

## READING AT MASS

*This note is intended to help everyone, clergy, and laity alike, who are responsible for communicating the liturgy in church.*

The Ministry of being a Reader at Mass is important. You are called on to communicate, to proclaim, the Scriptures to the congregation and if the closing phrase *The Word of the Lord* is to mean anything it's a ministry that has to be taken seriously.

The title "Reader" is not really helpful. "Proclaimer" might sound too grand, but you are called on to announce the words of Scripture in a way that everyone in church can hear and understand. If people in the congregation wish to follow the reading in the Mass book, so be it, but they shouldn't need to. It's worth remembering that biblical texts weren't originally intended to be mulled over in the quiet of one's home: they were to be announced aloud to a largely illiterate audience.

It may be your parish has an organised system of preparation and assistance for Readers, but many parishes don't. One of the benefits of being one of an organised group is that you can compare notes on how things are going. Things like, can you be heard at the back of church? Are you reading too quickly, making best use of the microphone? Public speaking doesn't come naturally to most people and knowing you have a group for support is an great boost to confidence. It would be wonderful if the parish could make use of a professional voice coach. Perhaps there is a drama teacher in the parish, if so they ought to be made use of.

Some parishes provide commentaries on the Sunday readings. If you don't have access to such aids, at least make sure you arrive in church early and spend some time studying the text you are to proclaim. You ought never have to be put in the situation when you are called to read at the last moment unprepared.

### PREPARATION IS VITAL

1. First thing: offer a word of prayer for guidance to do this well.
2. If your congregation is to understand what you are announcing, you need to understand the passage you are going to read. So, you need to be familiar with it, know the tricky bits so you can articulate carefully. It's very easy to tell if the Reader understands the passage or is just mechanically reading the words.
3. By far the hardest thing is to manage your delivery and speak slower than you normally do. It's horribly easy to let your tongue run away with you. If you ever hear children reading at Mass, you can immediately tell the difference between the confident youngster who knows how to pace the reading and the poor child who just wants to get it over as quickly as possible. Same with us adults!
4. Don't be in a hurry to start the reading. A moment of pause is needed to get everyone's attention (and don't start by saying, "The first reading is ..." they all know what it is!). You

need to make your voice fill the space so that the person at the back of church can hear and understand you. Microphones are a help, but they can't do the work for you. Clarity of diction is all important and your lungs are the means by which you make your voice heard. So, breathe deeply and evenly before you start and make use of full stops for more good breaths.

5. Acoustics in church can be tricky. I know of one church that a professional sound engineer said would make a good echo chamber. It makes sense to ensure the microphone is pointed towards your mouth - don't be afraid to adjust it if the last user was shorter/taller than you. But you should do your best to look over the microphone as much as possible, at the people you are addressing: if your nose is pointing at the book all the time you won't be heard properly.

6. The Prayers of the Faithful. You are *inviting* people to pray about various intentions. You have spoken clearly and confidently. Now you need to give a significant pause, giving people time to pray before invoking *Lord Hear Us*. By significant I really mean a noticeable moment. I used to reckon ten seconds of silence, which in a full church can seem a long time. The congregation will soon get used to it. Silence is such a valuable commodity, but we don't make enough use of it at Mass.

You have offered your service of ministry to the congregation; you are really helping to make our celebration of the Eucharist a significant event. Thank you!