

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

*'In the beginning was the Word:
the Word was with God
and the Word was God.'*

(John 1:1)

The Ministry of Reader comes from God. It is the Lord who wants to communicate to his people; it is God who has inspired these messages of hope and comfort, of challenge and surprising truth. During the liturgy, the Reader is fulfilling a mission to his or her fellow community members. It is a sacred duty that involves a sharing of one's own faith. It is something special and requires adequate preparation.

The Reader is entrusted with the crucial task of making the word of God come alive by proclaiming it for the Christian assembly. A well-prepared Reader can do much to enhance the celebration of the liturgy by a prayerful and powerful proclamation of the word of God. Such a proclamation can touch and move the whole assembly, serving as an instrument of God's grace.

The Reader then, serves the Eucharistic assembly - the people God has gathered to hear His Word - by telling the story of God's saving work in the lives of His people. These stories, told for generations, reinforce our identity as members of the community of God.

When your words came I devoured them. Your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.

(Jer 15:16)

WHAT IS MINISTRY?

All ministry in the Church is centred on the building up of the Body of Christ. The focus of all liturgical ministry is to assist people's communion with God through their fruitful participation in the worship of the Church.



Genuine ministry is about humble service. The model for all ministry is Christ himself, who came 'not to be served but to serve' (Mt 20:28). His command to 'love one another' (Jn 13:34) permeated his life and ministry. The liturgical minister must put aside personal preferences and judgements in order to serve the community and give true witness to Christ's presence in the celebration. Ministry is not about 'me'; it is about leading people to encounter Christ.

'The common end for which the diverse liturgical ministries work is not a ceremony but a corporate life in faithful communion with all God's holy people and holy things. For this reason liturgical ministers should never be seen to do in the liturgy what they are not regularly seen to do outside the liturgy.'

(Aidan Kavanagh, Elements of Rite, 1990)

Liturgical Ministry

LAY MINISTERS OF THE WORD

Since the beginning of the Church, communities have chosen people for the task of reading the Scriptures within the liturgy. Yet being a Reader is more than simply fulfilling a task. At its best, Reading is a calling, vocation and a spiritual discipline. It is a commitment to preparing oneself so that one's reading becomes a vehicle for God's word. Today we take the proclamation of the word of God for granted, but perhaps do not recognise that Reading is an act of proclamation and the key instrument of that proclamation is the Minister of Reader.



PRAYER FOR LAY MINISTERS OF THE WORD

May the word of God the Father
in all its richness dwell in your hearts and minds
and may you be so formed in his Holy Spirit
that you may worthily fulfil
your ministry among us to his glory
and for the building up of his people.

Amen

THE WORD OF GOD

Which do you think more important – the word of God or the body of Christ?

If you want to answer correctly, you must tell me that the word of God is no less important than the body of Christ!

How careful are we, when the body of Christ is distributed to us, not to let any bit of it fall to the ground from our hand!

But we should be just as careful not to let slip from our hearts the word of God that is addressed to us, by thinking or speaking of something else.

He will be no less guilty who listens negligently to the word of God than he who by his negligence allows the Lord's body to fall on the ground.

(Caesarius of Arles)

The Church has always revered sacred Scripture even as it has revered the body of the Lord, because, above all in the liturgy, it has never ceased to receive the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body and to offer it to the faithful.

(Dei Verbum, 21)



UNDERSTANDING THE MASS

The Mass is made up of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist and these are so closely connected as to form one act of worship. In the word of God the divine covenant is announced; in the Eucharist the new and everlasting covenant is embodied and renewed.

Mass begins with the opening rites that offer praise to God, after which we express sorrow for our sins. In the Liturgy of the Word we listen to God's voice speaking to us in the readings from Scripture and we hear Christ speak to us in the Gospel.

The chosen people entered into a special covenant with God at Sinai, a covenant that was renewed and fulfilled on Calvary.

By hearing the word proclaimed in worship, the faithful again enter into the unending dialogue between God and the covenant people, a dialogue sealed in the sharing of the Eucharistic food and drink. The meaning of Communion is proclaimed in the word; the message of Scripture is made actual once again in the Communion banquet.

'It can never be forgotten that the divine word, read and proclaimed by the Church, has as its one purpose the sacrifice of the new covenant and the banquet of grace, that is, the Eucharist' (Ordo Lectionum Missae, 10). Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. (Verbum Domini 55).

WHERE DOES MY MINISTRY FIT INTO THE MASS?

'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. ... In the biblical readings, God's word addresses all people of every era and is understandable to them'

(General Instructions of the Roman Missal 29).

During Mass we have four distinct encounters with Christ – in the people gathered together, in the presiding priest or bishop, in the word of God, which is 'alive and active' (*Heb 4:12*) and in the Body and Blood of Christ. The proclamation of the word is thus integral to the Mass and at its very heart.

In proclaiming the word of God from Sacred Scripture, 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, which requires the Reader to be attentive to the assembly, allowing times of pause and silence as the assembly prepares to listen and takes the word of God to heart.

'The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts'. (Heb 4:12)