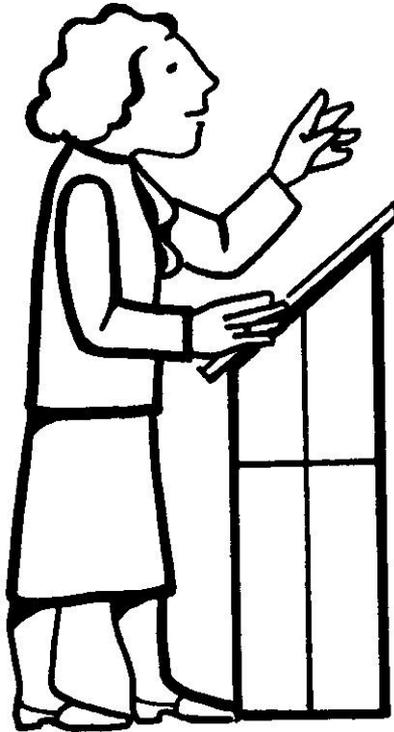


# The Ministry of Reader



*“Thus faith comes from what is heard,  
and what is heard comes  
through the word of Christ.”*

**(Romans 10:17)**



## **PRAYER FOR THE READER**

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 a vitality  
for proclaiming your word with power and authority.  
May your Spirit live in me and  
fill the holy Word which I proclaim.

*Adapted from Our Lady, Star of the Sea Parish, Singapore*

### **Discerning the Presences of Christ**

Remember that while God is everywhere, he is specially present and active in our churches. The presence of Jesus is made manifest in many ways. He is found in the People of God or gathered assembly— the Mystical Body of Christ. He is present in the ordained Priest who makes the Sacrifice of the Mass possible. He is present in the Scriptures or Word of God proclaimed. Finally, he is present upon our altars and in Holy Communion as the consecrated Eucharist. Your role as Reader is to amplify the meaning of this presence and, in cooperation with

God's grace, to help in disposing the community for Christ's redemptive presence as Lord. Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Life. What they hear from you should take root in their minds and hearts. The message of God's inspired Word is transformative and brings about repentance and conversion.

### **Understanding the Message We Transmit**

It is vital that the Reader understands the message that he or she will proclaim. You are not a robot or media player. How can you effectively communicate what you, yourself, to not know?

### **Encountering Christ in the Word**

We do not worship a book. Neither the Lectionary nor the written Bible is the true Word of God— not in itself. Printed words are just markings on paper. If you could not read and/or if there were no one to read them aloud, they would be meaningless and dead. Our Lord is present in his Word when it is proclaimed and received. Long before the printing press, (and bibles were rare and expensive), God's people were fed Scripture principally at Mass along with Holy Communion. Even today, many Catholics spiritually depend upon the proclamation of God's revelation at Sunday worship. It is for this reason that a Reader has a solemn duty and grave responsibility to proclaim God's Word as well and effectively as possible. Remember, it is both spoken and heard. You are not talking to yourself or just to God. Many parishioners use missalettes or missals;

however, these are only helps for the hearing impaired or to better follow the Mass. The posture of the congregation should be that of listening (not reading). The Lector or Reader is the one who reads.

The Reader breathes life into the dead letter of the page so that we might encounter and know the living Word of God. The Reader does not have to be a professional anchor or speaker. The skills needed are basic. Obviously, a certain level of literacy is required and the ability to speak normally. The Reader should speak slowly, loudly and clearly. No fancy dramatics or hand gestures are needed. Such accidentals might actually get in the way.

### **The Art of Reading**

Some parishes encourage the Readers to get missals or to take the missalettes home with them. This way they can practice the passages at home, study them, pray over them, and look up difficult words. Readers who only look at the Scriptures at Mass are bound to fumble and mispronounce words. They should also practice aloud. A friend or family member might give valuable advice to make the effort more successful. Remember, all good Readers come to Mass prepared.

### **Readers are Companions of the Word**

Readers are often encouraged to take part in parish bible study efforts. The person assigned such duties represents the Church and will be looked upon as a person for whom the Bible is important. This goes beyond the readings

selected for liturgies. We do not want to be hypocrites, proclaiming Scriptures with which we have little involvement. While certainly good for all Catholics, parish Readers in particular must be People of the Word.

