

GUIDELINES FOR READERS OF THE WORD OF GOD

The delivery of God's Word is enhanced by the following:

1. The holiness of the Reader's life
2. The prayerful preparation of the sacred Text.
3. The way the Reading is proclaimed (not simply recited)
4. By realising the importance of the task they have taken on.
5. By applying the message of the Readings to oneself.

SOME IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

"Christ is present in His Word", since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read at Mass". (Vatican 11 Documents)

"It is necessary that those who read at Mass should be competent for their task and carefully prepared for it". (Pope Paul VI)

"For in the Sacred Books, the Father who is in Heaven meets His children and speaks to them with great love" (Vatican 11 Documents)

Readers should make special efforts to develop a love and understanding of the Scriptures, and thus become more perfect followers of the Lord Jesus" (Paul VI)

PREPARATION

- Prepare at least the day before.
- Know what you are going to read well in advance (not when you arrive for Mass).
- Practice and become familiar and comfortable with the Reading.

- Try and get the appropriate phrasing, emphasis and speed right.
- Remember, failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

ON THE DAY

Read the passage fairly slowly but not too slowly. By going too fast the people won't take in the message. By dragging the passage the reading loses its vibrancy and meaning.

Stop, when there is a full stop.

Read loud enough so that the people at the back of the Church can hear you as well as those at the front. If at all possible direct your words to those in the back row. You are meant to proclaim the Word of God and not simply read it. However, please don't read too loud or then it will appear that you are shouting at the congregation and the people may be reluctant to listen to you. Even though everywhere has a microphone these days, you're not meant to read the Word of God at Sunday Mass in the conversational tone. Some do and people can't rightly hear them.

Approach the Lectern with the confidence of a spokesperson of God. Do not appear to apologise for your presence.

If you are very nervous, try to remember it is God's Word that you are proclaiming and not your own. You are only God's instrument. Try to be His worthy instrument. Everyone, including the priest, is somewhat nervous.

Some eye contact seems appropriate at times. By looking up at the congregation now and again, but not every time you blink, you are giving the message an immediate efficacy. A start could be made by looking up when you announce the Reading; "A Reading from St Paul to the Romans", and at the end of the Reading before you say: "The

Word of the Lord". You might also like to glance up at the congregation at the end of a paragraph.

Correct enunciation is most important. In addressing the congregation, sound every syllable in each word and let us hear every consonant and vowel. The 't's' must be crossed and the 'd's' '*dentalised*'. Stress adjectives rather than the nouns and the adverbs rather than the verbs. Please don't stress prepositions unless the sense demands it.

A very common fault is to chop the sentence into short chunks of five or six words, lowering the voice between each. Readers need to be aware of making every clause 'have the same tune' particularly with a descending tone at the end. This will have a lullaby effect on your congregation. Please use proper inflection and phrasing. When you came to a comma its best not lower your voice until you've finished the sentence. Otherwise the sense of the sentence tends to get lost and will have a numbing effect on the congregation. Some readers let themselves be ruled by their lack of breath, or their inability to look ahead to the words in front of those they are in the act of speaking. You should have already mentally read ahead to the end of the sentence before you say the actual words. If at all possible, please don't read with your finger moving along the page.

Try and put a bit of feeling into the Reading by altering your tone. An unaltered tone will make the reading sound like a vacuum cleaner. To put a bit of feeling into the Reading is not the same thing as being overly dramatic or condescending. By being overdramatic the focus will be ON YOU and not THE LORD. Some read as if they were reading to small children which can be off-putting for an adult congregation. Finally try to remember that the Reading is addressed to readers themselves and that includes the priest.

As a Reader our words are not the only means of communication. Body language is also important. Research has been done on the

impression people make at interviews. It reveals that 54% of the interviewee's communication was through posture and gesture, how the person sounded was 38% whereas what the person said was only 8% effective. Slouching up to the aisle and shuffling behind the lectern, then leaning part of your weight on one leg and resting your forearm on the Lectern itself, surely indicates that you don't think what you are doing is anything very important. Informality has its place but it can cheapen Liturgy.

SOME NO NO'S

Never say “The First Reading” or “The First Reading is from.....”

Never say “The Responsorial Psalm” or “The Response to the Psalm is”or “The Response is....” Just read the response, then look up at the congregation and they will repeat it.

Never say “Please stand for the Gospel”

(It is not the Reader's job to give instructions to the congregation. That is the job of the commentator or priest).

Never read the small print in italics at the top of the Reading. That is meant for private Reading.

Try and always read from the Lectionary rather than misalettes. Go up to the lectern and check the Reading in the lectionary before Mass. Reading from the Lectionary gives more dignity to the Word of God.

For the Bidding Prayers please be standing at the microphone before the priest begins the Opening Prayer and stay standing there until the priest has finished the concluding prayer.

Please wait until the people are seated and settled before you begin the Readings - don't rush into it. Rushed liturgy is poor liturgy and that also applies to the priest.

Please read the page entitled 'The use of prayerful pauses'. It is very important and applies to all readers.

If the large Book of the Gospel is used, the Reader of the Second Reading needs to remove the lectionary in order to make room for the green book of the gospels.

THE USE OF PRAYERFUL PAUSES

As I said already, please allow the people to sit down and get settled before you begin the reading. Don't rush.

According to new regulations there should be a short pause after (not before) the Reader says: 'the Word of the Lord'. May I ask the organists or guitar players to respect this pause and not come in immediately after the Readings are finished with music or singing - please wait those few vital seconds. The same applies after the second reading. Please pause for a few seconds before you start playing and singing the Gospel acclamation. We're talking here about very short pauses not long embarrassing silences.

If there is one Reader for the two readings and there is no singing then the Reader at the end of the reading, after saying 'the Word of the Lord' should step back slightly from the Lectern for that short pause with head slightly bowed before coming forward to read the psalm. The same applies at the end of the Second Reading before the Gospel Acclamation is said.

If the acclamation or psalm is sung, and by and large they should be, then it is the organist or guitar player or cantor who is responsible

for the short pause. In this case the reader goes immediately to his/her place at the end of the Readings. If there are no pauses in the Liturgy you get the impression that the priest and ministers want to get it over with.

Extra Guidelines for Readers

A good idea is to check the lectionary before Mass if you are on the Reading on that day. Make sure the lectionary is open at the right page and it is the right Sunday. I normally have the lectionary open at the right page but mistakes can sometimes be made.

I notice some readers bring up the Mass Sheet/Bulletin with them to the lectionary when they are reading. If you have checked the reading beforehand, this is hardly necessary. Having something in your hand while you are reading could distract the congregation and portrays a kind of hesitancy in what one is doing.

Thanks for taking note of the times when the big green Gospel Book is used in the Sunday Liturgy. In those instances the lectionary is removed from the lectern after the second Reading.

Please always check with the music leader to see if the Psalm and Gospel acclamation are sung on the Sunday you are assigned to do the reading. If the reader does not know whether the Psalm or Gospel acclamation are sung, the resulting hesitancy on the part of the reader will send a slight ripple of unease throughout the congregation. The Priest, the Organist, the Cantor and Reader are meant to work as a team rather than in isolation. Sometimes the priest can introduce the Readings on Sundays but it should always be quite brief.

When the entry procession approaches the sanctuary at the beginning of Mass I would be more than grateful if the readers or

servers did not obstruct the priest as he approaches the Altar. If at all possible, please try and move enough paces to the right or left so as to leave space for the priest or other sacred ministers to approach the altar. The normal practice at St Vincent's is that servers go to the right and readers to the left.

END