

The Structure of the Mass

- Entrance Rite
- Liturgy of the Word
- Liturgy of the Eucharist
- Concluding Rite

At Mass we are fed from two tables: **Table of the Word** and **Table of the Eucharist**.

The Table of the Word is the ambo. The scripture proclaimed at the Table of the Word reveals who God is. The Table of the Eucharist is the altar. The action at the table of the Eucharist is Jesus sharing God's life with us.

We are nourished at both tables because Christ is really present in the activity that takes place at both. Together they form a single sacred place and action - breaking the Word and breaking the bread for the assembly gathered in faith.

The reader is a key person in one of the two sacred activities in Mass. Namely the Liturgy of the Word. How the reader deals with his or her ministry plays a vital role in our understanding of the importance of the Word at Mass. The Liturgy of the Word has a power way beyond the mechanics of public speaking. It is read in faith to a people of faith.



In the celebration of the word, the Lord enchants our ears, touches our hearts, comforts us who are in sorrow, shows us the path of life. . . . He does this through the ministry of his ministers at the ambo and in their witness to him in everyday life



Questions for reflection

- How do I prepare myself for hearing the Word of God at Mass?
- Do I find that I am able to ponder that Word during Mass and in the days following?
- What passages of scripture have had a particular impact on my understanding of God and his saving love?
- Are there ways in which I can make the reading of Scripture a fruitful part of my daily prayer?

The Scriptures

The bible we open is not just a book of poetry, or of historical events and fables, or of tradition, but of our lives, providing us with a way of direction for Christian life. Instead of reading it, let it read you. How much more could we speak about hearing the word and then quickly forgetting it! It is to be lived. In proclaiming the Word of God, 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 reader has responsibility for not simply reading the Word, but assisting the assembly to hear the Word.

This will require the reader to be attentive to the assembly and careful to allow for times of pause and silence as the assembly prepares to listen and, once the reading has been proclaimed, as it takes the word of God to heart. It also requires that the diction of the reader is such that he or she can be readily understood by the assembly to whom they minister.

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. Other people may use these same sorts of techniques to good effect in play-acting, to 'make pretend'. The minister of God's word uses them to bring about the communication of saving truth, to serve God's speaking to the minds and hearts of the faithful.

Preparing to Read

At Mass, as they prepare to listen to the proclamation of the Gospel, Christ's faithful people trace the sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips and heart. This action denotes the desire to be responsive to the Lord in our thoughts, in our words and in our hearts. In preparing a reading, during the week prior to ministering the Word to the congregation, the reader should attend to these same three dimensions.

Understanding the reading

- What is the writer trying to say?
- What does this mean to me and my community?
- How does it relate to the other readings and prayers at Mass?
- What does God say to the Church in this word today?



The Liturgy of the Word is a privileged encounter with the risen Lord. Ministers of the word assist this encounter



Speaking the reading

- Begin a slow reverential reading of it. Be attentive to each word there. Try speaking the words out loud. Be conscious of the literary context – am I reading a myth, some history or poetry, perhaps a parable or a proverb.
- Consider how you can proclaim the passage so as to give fresh and authentic voice to God's living word?

Praying the Reading

- Read yourself into the bible scene. Make connections with today's world. There are words and images here to trigger vivid thoughts and memories. Linger patiently with each of these.
- Make time to respond in prayer to what you have discovered in the reading.
- Speak with the Lord about how you respond to his saving love.
- Try also to spend time bringing before the Lord the community that you are called to serve. Pray that, through listening together to God's word, all might come to live in unity with God and with each other.
- Ministers of God's word needs to be dwellers upon God's word before they can be its proclaimers.

Good Diction

Words have vowels and consonants. The vowels are A E I O U. The consonants are the rest. Consonants are like bookends. They package the vowels in units the hearer can decode and understand. They make for clear reading.

Always pronounce the final letter in every word; do this in order to be understood. Hit every consonant with a little vocal hammer. You don't have to exaggerate them but respect them: He **walked**. She **said**. They **lamented**. The prophet was **standing**. Practice staying with the word right to the last consonant. You may feel like you are being too precise and artificial. Not really... we listeners need this!

Phrasing

Phrasing is how the words are grouped together. Put words in groups that make sense to you, and allow you to catch your breath; i.e. be conscious of your rhythm. Commas and full stops are to help you with phrasing. Commas expect us to pause, briefly, in our story, but we can soon move off again. Full stops are always 'red light' instructions. With these, you have to stop.

Example

The only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14 – 18)

It is a strong sentence and it needs good phrasing. Read it aloud a few times. Then make a judgment on how to phrase it. Suppose you decide the heart of the sentence is the phrase; *the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Mark your missal this way:

The only/thing I can boast about is// the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ// through whom/ the world is crucified to me// and I to the world.//

/ is a short pause. // is a much longer pause. Don't be afraid to make judgments about phrasing! By practicing out loud, you are also learning to fit phrases into your individual breathing pattern.

Take your time!

