, and the impact of God’s message will depend significantly on their conviction, their preparation, and their delivery. The richness in the quantity and in the variety of readings in the Lectionary challenges those who are called upon to proclaim the Scriptures at Mass. Each of the individual sacred authors reflected on the meaning of God’s action in history from their own perspective. They employed various literary forms to convey the message of salvation, ranging, for example, from narratives and the poetry of the psalms to prophetic oracles and parables, from theological expositions to apocalyptic visions. A reader will proclaim the word of the Lord more fully and more effectively if he or she has an awareness of the literary form of a particular reading or psalm.

* Both to assist the assembly to appreciate the genre and context of the different passages of Scripture and benefit from a different voice, it is better to have a different reader for each reading.
* The responsorial psalm should be sung by a psalmist or cantor, but, if necessary, may be led by a reader.
* When there is no deacon, a reader may carry the Book of the Gospels before the presiding priest in the entrance procession and lay it on the altar.
* When there is no deacon, the reader may, from the ambo, announce the intentions in the General Intercessions. *Celebrating the Mass* 41-42

**Ministering the Word**

When God shares his word with us, he awaits our response, that is, our listening and our adoring ‘in Spirit and in truth’ (John 4:23). The Holy Spirit makes our response effective, so that what we hear in the celebration of the liturgy we carry out in the way we live: ‘Be doers of the word and not hearers only’ (James 1:22)

*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 6

**Ministering the Word of God at Mass**

A reader is asked to do more than simply read the readings at Mass. The readings are intended to be proclaimed in such a way that they might be heard, and that they might bring those who hear them to a deeper knowledge and love of the Lord. The minister has the responsibility of leading the assembly into a time of listening.

The liturgy of the word must be celebrated in a way that fosters meditation; clearly, any sort of haste that hinders reflectiveness must be avoided. The dialogue between God and his people taking place through the Holy Spirit demands short intervals of silence, suited to the assembly, as an opportunity to take the word of God to heart and to prepare a response to it in prayer.

cf. *Introduction to the Lectionary*, 28

The minister responsible for the effective proclamation of the scriptures needs to learn to draw on the skills of the public speaker – clear pronunciation; speaking sometimes more loudly sometimes more softly , sometimes speaking more slowly and sometimes more quickly – but always speaking audibly; emphasising particular words or phrases to better communicate the meaning of the passage, and making use of pauses to give shape and rhythm and texture to the reading.

**The language of the scriptures**

The Bible is not a collection of uniform books, but of a very diverse collection of writings. These include:

* Poetry – e.g. the Book of Psalms and the Song of Songs
* Narrative – e.g. the Books of Genesis and Exodus
* Parables – examples can be found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.
* Letters – e.g. the Letters of Paul and Peter
* Discourse – e.g. the ‘Farewell Discourse’ of Jesus in the Gospel of John ( John 13:31-17:26) or the Book of Isaiah
* Legal texts – e.g. the Book of Leviticus

Each of these literary forms invites a different way of performance. Poetry makes different demands on the reader and hearer to those of narrative, often Hebrew poetry, such as the Psalms is structured with parallels – either similar ideas or contrasts; parables make different demands to legal texts. Therefore, the reader needs to proclaim these different forms of texts as will best help those who listen to receive them in such a way as enables them to respond to the different demands they make.

A good question to ask oneself when you prepare to read is “what sort of writing is this?” Identifying whether the text is giving instructions, telling a story, offering encouragement or warning, is prose or poetry or something in-between will influence how it should be read.

**Reading in St Thomas’ Royston**

*At home*: do read the readings beforehand, think about what sort of writing they are and how they should sound, include them in your prayer.

*Before Mass:* do be at Church in good time so you can check that the books are in the right place and that you know where the readings are.

Do gather by the door. In the absence of a Deacon, a reader will carry the Book of the Gospels in procession and place it in the middle of the Altar.

*During Mass* Both readers come up together in the opening procession. One reader will read the first reading and the Psalm (if not sung), the other reader will read the second reading and the biddings of the intercessions. Please go back to your seats after the second reading. (And the second reader will return to the lectern for the intercessions.)

Please remember the great principle of ‘noble simplicity’ in liturgy. Do give space around the readings with a short pause after each reading. Please announce the readings simply “A reading from the letter of St Paul to Titus” (as in the Black Printing in the Lectionary). Do not give choreography, people should not normally be told to sit or stand. If we do need to help people with those sorts of instructions or commentary, please leave it to the presiding priest.

The Gospel Acclamation is normally sung (indeed the rubrics say it may be omitted if not sung).

**Resources**

Several resources can be found at <https://rcdow.org.uk/liturgy/resources-for-ministers-of-the-word/>

If you do not have your own copy of the missal, you can find the readings we use at: <https://www.catholicireland.net/readings/> NB currently Ireland and England and Wales are using the same translation for mass (The *Jerusalem Bible* and the *Grail Psalms*) this may well change in the next few years.

A useful help in praying with the readings is the *Wednesday Word*. <http://www.wednesdayword.org/> Please click on the ‘Parish’ to find resources which may help you prepare the readings.