

Proclaiming the Message of Salvation

A Guide for Lectors

ECCLESIASTES

1 These words of the Teacher,^a the son of David, king in Jerusalem,^b
² vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,^c
³ what do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?
⁴ A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains for ever.
⁵ The sun rises and the sun goes down,
and hurries to the place where it rises.
⁶ The wind blows to the south,
and goes round to the north,
round and round goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.
⁷ All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they continue to flow.
⁸ All things^d are wearisome;
more than one can express;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
or the ear filled with hearing.
⁹ What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.
¹⁰ Is there a thing of which it is said,
'See, this is new?'
It has already been,
in the ages before us.
¹¹ The people of long ago are not remembered,
nor will there be any remembrance
of people yet to come
by those who come after them.
¹² I, the Teacher,^e when king over Israel
in Jerusalem,^f applied my mind to seek
and to search out by wisdom all that is
business that God has given to human
beings to be busy with. ¹³ I saw all the
deeds that are done under the sun; and
see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

¹⁴ What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.
¹⁵ I said to myself, 'I have acquired great wisdom,
surpassing all who were ever in Jerusalem
before me; and my mind has had great
experience of wisdom and knowledge.'^g
¹⁶ And I applied my mind to know wisdom
and to know madness and folly. I perceived
that this also is but a chasing after wind.
¹⁷ For in much wisdom is much vexation,
and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.
2 I said to myself, 'Come now, I will
make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.'
But again, this also was vanity. ³ I said
of laughter, 'It is mad', and of pleasure,
'What use is it?' ⁴ I searched with my
mind how to cheer my body with wine—
my mind still guiding me with wisdom—
and how to lay hold on folly, until I
might see what was good for mortals to do
under heaven during the few days of their
life. ⁵ I made great works: I built houses
and planted vineyards for myself; ⁶ I made
myself gardens and parks, and planted in
them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁷ I made
myself pools from which to water the forest
of growing trees. ⁸ I bought male and female
slaves, and had slaves who were born in
my house; I also had great possessions of
herds and flocks, more than any who had
been before me in Jerusalem. ⁹ I also
gathered for myself silver and gold and the
treasure of kings and of the provinces; I
got singers, both men and women, and
delights of the flesh, and many concu-
bines.^h
¹⁰ So I became great and surpassed all
who were before me in Jerusalem; also my

^a Heb. Qohaleth, traditionally rendered Preacher.
^b Or words. ^c Or a finding on wind. See Hos 12.1.
^d Meaning of Heb uncertain.

The Futility of Self-Indulgence
wisdom remained with me,
my eyes desired I did not keep
I kept my heart from no plea-
sure, found pleasure in all
heart, found pleasure in all
this was my reward for all my
I considered all that my hands
and the toil I had spent in
again, all was vanity and a
wind,ⁱ and there was nothing
under the sun.
under the sun.
¹² So I turned to consider
madness and folly for what ca-
who comes after the king? Or
already been done. ¹³ Then
wisdom excels folly as light
wisdom.
¹⁴ The wise have eyes in their
but fools walk in darkness.
Yet I perceived that the same
all of them. ¹⁵ Then I said to my-
happens to the fool will happen
whenever I have been so very
said to myself that this also is v-
there is no enduring remem-
wise or of fools, seeing that in
come, all will have been long
How can the wise die just like
I hated life because what is done
hated life because what is done
and a chasing after wind.
¹⁸ I hated all my toil in w-
toiled under the sun, seeing I
leave it to those who come af-
and who knows whether they
or foolish? Yet they will be mas-
which I toiled and used my wis-
This also is vanity. ¹⁹ Fe-
the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ Fe-
and gave my heart up to despair
ing all the toil of my labours
sun. ²¹ Because sometimes on
toiled with wisdom and know-
silly must leave all to be en-
other who did not toil for it. I
vanity and a great evil. ²² What
they toil under the sun? ²³ Fe-
days are full of pain, and their
vexation, even at night their mi-
rest. This also is vanity.
²⁴ There is nothing better fi-
than to eat and drink, and find
in their toil. This also, I saw, is



Archdiocese *of* Toronto

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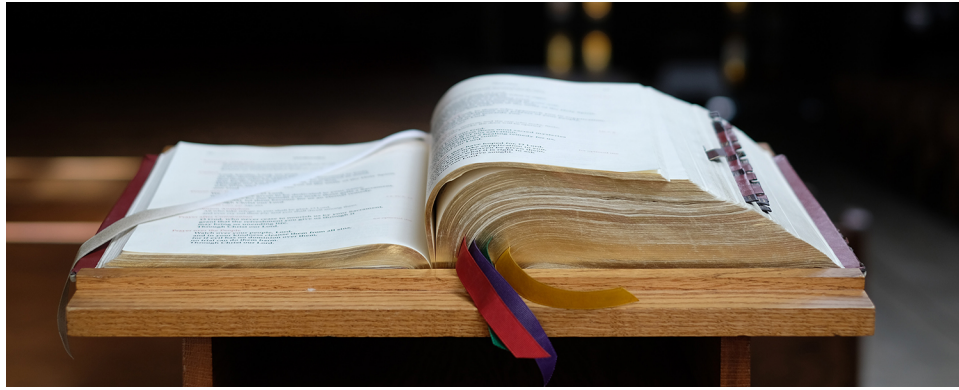
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“God of power and compassion, in Christ you reveal your will to heal and to save. Open our ears to your redeeming Word and move our hearts by the strength of your love, so that our every word and work may proclaim as Messiah, Jesus the Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen” (Opening Prayer for the Rite of Recognition for Lectors).