Probably the most common fault with readers. Too fast. Bombarding the hearer with sounds but not with meaning. Take it easy. We are so used to silently reading a paper or a book to ourselves, that our eye flies across the print. Reading in public is a very different matter. We are sending out airwaves that need time to travel and time to be received to the hearer.

The listener needs time to decode and extract the meaning. That happens in the silences; in the care which we pronounce long words; in the pauses between words. The larger the church, the greater the number of people, the more we need to slow the pace.

Get the pace right and the hearers get the meaning.

Microphone Technique

The reader must be 100% sure that they can be easily heard. Make friends with the microphone. It is not just the direction toward which the microphone is aimed that is important, but also its distance from the speaker since many microphones also have an ideal separation distance from the speaker. This depends on how the amplifier is set up and needs to be respected. With practice one senses when the volume of the amplified sound is right and also how much the lectern may help reflect our voices.

Another practical aspect is to know the acoustic characteristics of the church or the "space" in which you are reading. In a large church where there is a good distance between the reader and the last pew (or between the loudspeakers and the farthest person), the reader may need to speak more slowly to allow the words to be more easily heard.

Getting there. Getting settled

Get to church in good time. Last minute breathless arrival only invites nervousness. Part of the point on being in good time is:

- to let the celebrant know you are there
- to check the microphone
- to check that the book is open at the right page to have another look at your reading in your missal
- and then leave them alone and follow the mass
- to get a seat near the front. You don't want a long walk to the ambo.

Dress Code

Ideally the congregation shouldn't remember what you wore. Rather what you said.

Be comfortable. Especially in the shoes you wear; the flatter the soles the better. Clothing should be appropriate for the occasion, modest, and in keeping with the dignity of the ministry

Getting started at the ambo

Don't move before the first prayer is over and the people have responded Amen.

Approach the Ambo reverently, having revered the altar in accordance with local custom

- Walk slowly to the ambo. That way you won't upset the rhythm of your breathing. Settle yourself when you get there. You need that moment to establish that a new part of the mass – the liturgy of the Word – is starting.
- Settle both feet on the ground. Solidly. Settle both hands on the edge of the ambo. Stillness signals importance. It promotes receptivity. And it helps you do what you have prepared for.
- If the first reading runs overleaf, insert a finger under that leaf, in order to make a smooth turnover and not disrupt the flow of your delivery.
- Look to the congregation and check that they are seated and settled. When they are, announce the introduction to the first reading: i.e. "A reading from..." Do not add extra words to this introduction such as 'First Reading..' or 'The First Reading is....'
- When the text of the first reading has been proclaimed, leave one deep breath of silence pass before announcing the conclusion: "The Word of the Lord". This is what should be used NOT "This is the Word of the Lord". The revised version 'Verbum Domini' tells us this is

what we should use in the future. Make the pause a necessary habit after each reading so as the heart in silence and stillness may respond to the word spoken to it. Be comfortable with this silence.

- Whenever we read in public, we are communicating a message with our presence, mostly in our voicing the words, but also in our body language which also should be given some attention.

Always read from the Lectionary; never from a leaflet, booklet or pastoral publication

Responsorial Psalm

(The Psalm is preferably sung by the Cantor)

- Should the Psalm be read, the reader announces the refrain to the congregation who in turn repeat it; the reader continues reading the verse. Through intonation and eye contact the refrain is subsequently evoked from the congregation. Do not say 'response'

Gospel Acclamation

The Gospel acclamation (Alleluia / Seasonal Acclamation with verse), should always be sung. Otherwise it is omitted. When sung though, the verse may be read by the reader. This obviously would need to be clarified before with Ministers of Music and the celebrant.

Summary....

An anxiety over the pronunciation of people and place names from the scriptures can often lead to a fragmented reading. Check a source for correct pronunciation or ask a priest.

Be comfortable and relaxed entering the Sanctuary, standing at the Ambo and using the microphone.

Know how close you need to stand to the microphone before you read so as to speak directly into it.

While practising in the church, have another person present as a guide.

If necessary, move the Lectionary on the Ambo, or step back slightly, so that your neck is not bent while reading, keeping a constant distance from the microphone.

Make sure that the microphone is turned on — avoid knocking or tapping it.

Project your voice — even when using a microphone. The microphone is not an end in itself, rather speak through it to the congregation.

Speak firmly and at a much slower pace than normal, allowing the people time to reflect.

If you 'trip up', keep going, no need to apologise. If the whole sense of the sentence is lost though, begin it again.

Have a positive attitude, proclaiming a word about which you care, to a people about whom you care.

Speak the word as a message to the congregation, rather than a text to yourself.

Prepare carefully so that you can read intelligently, purposefully and with understanding.

A reading reflected upon, and at least somewhat understood by the reader, stands a good chance of being understood by the listener.

Hold people's attention by varying voice projection, tone and pace, while avoiding being over dramatic.

Connection between reader and congregation is important, therefore eye contact is vital.