

St. James Community of Faith

The Ministry of Lector

Fall, 2016

*Ministry, is first of all, receiving God's blessing from those
to whom we minister. What is this blessing? It is a
glimpse of the face of God. ~Henri Nouwen*

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"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." (Lk 4:18-19)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus read. He was reading out loud in front of his neighbors at synagogue service one Sabbath. Now he was an adult. "The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me, he continued. People started to pay a little more attention.

"The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me / to bring glad tidings to the poor," Jesus read. People listened even more closely. They had been talking about him ever since he returned to Galilee.

Jesus had already preached in nearby towns, but now he was back home in Nazareth. He was walking the streets of his old neighborhood, seeing familiar faces and summoning up memories.

At Sunday Mass, Christians gather because we also honor the Word of God. As we assemble to celebrate the Eucharist, we do not approach the table of communion until we have feasted at the table of the word.

In the scriptures, God speaks to us. At Mass, God speaks to a particular people gathered at a particular time in a particular place. The word will affect us in different ways. Each person will hear the message uniquely, as the Holy Spirit reaches into the hearts of us all to place within them the message that comes from God.

To work this miracle, God chooses instruments. God uses lectors.

A lector integrates many values. Lectors are people of faith who have nurtured a relationship with God and have formed their lives on the Gospel. They are members of a community of family, friends, and strangers, bound together by a desire to live near and for one another, and to share opportunities for faith and worship. Lectors have come to value their local Church and its mission. They understand the importance of making Sunday worship the highlight of the Mass - because it is.

Lectors have personally encountered the word of God, and through them the people of God encounter the divine Word.

1. *Theology and History of the Lector*

We hear God's word in many ways. We spend time with the Bible in private prayer. We refer to it when preparing for special events. We hear preachers and teachers site specific passages. Most importantly, we hear the word of God proclaimed at Sunday Mass.

When we gather with other believers, we form the people of God. Together we have a task to perform: we offer praise to one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. While we are there, gathered as one in the sacred place, we open our ears together, so that God might speak to us. Most importantly, it is there at the Eucharist, in the presence of the community of believers, where we hear the word of God.

Listening is one of the ways that express our unity. One of the duties of the people of God is to form one body. It is easier to be as one body when we perform the same action, assume the same posture, recite the same words or sing the same songs. But even when it looks like we are doing nothing - when we are listening - we are one. We are one when we unite our hearts in faith, when we hang onto every word as we wish those we love, when we make ourselves still, rather than miss a single word. When we do this together, we are one.

This is our joy. This is our duty: The readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are the element of the greatest importance in the Liturgy.

We all have a part to play when we come to Mass. We do not just attend Mass. We participate at Mass. When someone else is speaking, we participate. We listen. We open our ears and prepare our hearts to respond.

Oh yes, to respond. Jesus did not speak for his own entertainment. God did not invite Abraham and Sarah into promises of the covenant just to fill the air with solemn sound. God's Word comes to us with a purpose. It demands a response.

Our response is twofold. When God speaks, we respond on the spot by listening and adoring. Then later we carry out the purpose of the scriptures in our way of life. All that we do is based upon the Word of God. It is our blueprint, our mission statement, our compass.

God is speaking to us. When the scriptures are read, it is as if the book disappears. The lector becomes the mouthpiece of God. God uses the voice of the lector to say something modern, something new, something that applies to the world today. Yes, the words are old, but their proclamation is always new.

The Liturgy of the Word within the Mass

In the Mass is spread the table both of God's Word and of the Body of Christ, and from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed.

The furniture is different. The Liturgy of the Word focuses on the ambo. The Liturgy of the Eucharist centers at the altar. These two furnishings draw the attention of the faithful throughout each part of the Mass.

There is one moment at the beginning, however, when the two parts of the Mass may draw together. In the entrance procession, the deacon - or in his absence a lector - may carry the Book of the Gospels to the sanctuary. Arriving there, the person carrying the book sets it on the altar, makes a reverence, and withdraws. **This action does not take place with the Lectionary.**

The Book of the Gospels represents Christ. The altar, where the Liturgy of the Eucharist will be celebrated, also represents Christ. So at the beginning of Mass, these two symbols of Christ are brought together in a simple, yet meaningful gesture. The Book of the Gospels, carried up to the sanctuary in the entrance procession, is placed on the altar. The words of Jesus are set on the altar of Jesus. The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are joined as one.

The word of God deserves our respect. Lectors are not to change the texts for the introduction and conclusion of the reading, nor of the reading itself. Just announce, "A reading from..." The people more easily open their ears to the reading when they hear the appropriate cue.

The reading closes when the lector says, "The word of the Lord." Some years ago, the lector used to conclude the reading with "This is the word of the Lord." But the conclusion was changed for various reasons. For example, the Latin text, on which the English translations of the parts of the Mass are based, has always had the lector say, "Verbum Domini," literally, "The word of the Lord".

The initial English translation made sense: "This is the word of the Lord." it made a simple declarative statement about the word that had been read. But in time, the meaning became obscured. Some lectors picked up the book before they announced, "This is the word of the Lord," as if the word were the book. It is not. The book is special, and it deserves to be handled with reverence because of its sacred contents and purpose. But the word is not the book. The book is the spoken word.