The Ministry of Lector – Introduction

Introduction

The Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Toronto (www.archtoronto.org/pastoral) envisions the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful at Mass. It further envisions the engagement of parishioners in various ministries within the parish community: “Our aim is to fully engage all parishioners in parish life in accordance with their stewardship of God’s gifts. The parish will be encouraged to promote and develop a variety of ministries and initiatives which support the celebration of the Sunday liturgy....”

The Pastoral Plan highlights the importance of having qualified lay people assisting in the liturgical life of the parish. Of note is the importance of ensuring the training and formation of lectors “so that they may proclaim the words of Scripture well.”

It is our hope that this document provides some assistance in helping to form lectors in the parish community so that they may be qualified to serve in their role, supported in it, and be given the tools to grow closer in their relationship with the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

What is a Lector?

“Lay persons can fulfill the function of lector in liturgical actions by temporary designation” (*Code of Canon Law*, 230 §2). In this role, they “proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel..., announce the intentions for the Universal Prayer, and recite the Psalm between the readings.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, [GIRM] 99). This document relates specifically to temporarily deputed lectors in a parish. There are certain unique situations, such as school Masses, weddings, and funerals, that have different requirements than the ones that will be noted in this document. If you have further questions please contact the Office of Formation for Discipleship or the Office of Spiritual Affairs.

Rite of Recognition

In the *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition*, there is a liturgy to recognize lectors in the parish. The lectors are asked to affirm their commitment to this ministry. In these questions, we are able to see a liturgical snapshot of the Church's understanding of this ministry.

The presider turns to the lectors and says "After proclaiming all that the Father had done, Christ entrusted the Church with the task of preaching the Gospel to all, so that everyone might hear the loving and merciful Word of God. You are called to share in that mission by proclaiming the Word of God within this community of faith. Are you willing to proclaim that Word to us with faith, with clarity, and with conviction?"

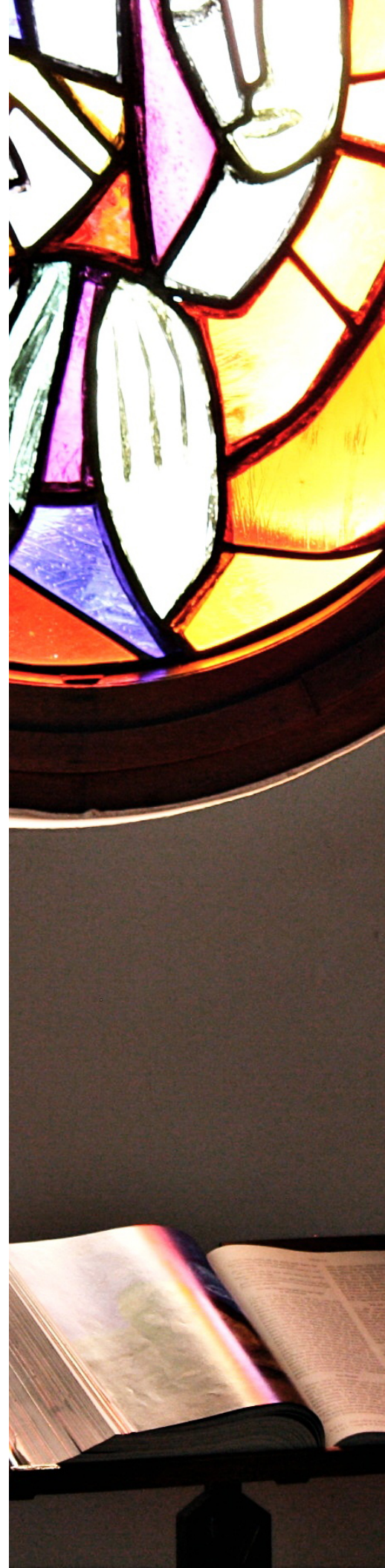
The ministry of lector is one that is rooted in the proclamation of the Word of God. That proclamation must be made with faith, with clarity, and with conviction, a combination of training and personal faith and piety.

The presider continues by asking, "Are you willing to become familiar with God's Word to meditate on it often, so that you will grow daily in God's love?"

It is not enough for the lector to be a good public speaker. S/he must know and love the Word of God and should be striving to grow in that love and understanding.

The final question the presider asks highlights this idea even further, "Are you willing to let the Word of God permeate your entire way of life so that you might show forth to the world our Saviour Jesus Christ?"

This last question shows that the ministry of lector does not end when the reading is concluded. The very Word of God that the lector is called to proclaim needs to take root in each lector's heart so that s/he might live out that love in a concrete, real way in the world around them.



The Importance of Formation

“Servers, lectors, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought, therefore, to discharge their office with the sincere piety and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God’s people. Consequently they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, each in his own measure, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 29).

The Office of Formation for Discipleship is tasked with providing resources and assistance to those involved in the formation and training of parish ministers: pastors, other clergy, pastoral staff, liturgy committees, and ministry coordinators. This document is not meant to provide a complete formation and training program for lectors; rather, it is meant to provide a framework that can be used to graft on formation and training particular to the local parish.

