

The Ministry of the Reader



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
GIRM 29

Participation in the Eucharist is the source through which we derive the true Christian spirit. It is through participation in the Eucharist that we are empowered to live our lives 'in Christ,' conscious of the call to live as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters to our neighbours. Through their manner of reading, the reader fosters the participation of the assembly, as those present listen to, and so participate in, the proclamation of the Word.

A reader is first and foremost a participant in the celebration of the Eucharist. We are all invited to a participation which is 'full, conscious and active.' Thus, before we are readers, we are participants in the assembly; we are called on to gather, speak, respond, gesture, sing with the entire assembly, be prayerfully attentive and open to the action of the Holy Spirit and seek a deeper understanding of what we are doing when we celebrate the Eucharist.

The act of hospitality belongs to the reader. To extend a welcome to those you meet on the footpath, in the doorway of the church or its entry way is a responsibility we assume as readers, for we are called together not as strangers, but as one body, the Body of Christ. As we extend hospitality to members of the body, we extend this same hospitality to Christ.

In the Eucharist, when the scriptures are proclaimed, Christ is truly present. It is through the reader that God speaks to his people. The role is a serious one.

Reading with understanding and clarity are significant aspects of this ministry. Attention to diction, volume, speed, pausing, phrasing, intonation, expression and pitch all require the attentiveness of the reader who is aware of the presence of Christ in the reading and in the assembly, as they seek to hear what is proclaimed.

The nature of this ministry calls upon the reader to dress in a way that is clean, tidy and modest. Through this important ministry people hear the Word of God spoken to them. It is important that a reader avoids presenting themselves in a way that could cause people to be distracted from hearing the Word. Cultural dress is welcomed.

Punctuality is a further act of hospitality. It is a measure of respect for the Eucharist and for the community to arrive well prepared and 10-15 minutes before the Eucharist is due to begin. The priest is instructed to begin the liturgy 'when the people are gathered.' The Word of God requires a spaciousness that is easily lost through any sense of being rushed.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.

SC or Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
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Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10.17

Christ is truly present the Word, since it is Christ himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.

SC 7 & GIRM 27

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:40

When the people are gathered, and as the Priest enters with the ministers, the Entrance chant begins.

GIRM p 47

The walk to the ambo should be dignified and unhurried. The practice of bowing varies between communities. Christ is present in the Word proclaimed and it is here that we focus our attention at this part of the liturgy. Some communities may bow to the ambo on which the scriptures have already been placed and opened. This may help direct the assembly's attention to the Word and help them appreciate the presence of Christ in the Word. Alternatively, a bow could be made to the altar, which represents Christ, if the reader is passing in front of it on the way to the ambo. There should not be more than one bow. Community norm is important.

It is important that all readers prepare thoroughly by prayer and reflection on the Word. This means a time of deep reflection before coming to Mass, perhaps in contemplative silence and especially by meditating on the scriptures of the day. Make your home in the Word, so the Word can make its home in you. The emphasis is on a person preparing worthily to fulfil their ministry and to engage deeply with the spirit of the liturgy. When we have been transformed by the Word we read, others, when they hear that Word spoken, are more likely to be transformed by it also. Sound preparation is essential.

In addition, the Canon states that those who have some special form of service have a duty to acquire the appropriate formation. This can be understood as ongoing formation. 'Even after you have completed your training and have begun your service as a reader you need to keep growing spiritually to serve well.' (The Liturgical Minister Series by Fr. Paul Turner (c) LTP Chicago 2013). The need to continue to grow spiritually gives life to your ministry and our service. This might be through retreats, workshops or formation days.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal directs us to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word in such a way as to foster meditation. Silence after the first reading (before the Psalm), after the second reading (before the Gospel Acclamation) and after the homily are recommended.

The responsorial psalm is sung and is a response to the first reading. The GIRM recommends the psalmist sing the psalm from the ambo (p 61).

Liturgical ministry enriches a person and for this reason, Liturgy Committees should be concerned to encourage more people to become involved in ministry. It would be inappropriate to have only a few people performing ministries as this could be seen by others in the parish as a sign that no more ministers are needed. People may not readily come forward to serve but this should not be read as a sign that people are not interested. Rather, it is an opportunity for Liturgy Committees to foster, encourage and nurture.

Then the reader goes to the ambo and reads the first reading, while all sit and listen.

The Roman Missal 10

Lay people who are pledged to the special service of the church, whether permanently or for a time, have a duty to acquire the appropriate formation which their role demands.

Canon 231/1