### **Appreciate the Liturgy as a Whole**

When you look at the readings, consider all of them for the upcoming celebration. Another Reader might have the other selection or a cantor will sing the Responsorial Psalm. The priest or deacon will do the Gospel. Nevertheless, familiarize yourself with all the readings so that you might better know how yours fits in with the theme of the liturgy. Usually the first reading and the Gospel show a clear connection, the second reading less so. If you are scheduled with another Reader, practice that selection as well. If he or she fails to appear, you may have to do them both. When there is no music, you must also be prepared to read the Psalm.

### **Study the Word**

Readers often recite the Alleluia verse (especially on weekdays); however, this introduction to the Gospel is best sung. Indeed, many clergy prefer to omit it if it is not sung. The priest, if musically inclined, will sometimes do it if there is no cantor. When you look at the Scripture reading, it is useful to determine what type of literature it is. There are epistles or letters, speeches, historical narratives, poetry, judgment or woe passages, prophecy, laments, allegory, hymns, apocalyptic literature, stories,

etc. What is the thrust of the overall book or letter? Who wrote it and who is speaking? What is the emotional weight of the reading?

### **Punctuality & Preparedness**

Do not arrive for Mass at the last minute or late. This will make matters rushed and is a disservice both to you and to the gathered community. Come at least fifteen to thirty minutes early. Check the Lectionary book to make sure you can find and read the texts easily. On the level of a whisper, practice the reading one last time. Look over the intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful. Let the priest know that you are present. Spend five to ten minutes in a pew composing yourself and at prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit so that God might make you into his mighty instrument.

### **Appearance**

Take notice of your appearance. Dress nicely and formally. Women's dresses should be modestly cut. Ties and even suit jackets are appropriate vesture for men. Beyond your clothes, take note of non-verbal signs: what is your body and facial language saying? Do not make mechanical gestures. How does your voice sound? Is it rushed, nervous, monotone, or overly emotional? While eye contact is nice, your main purpose is to communicate the Scriptures. Insure that your eyes remain sufficiently on the written page so that the reading does not sound broken or awkward. Do not read individual words but phrases and

sentences. You are conveying ideas not disconnected words as in a dictionary. We know that you have some vocabulary. Show enthusiasm for the Scriptures, communicating by your expression and manner a love and devotion for God's revealed Word.

### **Making the Book Your Own**

The revised rubrics specify that the Lector or Reader no longer carries the Lectionary. Only the Book of the Gospels is carried in the Entrance Procession, and often by a deacon. It is held up high in honor of Christ and the wonderful story of salvation.

As a trick of the trade, you may want to keep a finger on the line where you are currently reading. This way you will not lose your place. However, do not do this word for word as it will tend to make your reading choppy and disconnected.

### **Be Yourself & Really Share the Message**

You are not an actor. Avoid giving exaggerated drama to the readings. Speak loudly and imagine you are talking to the person in the last row or standing by the doors. If people cannot hear you then you have not done your job. Make sure you understand how the microphone, speakers and acoustics work in the church. Adjust the microphone so that it is facing your mouth and not over your forehead or toward the floor. Keep proper distance from the microphone to make it effective and to avoid distortion.

## **Do Your Best to Be Intelligible**

Control as best as you are able personal quirks in speaking that would alter the proclamation. Some Readers routinely add “s” at the end of names or other words. If the text says “pray” or “Daniel,” do not change it to “prays” or “Daniels.” Immigrants might sometimes pronounce certain words differently. Indeed, the small state of Maryland possesses many local dialects and archaic expressions. People in Baltimore have their nasal sound and funny “a” and “o” (with an “r” sound that magically appears) and Southern Marylanders have a southern drawl. As an instance of this drawl, the word “ask” is sometimes pronounced as “axe” or as the word for a rebellious donkey (yes, the vulgar word for one’s backside). Make sure that the majority will comprehend what is being said. Others drop off the ends of words or get quiet at the conclusion of sentences. Pay attention that all the sounds and syllables are properly articulated.

## **Believe & Live What You Proclaim**

Let us be honest. Jesus disapproves of hypocrites. If you cannot in good faith read Scripture then do not volunteer as a Reader. You must believe and be a Catholic in good standing. If a particular reading is painful for you, seek out another Reader and switch weeks. Examples of this would be people still hurting over a bad marriage, abuse, and the murder of a loved one. They might be emotionally overcome in regard to texts which stress marriage fidelity, long-suffering in diversity and the forgiveness of those

who hurt us. It is important that we “personally” believe the words we speak.