Broadly speaking, there are four areas in which formation and training take place: spiritual, scriptural, liturgical, and technical (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 55). This document will address all four areas and it is our hope that all who accept the call to serve as lectors in the Archdiocese of Toronto receive initial and ongoing formation in all four dimensions.

Ways to use this Document

A Tool for Formation and Training

This document provides an overview of the importance of Scripture, both in the Church on a whole and in the liturgy in particular. It also provides an overview of the Liturgy of the Word. At the end of this document there is a list of further resources that can be helpful in this regard.

A Tool for Recruiting

This document can be used to form and train lectors, but it can also be used to recruit new lectors. Various aspects of this document, including the section on the Archdiocesan requirements, can be adapted for social media, bulletins, or posters to help share with others in the parish what the ministry of lector is and what the requirements for it are.

A Tool for Ongoing Formation

This document can also be used for retreats, days of recollection, study days, and more to help provide for the ongoing formation of lectors. Not only does it include the overviews already discussed that can provide content for formation, it also includes spiritual resources and reflection questions that could be adapted for a retreat day.

Vocation to Holiness and the Ministry of Lector

Ministry in the Church generally and ministry as a lector in particular, is an outgrowth of the baptismal call to holiness. “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation* that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony of the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ” (*Christifideles Laici*, 16).

“Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal part with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness” (*Christifideles Laici*, 16).

This vocation to holiness is shared by every member of the Church – from everyone in the pews to the Bishops and Pope – because it is rooted in baptism. Any other ministry or vocation in the Church stems from our baptismal call to holiness and must be done with a constant eye toward living out our primary vocation to holiness.

“The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one head. Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer” (*Lumen Gentium*, 33).

Our vocation to holiness is lived out in the Church, as the People of God. We are called to live out our vocation in service to Christ, by working for the growth and sanctification of the whole People of God that is the Church.

In the particular context of being a lector, this vocation to holiness has a more specific dimension:

“Besides this apostolate which certainly pertains to all Christians, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the Hierarchy...Further, they have the capacity to assume from the Hierarchy certain ecclesiastical functions, which are to be performed for a spiritual purpose” (*Lumen Gentium*, 33).

Your ministry as a lector is a calling, a vocation. We are very glad you have answered that call. However, it is important to always remember that it is a secondary call. It is meant to aid you in your primary vocation of holiness. It is a means by which you help build up the People of God. It is a means by which the whole of the Church is sanctified.

Biblical Reflection

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

These are some of the most important words of the whole Scripture because they tell us something fundamental about the nature of God: Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, is identified as the Word of God. We know from Genesis that God spoke and the world was created. What we hear in John is that that speech of God is a part of God’s own self in the Trinity. The Word of God is Jesus Christ. More than that though, we learn what it is the Word of God *does*: the Word creates, brings life to all people, and shines a light in the darkness.

When the Word of God is proclaimed in liturgy, the lector is proclaiming the very Person who does all of those things: “The proclamation of God’s word at the celebration [of the Eucharist] entails an acknowledgment that Christ himself is present, that he speaks to us, and that he wishes to be heard.” (*Verbum Domini*, 56). The proclamation of the Word is nothing less than the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

The importance of that cannot be overstated. When the Word of God is proclaimed, Christ, and thus the whole of the Trinity, are made present in the assembly. The lector participates in that making present of the Trinity.

Christ’s presence transforms us, and once we are transformed, we are called to go out and transform the world. That transformation happens, in part, because of the Proclamation of the Word of God, because of our participation in the life of the Trinity.

As a lector, you are called to do nothing less than share the very person of Jesus Christ with the Community. Sometimes that proclamation can be difficult, but it is always life-giving because Jesus Christ himself promised us that even when it is darkest and hardest, the light of Christ will not be overcome and proclamation will not be in vain.



What is Scripture?

The word *scripture* comes from the Latin word *scribo*, to write. On a simple level, Scripture then is something that is written. However, Sacred Scripture is much more than a simple written text.

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, says the following: “Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” That is to say that the sacred texts were written by people, by many people, but they were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Because of that, it is also important to remember that Sacred Scripture needs to be *interpreted*: “However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.” (*Dei Verbum*, 12).



“Sacred Theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation” (*Dei Verbum*, 24).

The importance of Scripture is sometimes viewed as secondary to the importance of Sacred Tradition in the Church. However, it is important to remember that Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture together provide the grounding for the theology of the Church. Scripture then is of the utmost importance if we want to fully understand the theology and liturgy of the Church.

A Book of Books

It is understandable that we often think of the Bible as one book. In fact, however, it is made up of many books of various lengths and styles. There are 73 books in total, 46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

Scripture as a Type and Prefiguring of Christ

Christ changes everything. Once a person comes to know him, everything, including how we read Scripture, changes. With eyes enlightened by faith, we come to see Christ revealed in the whole of Sacred Scripture.

“The Church, as early as apostolic times, and then constantly in her Tradition, has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 128).

“Christians therefore read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament; but it must not make us forget that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as Revelation reaffirmed by our Lord himself. Besides, the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament. As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 129).

Marcionism: a heresy named after Marcion, a 2nd century Roman writer who held that the God of the Old Testament was not the same God as the God of the New Testament. He held that the God of the Old Testament was a god who demanded justice over mercy. This god was angry, wrathful, and vindictive. Opposed to him was/is the god of the New Testament, who is a god of mercy. This god sent his son Jesus to save us from the evil, material world.

