



Recognizing that most people do not have the time to dedicate to more in-depth reading of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and some of the other ancillary liturgical documents, the USCCB produced the following “General Principles.” The principles outlined in the text are followed by their citation in the GIRM or other document, for those who wish to have more information. It is hoped that this piece can serve as a handy tool for the reader and those responsible for their formation on the local level.

When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own 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, nevertheless, 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*, 29.

Reading and Explaining the Word of God¹

When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the gospel. The readings of God’s Word must therefore be listened to by all with reverence; they make up a principal element of the liturgy. In the biblical readings, God’s Word addresses all people of every era and is understandable to them, and a fuller understanding and efficacy are fostered by a living commentary on it, that is to say, by the homily, understood as an integral part of the liturgical action (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], 29).

Vocal Expression of the Different Texts

In texts that are to be delivered in a loud and clear voice, whether by the Priest or Deacon or by the reader, or by

all, the tone of voice should correspond to the genre of the text, that is, accordingly as it is a reading, a prayer, an instruction, an acclamation, or a liturgical song; the tone should also be suited to the form of celebration and to the solemnity of the gathering. Other criteria are the idiom of different languages and the genius of peoples (GIRM, 38).

Silence

The Liturgy of the Word must be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. For this reason, any kind of haste which impedes recollection must be clearly avoided. Brief moments of silence are appropriate during the liturgy. Such moments should be suitable for the gathered assembly, in which the Word of God is taken into the heart by the fostering of the Holy Spirit, and its response is prepared through prayer. Such moments of silence are opportunely observed after the first and second reading, and then, at the completion of the homily (GIRM, 56).

Preparation for Ministry

The Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass* prioritizes the spiritual preparation of the minister over the technical preparation.² This is not to say that knowing how to skillfully read in a public setting is not important, but that an understanding of what is being read and how it fits into the liturgy as a whole should come first. A proclamation of the word done well should reflect an internal belief in what has been spoken. As Saint Paul says to the Romans, “How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”³

As with any liturgical ministry, it is important for those who serve in this capacity to be recognized. All who serve as regularly scheduled readers should be blessed according to the rite found in the *Book of Blessings*, chapter 61. Any fully-initiated Catholic in good standing may serve as reader. Those who are not fully-initiated (such as grade school children who have not yet received Confirmation) may serve as reader with the pastor’s permission.

¹ Based upon *Roman Missal* Formational Materials provided by the Secretariat for the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002. Adapted for use in the Diocese of Evansville by the Office of Worship, 2012.

² See *Lectionary for Mass*, 55.

³ Romans 10:14

Scripture Readings

- ✘ In the readings, the table of God's word is laid for the faithful and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, the arrangement of the biblical readings must be observed, whereby the unity of each Testament and of the history of salvation is demonstrated. It is never permitted that the readings and responsorial psalm, which contain the Word of God, are substituted by other, non-biblical texts (GIRM, 57).
- ✘ In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always given from the ambo (GIRM, 58).
- ✘ By tradition, the office of reading the Scriptures is a ministerial, not a presidential function. The readings should be delivered by a reader, the Gospel being proclaimed by the Deacon or by a Priest other than the celebrant. If, however, a Deacon or other Priest is not present, the Priest Celebrant proclaims the Gospel. Further, if a suitable reader is not present, then the Priest also delivers the other readings. After each reading, whoever does the reading proclaims the acclamation. Responding to it, the gathered people honor the Word of God which they have received with faith and grateful hearts (GIRM, 59).
- ✘ The reader is to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel reading. He may also announce the intentions for the Prayer of the Faithful⁴ and, in the absence of the psalmist, sing or read the psalm between the readings. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the reader has specific duties which he alone ought to perform, even though ordained ministers may be present (GIRM, 99).
- ✘ Readers must be truly qualified and carefully prepared for this office, so that the faithful will develop a warm and lively love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the reading from the sacred.

Functions of the Reader: Introductory Rites

- ✘ In the Entrance Procession, when no Deacon is present, the reader, wearing the appropriate vesture,⁵ may carry the *Book of the Gospels* elevated slightly. In that case, the reader walks in front of the Priest but behind the other ministers. Otherwise the reader walks with the other ministers (GIRM, 194).
- ✘ Upon reaching the altar, the reader makes a profound bow with the others.⁶ If the reader is carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, the reader omits the bow, goes to the altar and places the *Book of the Gospels* on it. Then, the reader takes up a position with the other ministers (GIRM, 195).

Liturgy of the Word

- ✘ After the Collect, all sit. The Priest may, in a very few words, introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word. Then the reader goes to the ambo and proclaims the first reading from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass. At the end, the reader makes the acclamation, "The Word of the Lord," with all responding, "Thanks be to God."
- ✘ Then a brief period of silence may be observed as appropriate, so that all may meditate on what they have heard (GIRM, 128).
- ✘ The psalmist or the reader sings or recites the psalm verse and, as a rule, the congregation makes the response (GIRM, 129).
- ✘ If there is a second reading before the Gospel, the reader proclaims it from the ambo with all listening and making the acclamation at the end, as above (GIRM, 128). Then, as the occasion allows, a brief period of silence may be observed (GIRM, 130).
- ✘ After the Priest gives the introduction to the Prayer of the Faithful, the reader may announce the intentions from the ambo when no Deacon is present (GIRM, 197).
- ✘ If there is no opening liturgical song or communion song and the antiphons in the *Missal* are not said by the faithful, the reader may recite them at the appropriate time (GIRM, 198).

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- ✘ At the conclusion of the Mass, the reader does not process with the *Book of the Gospels*. The Lectionary is never carried in procession. The reader may join in the procession at the end of Mass in the same order as the Entrance Procession.

⁴ GIRM, 71: They are announced from the ambo ... by the Deacon or by a cantor, a reader, or one of the lay faithful.

⁵ Ibid., 339: ...lectors, and other lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing.

⁶ Ibid., 274: If, however, the tabernacle with the Most Blessed Sacrament is present in the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the other ministers genuflect when they approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the celebration of Mass itself.