### **We are Servants, Not Masters of the Word**

When you announce the text, “A reading from...,” pause for a moment before starting the Scripture text. Stand erect but not rigid. Try not to shake or to move from side to side. God will give you the strength and the courage to talk before others. Do not be afraid. Like the introductory words, the closure, “The Word of the Lord,” should also be separated from the reading by a brief pause. We do not want to confuse these words with the Scriptural text.

We should neither add nor subtract to these words or in any way change the readings. Some Readers still say, “This is the Word of the Lord,” however, this was shortened by Church authorities to the more literal rendition of the Latin, “The Word of the Lord.” The emphasis is moved away from the book to the proclaimed text. The Reader is a servant of the Word, not its master. Further, we should not draw undue attention to ourselves. Some Catholic churches borrow from the Protestant tradition in citing chapter and verse before quoting Scripture. This is inappropriate. The Mass is not the same as bible study. It is a ritual or ceremonial with definite rubrics. The Mass has many parts but it is a whole and should not be dissected with interruptions to its rhythm or movement. This also applies when the Reader does the Responsorial Psalm. The Reader or Cantor should say or sing the verse to be repeated, but not add words like, “Our response will

be....” However, such directions can be offered during the Prayer of the Faithful if there is a special response other than “Lord, hear our prayer.” Otherwise, habit should make additional directions unnecessary.

It is not the Reader’s responsibility to offer any commentary to the readings. The priest or deacon will preach. Here we allow the readings to speak for themselves. Please avoid the temptation to change or “correct” the text. God’s Word is inspired, you are not. Several years ago a well-meaning woman changed the word “submission” to “love” in regard to a wife’s posture to her husband in Ephesians 5. The priest had intended to preach on its meaning. Unfortunately an embarrassing scene was made (everyone knew from the missalettes what she had done) and God’s Word was violated.

### **Mistakes Happen, It is Okay**

You are human and mistakes will be made. Try to be professional but do not worry. If you miss or read a word incorrectly, garble a sentence or confuse a thread of thought— just back up and read it correctly. Never apologize for a mistake. That makes matters worse. It further breaches the text. If an error is small and does not hurt the meaning then just keep going and ignore it.

Your willingness to serve the faith community is greatly and gratefully appreciated.

***Archdiocese of Washington***  
**Liturgical Norms: Scripture & Readers**

**B. OFFICES AND MINISTRIES**

**Instituted Lectors**

6.8.1 The lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel. He may also announce the intentions for the Prayer of the Faithful and, in the absence of a psalmist, proclaim the Psalm between the readings. In the Eucharistic celebration, the lector has his own proper office, which he must exercise personally.

6.8.2 A layman who is to be installed in the ministry of lector on a stable basis must have completed his twenty-first year of age. The candidate must also possess the skills necessary for an effective proclamation of the Word or service at the altar, be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church, be free of any canonical penalty, and live a life which befits the ministry to be undertaken.

6.8.3 In the dioceses of the United States of America, lectors may wear the alb and cincture or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing.

**Readers**

6.9.1 In the absence of instituted lectors, other laypersons may be commissioned to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture.

6.9.2 The Order for the Blessing of Readers may be used when readers first begin their ministry. However, any ceremony associated with the deputation of readers must not have any semblance to the ceremony of sacred ordination, nor may such ceremony have a form analogous to that of the conferral of the ministries of lector or acolyte.

6.9.3 Readers should be truly suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so that the faithful by listening to the readings from the sacred texts may develop in their hearts a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture. They must also possess the skills necessary for an effective proclamation of the Word or service at the altar, be fully initiated members of the Catholic Church, be free of any canonical penalty, and live lives which befit the ministry to be undertaken.

6.9.4 In the dioceses of the United States of America, readers may wear the alb and cincture or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing.

6.9.5 The reading of Scripture during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by Catholics. On exceptional occasions and for a just cause, the Archbishop may permit a baptized non-Catholic to take on the task of reader.