Scripture and the Liturgy

The Church makes it very clear that the Liturgy of the Word is not an “appetizer” for the main course that is the Eucharist: “the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 103; cf. *Dei Verbum*, 21).

“Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 24).

Apology of Justin Martyr

From the earliest days of the Church, the reading from Sacred Scripture was a fundamental part of the liturgical life of the community. The second - century apologist, Justin, wrote concerning what happened when Christians gathered, in his *Apology*. There he stated that at the start of the liturgy “memoirs of the Apostles” and the writings of the prophets are read. While the shape and style of the liturgy is still being worked out at this point, it is clear, that at least in his context, the reading of what will come to make up the New Testament, as well as selections from the Old Testament, are part of the liturgical life of his people.



What is clear is that from its foundations, the Church has held that the Word of God, spoken in the Scriptures, is essential to the liturgical life of the Church. From the beginning, “The Church has honoured the Word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with the same reverence, although not with the same worship, and has always and everywhere insisted upon and sanctioned such honour” (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 10).

Place of Honour and Importance

Scripture is given a place of honour and importance because it provides the groundwork and basis for the whole of the liturgy.

“A faith-filled understanding of sacred Scripture must always refer back to the liturgy, in which the word of God is celebrated as a timely and living word...” (*Verbum Domini*, 52).

“In considering the Church as “*the home of the word*”, attention must first be given to the sacred liturgy, for the liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives; he speaks today to his people, who hear and respond. Every liturgical action is by its very nature steeped in sacred Scripture.” (*Verbum Domini*, 52).

The proclamation of Scripture is essential to the liturgy for various reasons:

- It is through Sacred Scripture that God speaks to His people. Liturgy is a privileged place for communication with God, and so it makes sense that in the liturgical life of the Church, we would hear God’s words in the way he chooses to speak. Further, that speech is nothing less than the divine revelation, it is God himself. Liturgy is about providing a way for the human to meet the divine and so what better way to do that than to meet God in His own Word.
- Sacred Scripture provides the framework for our liturgical prayers. Many of the prayers, songs, and hymns of the Church are rooted in Scripture. To hear Scripture proclaimed in the liturgy provides us the opportunity to hear the context for some of our liturgy.
- The proclamation of Sacred Scripture in the liturgy roots us in the Tradition and history of the Church. The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as the Word of God. It has always proclaimed Scripture in the liturgy. To continue to proclaim them links our liturgy to the earliest liturgies of the Church.
- The proclamation of Sacred Scripture provides a way for us to hear our story. The Sacred Scriptures contain the story of the People of God throughout history. Hearing them in the liturgy gives us a way to connect with those stories and those people.

The Lectionary and the Cycle of Readings

The Lectionary

“The pastoral advantage of having in the Roman Rite a single Order of Readings for the Lectionary is obvious on other grounds. All the faithful, particularly those who for various reasons do not always take part in Mass with the same assembly, will everywhere be able to hear the same readings on any given day or in any liturgical season and to meditate on the application of these readings in their own concrete circumstances” (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 61-2).

“The present structure of the Lectionary not only presents the more important texts of Scripture with some frequency, but also helps us to understand the unity of God’s plan thanks to the interplay of the Old and New Testament readings...” (*Verbum Domini*, 57).

The Word of God is properly proclaimed from the Lectionary. While missalettes, lector workbooks, photocopies or apps can be most helpful for lectors during their preparations, they should not replace the use of the Lectionary during the liturgy. Practically, this is because it ensures that the text being read is the proper text for use in the dioceses of Canada. It is also because there is a dignity that is afforded to the proclamation of the Word of God and that means the book those words are written in has dignity as well. To read from something other than the Lectionary makes it seem as if the proclamation of Scripture is just like reading any other text, which it is not.

Cycle of Readings

The Lectionary is structured in a way that lays out Scripture to us over the course of time, taking into account the nature of the liturgical year of the Church which runs from the First Sunday of Advent to the Feast of Christ the King.

The Church year is broken up into Liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Each of those seasons helps us grow more deeply into the mystery of Christ and each season has a ‘flavour’ that is reflected in the assigned readings.

The season of Ordinary Time runs between the end of the Christmas Season and Lent and from the end of the Easter Season to the start of Advent. It is here that we hear most of the stories with which we've grown up. It is a time to hear about and grow into the daily work of a Christian.

There are two main cycles of readings: Sundays and Solemnities, and Weekdays. Additionally, there are cycles of Saints days and votive Masses.

Sundays and Solemnities

“Sundays and festive days present the more important biblical passages. In this way the more significant parts of God’s revealed word can be read to the assembled faithful within an appropriate period of time” (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 65).

The readings are on a three - year cycle and generally a different evangelist corresponds to the year: Matthew for year A, Mark and John for year B, and Luke for year C.

There are three readings, one normally from the Old Testament, a psalm selection, one from the New Testament (normally an Epistle, but sometimes from the Book of Acts or the Book of Revelation), and a selection from the Gospel.

Weekday Readings

Weekday Masses have a Reading from the Old or New Testament, a psalm, and a Gospel. The Gospel reading is on a single cycle, which means that the same liturgical day every year will have the same Gospel reading. The readings, however, are on a two - year cycle, I and II and in Ordinary time the readings will change to reflect that cycle. Year I is the odd numbered years and Year II is the even years.