2. The History of Lectors

The proclamation of Scriptures at the Eucharist dates back at least as far as the time of Saint Justin. Writing about the year 150, he described a typical gathering of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. From this brief witness we recognize the customs of having regular readings and lector to proclaim them.

Before a man was ordained to the major order of priesthood, he passed through a series of rituals called minor orders. Originally, the minor orders appointed ministers to perform certain tasks, but in time they evolved into steps toward ordination to the priesthood. One of these made him a lector, but he was a lector more in name than in deed.

The Second Vatican Council made some changes to the ministry of lector. Pope Paul VI abolished the minor order of lector, a status attained when a bishop ordained a cleric to this function in a liturgical ceremony. But Pope Paul retained the title lector as an "instituted" lay ministry, a status still attained in a liturgical ceremony over which a bishop presides.

Men and women share this ministry in parishes equally as *non-instituted, commissioned* lectors.

Our Lectionary

The Second Vatican Council also made changes to the Lectionary. The Sunday Lectionary expanded into a three-year cycle of readings denoting Years A, B and C. During Ordinary Time, each year features one Gospel: Matthew, Mark and Luke, respectively. The Gospel of John appears during the Easter season all three years, as well as on other occasions, such as the second Sunday in Ordinary Time each year, many of the Sundays of Lent, and some of the summer Sundays of Year B.

3. The Role of the Lector during Mass

The lector's role takes place during the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of this first half of the Mass are the readings from sacred scripture and the music occurring between them. Periods of silence, the homily, the Creed, and the Prayer of the Faithful fill out the Liturgy of the Word.

If the deacon does not lead the Prayer of the Faithful, a lector may do so. The lector's role concludes with the Liturgy of the Word. The lector continues, however, to participate fully at Mass throughout the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the proclamation of the word, the people will realize how well the lector understands the reading. The lector's preparation will be evident by the way the reading sounds. The preparation is more than technical, grammatical, and mental. It is, above all, spiritual.

4. Spirituality and Formation of Lector

The most important activity of your life is your regular participation at Sunday Mass. You do not have to be a lector to know this is true.

Sunday is also a day of leisure. It should feel different from other days. People often say it should not be hard to set aside one hour a week for God. That is true, but faithful celebration of Mass will require more time. It will take time for leisure, especially before Mass. It will be hard to participate if we are busy up to the time we leave home to go to church. Our minds and bodies need time to prepare.

While you are at church, even if you are not serving as lector that day, put your heart, will, mind, and strength into the Eucharist. As a member of the assembly, you will be called upon to sing songs, make responses, assume postures, make gestures, and observe silences. People will do what you do. If you model participation and prayer for them even when you are not in the ambo, they will more gratefully follow your words when you are.

It takes time to learn the names of people in a parish, but it is worth the effort. You will feel more and more at home at church, and people will feel more and more at home with you as their reader.

5. Prayer at Home

Everyone is encouraged to pray at home. The early Christians made it a habit twice a day - morning and evening. If it was getting light or getting dark, it was getting to be time to pray.

One method of praying the scriptures has traditionally been called *lectio divina*. It is a process of slow meditation on word of God. When you read the morning paper or an assignment for class or a light novel, you probably do it as quickly do it as quickly as you can. Calm yourself and prepare your heart to an attitude of prayer. Read slowly the passage you are going to proclaim on Sunday. Did something in the text grab your attention? Reflect a while on that word or phrase. Memorize it. Pray about it: tell God what is on your mind about those words. Then rest in the presence of God, who comes to you in this word. Read the passage slowly again, and let it speak to you more deeply than it did the first time.

6. Retreat Days

Look for opportunities to learn more about the Bible. There may be a retreat center near where you live. Take advantage of the days offered for prayer and meditation. Attend a retreat of several days once a year if you are able. Take a spiritual book or a biblical commentary with you to a special place where you can spend some time reading slowly with understanding.

7. Silence

The signature task of any lector is reading. But every lector must also be comfortable with silence. If you aspire to be a good lector, be good at silence. Make time each day to quiet your heart. Prepare yourself before you read. The Word of God is truly present in the proclaim word. And the Spirit of God is truly present in the silences.

Questions

1. How do you use the Bible for prayer at home?

2. This week, how have you heard someone use a passage from the Bible? What did it say to you?

3. Apart from the liturgy, how do you use the written word or the spoken word in service to others in your community?

4. When is the quietest part of your day? When is the noisiest?

Lector—As a Lector your voice becomes the voice of Christ. Just as He taught the parables and captured the attention of all those listening, so will you. You do not just “read” the scripture. You do not just “say” the words printed on the page. You proclaim His words. Your voice echoes Christ’s voice in our ears, in our hearts and in our minds. As a Lector, you will fill us with the word, or words, of strength and guidance we need for that day and that week.

- **Arrive 20 minutes before mass**
 - Coordinate with your Lector partner who will do the following:
 - Carry the Book of Gospels in the procession
 - Greeting
 - 1st Reading
 - 2nd Reading
 - Prayers of the Faithful – (if no Deacon is present)
 - If there is no Deacon present, please read the prayers over a few times to familiarize yourself with the verbiage and pronunciation of names. A copy will be available on the counter in the vesting sacristy as well as in the Prayers of the Faithful binder.