

A SCHOOL'S GUIDE TO READING SCRIPTURE AT MASS

THE WORD OF GOD

At the heart of our Christian faith is the amazing truth that God speaks to us - his people. God finds many ways to communicate with us but central is the Bible, the written word of God. The Church teaches us that when the Scriptures are read at Mass 'God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel.' The task of those who minister the word, that is those who read the Scriptures at Mass, is to enable God's word to be heard and understood.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHICH READINGS ARE TO BE PROCLAIMED AT MASS?

There are readings assigned for every day of the year. The Church sets out the readings in a systematic way so that the Church listens to the biblical readings in sequence. The Church does this so that as much of the Scriptures as possible are read at the Mass. It stops us from falling into the trap of only listening to our favourite Scripture passages or closing our ears to the more difficult words of God. We do not choose what God says to us, we are called to listen to every word which comes 'forth from the mouth of God.'

This also means that we listen to the Scriptures with the whole Church. There is something wonderful in knowing that on any given Sunday the same readings are being proclaimed at every Catholic Mass throughout the world.

So, generally, the Church listens to the whole of the Scriptures in sequence, with a different cycle on Sundays and Weekdays. It is therefore usual at any Mass to listen to the readings of the day, rather than to choose readings according to what we like or what seems suitable to us.

WHERE DO WE FIND THESE READINGS?

These readings, and their arrangement, are found in the Lectionary. The Lectionary for use in England and Wales is in 3 volumes:

Volume 1 is for Sundays and the great Seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/ Easter.

Volume 2 for Weekdays.

Volume 3 for celebrations of particular sacraments, and in particular circumstances.

In Clifton Diocese there is a Liturgical Diary published each year, at the beginning of Advent, which gives a clear guide to the sequence of readings and to the various Saints' Days and Feasts throughout the year.

WHEN CAN WE CHANGE THE READINGS?

There are many occasions when we cannot change the Scripture readings, such as on major Feast days. There are other times such as Advent or Lent when the readings of the following Sunday may be the most appropriate. However, we should always begin with the readings assigned by the Church for that particular day.

If you need to consider changing the readings you can find appropriate readings for various needs and occasions in Volume III of the Lectionary. You should always consult the priest who will preside at the Mass before you change the readings.

WHERE SHOULD THE READING BE READ FROM?

The Readings should always be proclaimed from a Lectionary to show the reverence in which we hold God's word. Scripture should never be proclaimed from a piece of paper or from a folder. The Lectionary sets out the readings clearly.

The readings should be read from an ambo or a lectern.

WHAT IS ORDER OF READINGS AT MASS?

The Liturgy of the Word is slightly different on Sundays and on weekdays but it follows roughly the same pattern.

First Reading - Taken from the Old Testament (except during Easter time when it will come from Acts of the Apostles).

Responsorial Psalm - Taken from the Old Testament Book of Psalms or from a poetic section of the Old or New Testament.

Second Reading (on Sundays and major celebrations) - Taken from the Epistles of the New Testament or, especially during Easter time, the Book of Revelation.

Gospel Acclamation - Throughout the year the Church greets the Gospel by singing Alleluia, except during Lent when another Acclamation is used.

Gospel - The Gospel reading is taken from one of the four gospels. It is read by an ordained minister: the deacon, if one is present, or the priest or bishop.

Homily - The homily is a 'breaking open' of God's word so those present can better digest the living word of God, and benefit from it in their lives.

Creed - The Creed is recited on Sundays and other Solemnities. Having listened to God's word we re-affirm our faith in God and what he has done for us.

Prayer of the Faithful - The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the faithful uniting in prayer for those in need.

WHO SHOULD READ AT MASS?

The reader should be chosen so that the congregation is able to hear and to understand what they hear.

If a child is to read at Mass they must be clear and audible. If the Scripture reading is to bear fruit the reader will need to understand the meaning of the reading in its biblical context, think about what the reading has to say to us today, be confident, clear, audible and engaging in their proclamation.

If there is no suitable child it might mean that an adult is chosen who will be able to read well and who will be able to minister the word to the congregation.

The Gospel is always read by a deacon or a priest.

LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

God speaks so that we might move into deeper relationship with him by responding to what he says.

As is so often the case, if the Mass is to be meaningful and fruitful for us, we need to work - whether we are ministers or congregation. Teachers can have a big impact on how the congregation manages to find nourishment in the word of God.

- Readings are often not easy to understand at first hearing. Perhaps in the days before Mass they could be introduced in class.
- Allow time during the Mass for silence after the reading for the congregation to take it to heart and ponder its meaning for them.
- Give time in the days after the Mass to come back to the reading, and talk about how we might live out what it says to us.

All this takes effort but it helps us form the pupils and students to be people who listen to God's word and who put it into practice in their lives. If we take this seriously, we help them develop a practice of preparing, listening and reflecting that will be theirs always.