Lent has its own arrangement that takes into account its baptismal and penitential nature. Advent, Christmas, and Easter are on yearly cycles and the readings remain the same each year.

Other Cycles

Throughout the Church year other liturgical events arise that may be reflected in the Lectionary.

The first place this may arise is for saints’ days. The Proper of Saints includes proper readings for Solemnities, Feasts, and Memorials. The Commons of Saints includes readings for various classes of saints: martyrs, pastors, virgins, etc.

There is also a Lectionary for Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, Masses for the Dead. Here the texts are grouped together based on category, much like they are in the Commons of Saints.

The Lectionary is a sacred object. It is the place where the Word of God is written so that we might proclaim it to the People of God. It is not like any other book that we might read from, and so we need to be careful how we treat it.

The ambo should provide a sufficient stand for the Lectionary so that it does not need to be held by the lector. Further, we do not need to move the Lectionary around as we read and we do not need to elevate the Lectionary after we have read to “show” it to the people. God is made present in the proclamation of Scripture not in the book itself.

The Liturgy of the Word

“The Mass consists in some sense of two parts, namely the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, *these being so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship*. For in the Mass is spread the table both of God’s Word and of the Body of Christ, from it the faithful are to be instructed and refreshed.” (*GIRM*, 28).

What about the Entrance Procession?

In a Mass without a Deacon, a reader may carry *The Book of Gospels* (not the Lectionary), slightly elevated, in the Entrance Procession (*cf. GIRM* no. 120).

The First and Second Readings

“In the readings, the table of God’s Word is spread before the faithful, and the treasures of the Bible are opened to them” (*GIRM*, 57).

The First Reading is almost always from the Old Testament. It is properly proclaimed by a lector. In any Mass where lay people are present but no deputed lector, a qualified lay person is to read the lesson.

During the Easter Season the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles. On other days, the first reading might be from an Epistle or the book of Revelation.

The Second Reading is always from the New Testament.

The Responsorial Psalm

“After the First Reading follows the Responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and which has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God” (*GIRM*, 61). This can also be said if there is no one available to sing it. Ideally, on Sundays and Solemnities it is sung.

The Gospel Acclamation

“After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the Alleluia or another chant laid down by the rubrics is sung, as the liturgical time requires. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the gathering of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel and profess their faith by means of the chant” (*GIRM*, 62).

The *Book of Gospels* is an Icon of Christ. It is venerated because the very words of Christ are being spoken to the People of God. That is why it is carried in procession. The carrying of the *Book of Gospels* in procession is part of the earliest liturgical tradition of the Church. It is placed on the altar which shows the link between and importance of the two tables, the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist.

The Gospel

“The reading of the Gospel constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The liturgy itself teaches the great reverence that is to be shown to this reading by setting it off from the other readings with special marks of honour, by the fact of which minister is appointed to proclaim it and by the blessing or prayer with which he prepares himself; and also by the fact that through their acclamations the faithful acknowledge and confess that Christ is present and is speaking to them and stand as they listen to the reading; and by the mere fact of the marks of reverence that are given to the Book of Gospels” (*GIRM*, 60).

The Homily

The homily is meant to foster a deeper understanding of the Word of God. It should serve as a call to mission and lead the congregation to a deeper understanding of their vocation in the world. The homily is always given by someone who is ordained: a deacon, priest, or bishop.

The Creed

“The purpose of the Symbol or Profession of Faith or Creed is that the whole gathered people may respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also honour and confess the great mysteries of the faith by pronouncing the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use and before the celebration of these mysteries in the Eucharist begins.” (*GIRM*, 67).



Location, Location, Location: The Ambo

“In the celebration of the Mass with the people, the readings are always read from the ambo.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 58).

The reason is because of the importance of the Word of God and its proclamation in the liturgy: “The dignity of the Word of God requires that in the church there be a suitable place from which it may be proclaimed and toward which the attention of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 309).

The ambo is set aside for the proclamation of the Readings, Responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation. It should be approached with respect. Unlike the altar, which is dedicated as a place of our sacrificial offering to God, the ambo is not set aside in the same manner. Therefore, while it is to be respected, it is unnecessary to bow to the ambo as you do to the altar.

The Prayer of the Faithful/ The Universal Prayer

“In the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is desirable that there usually be such a form of prayer in Masses celebrated with the people, so that petitions may be offered for holy Church, for those who govern with authority over us, for those weighed down by various needs, for all humanity, and for the salvation of the whole world.” (*GIRM*, 69).

The prayer is announced from the ambo by the deacon, if there is no deacon then by a cantor, lector, or other member of the lay faithful.

The Prayer of the Faithful highlights the importance of living out the Scriptures. Having heard the Word of God proclaimed, this is an opportunity to put it into action by praying for the world and those in it. It is a direct response to the missional call we hear in the Word of God.



The Liturgical Role of the Lector

The ministry of lector requires participation in the liturgical celebration of the Mass. The question “what does a lector *do* (other than proclaim the Word of God)” is a common one. What follows is an outline of what the *General Instruction of Roman Missal* and the *Introduction to the Lectionary* say about the liturgical participation of the lector. It is also fundamental that the pastor of the parish be involved in deciding how the liturgical practice looks.