## USCCB Guidelines: The Lector At Mass

### **General Principles**

#### ***Reading and Explaining the Word of God***

When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are an element of the greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture the Word of God is addressed to all people of whatever era and is understandable to them, a fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness of the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, by the Homily, as part of the liturgical action. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], no. 29)

#### ***Vocal Expression of the Different Texts***

In texts that are to be pronounced in a loud and clear voice, whether by the Priest or the Deacon, or by a reader, or by everyone, the voice should correspond to the genre of the text itself, that is, depending upon whether it is a reading, a prayer, an explanatory comment, an acclamation, or a sung text; it should also be suited to the form of celebration and to the solemnity of the gathering. Consideration should also be given to the characteristics of different languages and of the culture of different peoples. (GIRM, no. 38)

## ***Silence***

The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favor meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided. In the course of it, brief periods of silence are also appropriate, accommodated to the assembled congregation; by means of these, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and lastly at the conclusion of the Homily. (GIRM, no. 56)

## **Scripture Readings**

In the readings, the table of God's Word is spread before the faithful, and the treasures of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable that the arrangement of the biblical readings be maintained, for by them the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history is brought out. Nor is it lawful to replace the readings and Responsorial Psalm, which contain the Word of God, with other, non-biblical texts.

In the celebration of the Mass with the people, the readings are always read from the ambo.

The function of proclaiming the readings is by tradition not presidential but ministerial. Therefore the readings are to be read by a reader, but the Gospel by the Deacon or, in his absence, by another Priest. If, however, a Deacon

or another Priest is not present, the Priest Celebrant himself should read the Gospel, and moreover, if no other suitable reader is present, the Priest Celebrant should also proclaim the other readings as well.

After each reading, whoever reads it pronounces the acclamation, and by means of the reply the assembled people give honor to the Word of God that they have received in faith and with gratitude. (GIRM, nos. 57-59)

The lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel. He may also announce the intentions for the Universal Prayer and, in the absence of a psalmist, recite the Psalm between the readings.

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the lector has his own proper function (cf. nos. 194-198), which he himself must carry out. (GIRM, no. 99)

In the absence of an instituted lector, other lay people may be deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, people who are truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared, so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for Sacred Scripture. (GIRM, no. 101)

### ***The Liturgy of the Word***

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 reader pronounces the acclamation, "*The word of the Lord,*" and all reply, "*Thanks be to God.*"

Then a few moments of silence may be observed, if appropriate, so that all may meditate on what they have heard.

Then the psalmist or the reader proclaims the verses of the Psalm and the people make the response as usual.

If there is to be a Second Reading before the Gospel, the reader proclaims it from the ambo. All listen and at the end reply to the acclamation, as noted above (no. 128). Then, if appropriate, a few moments of silence may be observed. (GIRM, nos. 128-130)

## **Functions of the Lector**

### ***The Introductory Rites***

In the procession to the altar, in the absence of a Deacon, the reader, wearing approved attire [see GIRM, no. 339], may carry the Book of the Gospels, slightly elevated. In that case, the reader walks in front of the Priest but otherwise walks along with the other ministers.

Upon reaching the altar, the reader makes a profound bow with the others [see also GIRM, no. 274]. If he is carrying the Book of the Gospels, he approaches the altar

and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then the reader takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers. (GIRM, nos. 194-195)

### ***The Liturgy of the Word***

The reader reads from the ambo the readings that precede the Gospel. In the absence of a psalmist, the reader may also proclaim the Responsorial Psalm after the First Reading.

In the absence of a Deacon, the reader, after the introduction by the Priest, may announce the intentions of the Universal Prayer from the ambo.

If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons given in the Missal are not recited by the faithful, the reader may read them at an appropriate time (cf. nos. 48, 87). (GIRM, nos. 196-198)

### ***The Concluding Rites***

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.

The Archdiocese of Washington has regular workshops for Readers. Instruction is offered on how Readers can be effective proclaimers of the Word in a liturgical setting. The Lectionary and the structure of the Catholic Biblical tradition are explained. The workshops are open to all. For more information, contact [liturgy@adw.org](mailto:liturgy@adw.org) or call the Worship Office at 301-853-4594.





**This booklet is prepared as an aid to assist those who volunteer and worship at Holy Family Catholic Parish, Mitchellville, MD. May it make possible a more active lay participation in our faith community.**

**12010 Woodmore Road  
Mitchellville, MD 20721**

**301-249-2266**