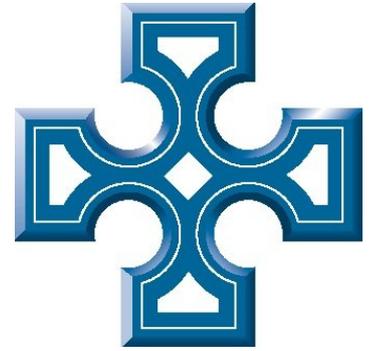


The Ministry of Reader

An Introduction to the New Words of the Mass

Ashbourne-Donaghmore Parish



“The scriptures are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.” (*Dei Verbum*—n.11) The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. “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. (*Celebrating the Mystery of Faith*)”

The words we say and hear at Mass are about to change. The new translation seeks to reclaim the richness of the original Latin texts and will employ a more formal style than we use in ordinary conversation. As with all change, it will take time, but it should help us better appreciate the meaning of the faith we declare at Mass. These changes will involve a certain amount of change for each ministry in the life of our parish. The following is an aid to your ministry.

1. What change will I notice most?

At the end of every reading, instead of saying “**This is the word of the Lord**” (or, for deacons and priests, “This is the Gospel of the Lord”), you will be asked to say simply “**The word of the Lord**” (priests and deacons: “the Gospel of the Lord”).

2. Why is this happening?

Several reasons:

- (a) The Latin is *Verbum Domini* — the word of the Lord. “This is” does not appear there.
- (b) It emphasises that the word of the Lord is what is *proclaimed* by the reader and takes root in the hearts of the people, not what is printed in a book. Saying “This is the word of the Lord” can give the wrong impression.
(You have probably seen priests and deacons raising the book as they say “This is the Gospel of the Lord”. In future they will be asked to say simply “The Gospel of the Lord”, once again emphasising that the Gospel is present in the proclamation of the text, not in the printing on the page. The point is that the book is like a tabernacle of the word: it contains the word, but it is not actually the word itself, in same way that a score of Beethoven's 5th Symphony contains the musical ‘instructions’, but the music itself only comes alive when the piece is played.)
- (c) Many other English-speaking countries have already been saying “The word of the Lord” and “the Gospel of the Lord” for many years. We are simply coming into line with them.

3. What else should I do?

An excellent start is to prepare the reading:

- (a) Check the pronunciation of unfamiliar biblical phrases, names and places.
- (b) Speak Clearly. **Vowels make you heard. Consonants make you understood.** Practice staying with each word right to the last letter.
- (c) Highlight certain phrasing. Words travel in clusters and breaking the reading into clusters that make sense assists the listener in absorbing the Word of God.

(d) Read as you talk. When talking normally, we emphasise certain words and phrases. This is what gives colour and shade to speech. It helps the hearer to interact with the text. For example, ‘The Lord **spoke** to Moses.’ Love is patient.’ (Remember, this is *proclamation*, not mere reading aloud),

Pace! Take your Time. Many readers read too quickly (sometimes this is due to nerves) and start before people are ready to listen. It’s always a good idea to take a couple of good, deep, slow breaths at the ambo before launching into the reading. This gives the people time to focus on the reader after they have sat down, and also helps to calm the reader. Don’t be afraid to look around to ensure that you have everyone’s attention before you start. After all, this is the word of God, the most important word that we can ever hear. If we read too fast we bombard the hearer with sounds but not with meaning. We are sending out airwaves that need time to travel and time to be received by the hearer. This is called **Reverberation Time**. Get the pace right and hearers get the meaning.

Pause! Leave a good silent pause — 10 seconds is not too much — at the end of the reading before you say “The word of the Lord”.

- (a) This makes it clear that the concluding formula (“The word of the Lord”) is not part of the scriptural text (it isn’t!). Just tacking it onto the end can also sound silly.
- (b) It leaves a silence for people to reflect on what they have heard, and this is something the Church is always asking for (cf. GILM 28 (reproduced in GIRM 45), GIRM 56).
- (c) It avoids ‘switching people off’ too quickly, ready for the next thing that happens.
- (d) It also gives the reader time to make the reading their own.

If you don’t already do this, it will take a while for you to become used to it. And 10 seconds can seem like an eternity to the reader, though it seems much shorter for the listener. A good tip is to re-read the last two or three sentences of the reading silently to yourself before you say “The word of the Lord”.

4. Anything else?

Microphone. Always adjust the microphone ensuring the head of the microphone is in line with the mouth.

The Lectionary. Read from the Lectionary, not the missalette. Ensure before Mass begins that the correct readings are marked.

The Psalm. Always read the response slowly and clearly. **Never say:** “Responsorial Psalm; or Responsorial Psalm, the response is...” At the end of each verse, do not say: “Response”. Always let the congregation answer the verse before launching into the next verse.

Pray. Since it is God’s Word try to get into the habit of saying a short prayer of preparation: “*Lord, open my heart, mind and lips to worthily proclaim your Word.*”

5. Conclusion

If, in the course of time, you manage all the suggestions above, the people’s “Thanks be to God” response will be that much more heartfelt and full of meaning, and the word will have a chance to grow within them!

Useful resources

Reading in Church...a practical guide

Fr. Colm Kilcoyne

Irish Bishop’s Conference

<http://www.liturgy-ireland.ie/Romanmissalfinal.htm>

Liturgy Office of England & Wales

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Readers.pdf>

A sample set of Guidelines for Readers:

<http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/userfiles/Guidelines%20for%20Readers%20Mar%202007.pdf>

A Handbook for Readers (a practical and liturgical guide)

Marian Tolley, Decani Books, ISBN 1-900314-01-0