Entrance Procession

- In Masses with no deacon, a lector may carry the *Book of Gospels*, slightly elevated, in the entrance procession. When they do, they process in front of the priest. The Lector should approach the altar, without bowing, and place the *Book of Gospels* on it. Then s/he will take her/his place in the sanctuary with the other ministers (*GIRM*, 194, 195).
- In a Mass with a deacon, it is the deacon who carries The *Book of Gospels* and the lector processes in with the other ministers (the deacon, when carrying the *Book of Gospels*, omits the sign of reverence, *cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 173). At the altar the lector makes a profound bow and takes their place with the other ministers (*GIRM*, 194-195).
- If the tabernacle is situated in the sanctuary, genuflection is made when the ministers approach the altar and when they depart from it, but not during the Mass itself (*GIRM*, 274).
- If there is no singing at the Entrance, then the antiphon given in the Missal is recited. A lector may recite it (*GIRM*, 48).



The Liturgy of the Word

- The function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial and not presidential (that is it is not something reserved to the presider). Therefore, the first and second readings are to be read by a reader [lector] (*GIRM*, 59). Further, it is desirable that there be a different lector for each reading (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 52).
- Scripture is proclaimed from the ambo (*GIRM*, 128, 196-198).
- After the reading, the lector says “The Word of the Lord” (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 18).
- Silence is properly observed after both the first and second reading (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 28).
- In the absence of a deacon, the lector (or cantor) announces the intentions for the Universal Prayer from the ambo (*GIRM*, 197, *Introduction to the Lectionary*, 53).
- When entering and departing the Sanctuary during the Mass, or crossing before the altar, the lector is to make a profound bow to the altar.
- When approaching and departing from the ambo, the lector does not bow (*GIRM*, 275).

Communion

- At Communion, the lector may recite the Communion antiphon if there is no singing (*GIRM*, 87).

Concluding Rites

- After the dismissal, the priest and deacon kiss the altar and then, with all the ministers, make a profound bow (*GIRM*, 90).

Summary of the Norms and Policies for Lectors

When it comes to the practical exercise of the ministry of Lector, there are norms and policies from the Universal Church and the Archdiocese of Toronto.

What follows is a summary of those norms and policies as they pertain to the Catholic faithful. For further details about these norms and practices, please contact the Office of Spiritual Affairs at spiritual@archtoronto.org or at 416-934-0606. If you have questions about these norms as they apply in your parish, please speak with your lector coordinator or pastor.

1. The lector should be publically commissioned by his/her pastor according to the rite found in *Celebrations of Installation and Recognition*.
2. The minimum age to be a lector is 18.
3. To be a lector, a person must be fully initiated in the Catholic Church (i.e. having received Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion).
4. To be a lector, a person must be in full communion with the Catholic Church. This includes (but is not limited to) regular Mass attendance, regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and, if married, be in an ecclesiastically valid marriage.
5. It is expected that lay ministers serving at Mass, such as lectors, acolytes, or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, only fulfill one liturgical ministry at any particular liturgy.
6. A lector must be devoted to and understand the importance of the liturgical celebrations of the Church community and the importance of the Liturgy of the Word within the whole celebration of the Sacraments.
7. A lector should have an understanding of the structure of the Lectionary used for the liturgy.
8. A lector should have the ability to speak the biblical Word intelligibly and comfortably in front of the assembly.
9. A lector must have the approval of his/her pastor to exercise this ministry.

Best Practices for the Public Proclamation of Sacred Scripture

While a lector is not an actor and is not giving a dramatic reading or speech, they are tasked with proclaiming the Word of God in public. It is a necessary part of the ministry of lector then to be able to read well in public. This ensures that the Word of God may be heard and understood by those gathered. It is also important that the Lector remember that in proclaiming the Word of God Jesus Christ is being proclaimed.

What follows is a very brief set of best practices to help with public speaking. If you would like more information, please contact the Office of Formation for Discipleship at formation@archtoronto.org or 416.534.3400 ext 523.

Verbal and Non Verbal Communication

Verbal Communication

BREATH CONTROL

- Many other “issues” that come with reading anything out loud often find their source in problems with breath control. When we aren’t breathing well, we tend to speed up, so we don’t run out of air, and as we do, we tend to trail off at the end of what we are reading.
- Proper posture is essential for having good breath control. Standing up straight allows you to breathe from your diaphragm.
- Be sure to take advantage of natural places to breathe in the text. This is better achieved if you review the selection of Sacred Scripture before you are at the ambo.

VOCAL VARIETY

- Monotone reading is hard to listen to and is often seen as boring.
- Vocal variety helps ensure that the Word is not being tuned out because it is monotone.
- Variation in pitch and inflection (for example, it is okay to read a question as a question, with an upward inflection) will help ensure that the listener is engaged fully. This is better achieved if you review the selection of Sacred Scripture and practice before you’re scheduled to serve as a lector.
- Avoid dramatic readings. The ministry of lector is one of proclamation, but care must be taken not to turn the proclamation into a performance.

EMPHASIS AND STRESS

- What words are emphasized and given stress in reading will greatly shape how people who are listening interpret what is being said. It is important to pay attention to the words we emphasize and stress.
- A lector guide will often provide helpful tips for what words could be stressed in the proclamation of Scripture.
- It is important to reflect on the meaning of the text and to read in such a way that what is emphasized reflects that meaning.
- Practice prior to public proclamation is essential.
- Avoid upward inflections that indicate questions when reading, unless you are reading a question. This should especially be avoided when saying “The Word of the Lord”.

SPEED

- Some people read too quickly when they are reading out loud. The only way you’ll know if this is happening is to practice and have someone tell you honestly about your speed.
- It is important to remember that there are people of various hearing abilities in the congregation, and speaking too quickly is a common concern.
- Speaking too quickly leads to words being slurred and in general, not being understood.
- Read slower than your normal speaking pace, but be sure not to read so slowly that the congregation stops listening.

SPEECH CLARITY

- Speaking so that the Word of God may be heard with clarity is important.
- Enunciate, speak deliberately, and don’t slur your words.
- Speak at an appropriate volume. What that is will depend on the sound system in the parish and will require practice.
- Sometimes a word will be mispronounced, missed altogether, or it is possible some other “mistake” will happen when you’re reading. If that happens, do not draw attention to the mistake. The chances are slim that people will notice a mispronounced word unless you draw attention to it by trying to correct it. For larger “mistakes” such as reading the wrong reading, speak with your Lector Coordinator or Pastor at your initial training to see how they would like you to handle that issue.

PROJECTION

- Even with sound systems, it is important to project your voice. Practice with your sound system to learn how far you need to be from the microphone and the volume at which you need to speak.

Nonverbal Communication

POSTURE

- Correct posture not only helps in verbal communication, but it also helps show that what is being proclaimed (the Word of God) is important.
- Stand up straight, it not only helps with projection, but it highlights the dignity and importance of what is being done. It also makes you easier to see over the ambo.

EYE CONTACT

- It is hard to understand people who read and never look up.
- Eye contact is a way to help those listening feel engaged.
- Eye contact, however, should not be fleeting. It is important to look up for more than a word of the text. To do that requires practice.
- However, if you cannot look up for a longer period of time, it is better to not look up at all. Fleeting eye contact is distracting.



HANDS

- How we hold our hands can contribute to how people listen.
- Do not make elaborate gestures as it is distracting.
- When leading the responsorial psalm, large hand gestures indicating when it is time for the congregation to respond serve, more often than not, as a distraction. If read properly, the timing for the response naturally follows.

Best Practices Not Related to Speaking

Being a lector is about proclaiming the Word of God. However, there are best practices that are related to the aspects *around* that proclamation. Some of those follow.

General

- Ensure that you receive ongoing training and formation. Reach out to your Lector Coordinator or Pastor if you have any questions about when and where the training will be.
- While the length of the appointment of lectors is up to the pastor, it is recommended that the term be 3-5 years (renewable). This ensures that new people have a chance to come on board. It also provides a way to prevent burn out.

Before Mass

- Dress modestly so that your clothes do not provide a distraction to the Word of God you are proclaiming.
- Pray with your assigned reading in the week leading up to the Mass. Pray that God may speak His words through you.
- Practice reading to yourself, out loud. Practice in front of people. If you can, practice at the ambo with the microphone (before people start arriving for Mass).
- Prepare your reading in advance. Know what to do if there are technical issues with the microphone.

At the church

- Arrive early.
- Check in with your coordinator, the presider, or whoever else your parish has designated.
- Pray that you may be an instrument of God.
- Make sure the readings are set and ready to be proclaimed. Check the ambo to make sure the Lectionary is there and marked to the correct reading. Check that the microphone is ready to be used.

When you read

- Approach the ambo with respect.
- Announce the reading and then pause.
- Announce the reading as it is in the Lectionary. Do not add or subtract from the Word of God. Read the black portion of what is in the Lectionary (the red text is not meant to be read out loud).
- Read slowly and clearly.
- If you mispronounce a word or make a mistake, do not draw attention to it, keep going.
- At the end of the reading pause before proclaiming *The Word of the Lord*. Then pause once more before returning to your seat.



From the Saints

Throughout the history of the Church, the saints have spoken of the importance of Scripture. What follows is a very brief list of what some of them have said as well as some questions for reflection.

“All the troubles of the Church, all the evils in the world, flow from this source: that men do not by clear and sound knowledge and serious consideration penetrate into the truths of Sacred Scripture”
– St. Teresa of Avila

- Do you feel like there is a general lack of knowledge about Sacred Scripture in the world today?
 - How might we better proclaim Scripture, and in turn Christ, to the world around us?
 - How might that proclamation help change the world?
-

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”
– St. Jerome

- How is knowing Scripture knowing Christ?
 - Have you come to know Christ through the Scripture?
 - How might you grow in your knowledge of Scripture to know Christ more?
-

“And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together”
– St. Ambrose

- Do you view prayer as an important part of reading Sacred Scripture?
- When you pray with Scripture, do you feel that God is walking with you?

How to Pray with Scripture

A lector is called to be someone who has a deep love and devotion to the Word of God. That love and devotion is fostered through prayer with the Scriptures themselves. What follows are some brief recommendations on how to pray with Scripture in order to deepen your love and devotion of it.

- **Make Mass a Priority**

In the Mass we experience the Word of God made present for us both in the proclamation of Scripture, but also in Christ, the Word of God, made present on the Altar.

- **Participate in the other Sacraments of the Church**

Scripture is read at every Sacramental liturgy of the Church. Because the liturgy informs our understanding of Scripture, participating in as many different liturgies as possible will help open your mind and heart to Christ in different ways by hearing the Word proclaimed in different contexts.

- **Pray the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning and Evening Prayer**

Known as the Prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours is an ancient way of praying the psalms that is intended to mark and sanctify the day. “Among the forms of prayer which emphasize sacred Scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours has an undoubted place.” (*Verbum Domini*, 62). While you can order a book (or set of books) to help you pray the Divine Office, there are also many apps and websites that can help you as well, and may prove easier if you are new to the Liturgy of the Hours.

“The Synod asked that this prayer become more widespread among the People of God, particularly the recitation of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. This could only lead to greater familiarity with the word of God on the part of the faithful. Emphasis should also be placed on the value of the Liturgy of the Hours for the First Vespers of Sundays and Solemnities, particularly in the Eastern Catholic Churches. To this end I recommend that, wherever possible, parishes and religious communities promote this prayer with the participation of the lay faithful.” (*Verbum Domini*, 62).

- **Pray with Scripture**

There are many ways that have come down to us to pray with Scripture. One of the most common is *Lectio Divina*. There are different ways to practice *Lectio Divina*, which means *divine reading* but the goal is the same, to make space to hear God’s voice in the Sacred Scriptures. A common way to pray it involves reading a selection of Scripture 4 times. After a time of prayer and making yourself ready, the first reading is just a chance to read the text and hear it. Listen carefully for words or phrases that jump out. The second reading is a time for reflection. Read the text again and reflect on what God is saying. After the third reading, respond. That can be done in different ways, for example by journaling or by praying in the moment. After the final reading rest, spend time in silent contemplation.

For more information you can go to <https://www.archtoronto.org/lectio>

Resources

This list provides a starting point for further investigation. As always, if you have any questions about further resources, please contact the Office of Formation for Discipleship.

Church Documents

- *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2011) <http://bit.ly/GIRM2011>
This is where you will be able to find the universal norms for the celebration of the Mass. It is referenced in this document as a place to find information on the role of the lector.
- Pastoral Notes for the Celebration of the Eucharist in Light of the Revised Roman Missal from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2012) <http://bit.ly/GIRMPastoralNotes>
This guide is a pastoral and catechetical instrument to assist in the implementation of the Fifth Edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. It presumes the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and is in no way intended to replace it, but should always be read in conjunction with that official document.
- *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* <http://bit.ly/CatechismCatholicChurch>
There are various sections of the Catechism that might be helpful for teaching or reflection. Some of particular interest might be 80-83, on the Relationship between Tradition and Sacred Scripture as well as 101-141 which is on Sacred Scripture.
- *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution from the Second Vatican Council on Sacred Liturgy (1963) <http://bit.ly/SacredLiturgy1963>
This document provides a great deal of the theological framework for liturgical renewal in the Church and the current guiding liturgical principles in the Church often begin here. In a parish context, it could be helpful in providing an overview for the theology of the liturgy. It also helps provide the context from which much of our current liturgical views come.
- *Dei Verbum*, the Constitution for the Second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation (1965) <http://bit.ly/DV1965>
This document provides the grounding for the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church, including in the liturgy.
- *Verbum Domini*, Benedict XVI's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of the Lord (2010). <http://bit.ly/vdben16>
The stated goal of the exhortation is to help rediscover the importance of the Word of God in the church and to help see it as a place of constant renewal for the Church.
- *Aperuit Illis*, Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter Instituting the Sunday of the Word of God. <http://bit.ly/AperuitIllisEN>
The goal of this document is to establish the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time the Sunday of the Word of God.

From the National Liturgy Office of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

- *Eucharistic Celebrations* <http://bit.ly/EucharisticCelebrations>
This website contains a great deal of general information about the Mass. It mostly concerns questions that arose in the context of the latest translation of the Roman Missal, but much of the information is still useful. Of particular interest might be the *2002 General Instruction – Readers and Ministers of the Word*.

Books

- *Guide for Lectors: The Liturgical Ministry Series*, Paul Turner and Virginia Meagher.
This book contains a brief history of the role of lector, liturgical practices, and practical tips to help the reader proclaim the Word of God.
- *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*. Elaine Park, Konrad Schaefer, and Douglas Leal.
This workbook goes through the Sunday readings and provides context for the reading, tips for how to best read it, and a pronunciation guide. Be sure to get the correct year and the Canadian edition.

Online Resources

- *Elements of the Catholic Mass* <https://www.elementsofthecatholicmass.com/episodes>
This video series put out by the Liturgical Institute, consists of 31 short videos that discuss various aspects of the Mass and liturgy in general. Each video also contains a Study Guide that could be used to help facilitate group reflection and conversation. Of special note for lectors is Episode 23: *The Word of the Lord* that discusses what it means when we say “The word of the Lord” after the proclamation of Scripture.
- *Ambulance* <http://bit.ly/ambulance>
This podcast from the Liturgy Guys (part of the Liturgical Institute) is about the importance of the Ambo. They also discuss the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God in the liturgy.
- *Ways to Read the Bible*, from Ascension Presents <http://bit.ly/waystoreadthebible>
This video looks into the different stages and phases many of us go through when reading the Bible. It discusses how it is possible for the Biblical text to be true but not necessarily true how we think of truth today and ends with saying that what we should get out of the Bible is the Word, Jesus, and that we get to know the Father’s heart.
- *Lectio Divina with Cardinal Collins* <https://www.archtoronto.org/lectio>
This website contains the information for live streaming Lectio Divina from St. Michael’s Cathedral Basilica. It also contains the archive of past years.