



The revised GIRM and the Ministry of the Word

A. What are the main points of the General Instruction for the Liturgy of the Word?

1. In the Liturgy of the Word, the table of God's word is prepared for the Faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Therefore, the Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation, and so any sort of haste that hinders recollection must clearly be avoided. (56-57)
2. Periods of silence are an important element in the celebration of the Word, so that by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart and an appropriate response through prayer may be made. Silence is observed before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the First and Second Reading, and after the Homily. (56)
3. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. (29)
4. Singing the Psalm (at least the Refrain) and the Gospel Acclamation plays an important part in promoting reflection and participation in the Liturgy of the Word. (40, 61)
5. The order of the Readings in the Lectionary is to be followed and non-biblical texts are never to be substituted for the Readings and Responsorial Psalm, which are the Word of God. (57)
6. The ministers of the Word include the Lectors who proclaim the First and Second Reading, the Psalmist and Cantor who sing the verses of the Psalm and Gospel Acclamation, lead the Faithful in the refrain and the Alleluia or Lenten Acclamation and the Deacon who proclaims the Gospel and the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful.
7. The Readings are always proclaimed from the Ambo (58, 260) and should be proclaimed by a Lector, and the Gospel by a Deacon or, in his absence, a Priest other than the celebrant. (59)
8. The dignity of the Ambo requires that only the Readings, the Responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) are proclaimed from the ambo; it may be used also for giving the Homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. (309)

B. What is the role of the Lectors in the Liturgy of the Word?

1. A greater distinction is made in the revised General Instruction between those who are permanently instituted as Lectors and those lay persons who are commissioned to exercise this ministry for a period of time. All should be suited to perform this function and should receive careful preparation, so that by listening to the Readings the Faithful may develop in their hearts a living love for Sacred Scripture. (101)
2. The Lectors proclaim the Readings before the Gospel. They may also announce the intentions for the Prayer of the Faithful in the absence of a Deacon, and, in the absence of a psalmist, proclaim the Responsorial Psalm between the Readings. (99, 194-198)
3. If there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion and the antiphons in the Missal are not recited by the Faithful, the Lector may read them at the appropriate time (198, cf. nos. 48, 87).

C. How will the revised GIRM affect the Lector?

1. The Lectionary is no longer to be carried in the Entrance Procession, rather it is placed at the Ambo (lectern) before the Mass begins. (118b)
2. If there is no Deacon, the Lector may carry the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated in the procession, walking before the Priest; (120d) otherwise it is placed on the Altar beforehand. (117, 194)
3. At the Altar, the Lectors make a profound bow. (49, 275b) If carrying the Book of the Gospels, the Lector omits the reverence to the Altar and places the Book on the Altar. (173, 195)
4. If there are several Readings, it is better to distribute them among a number of Lectors (109), however, the same Reading is not to be proclaimed by two Lectors, except for the Passion of the Lord. (110)

D. What is the role of the Psalmist in the Liturgy of the Word?

1. The Psalmist's role is to sing the Psalm or other biblical canticle that comes between the Readings. (102)
2. Since the Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and fosters meditation on the Word of God, it is preferable that it be sung, at least the people's response. Hence, the Psalmist sings the verses of the Psalm from the Ambo or another suitable place. (61)

E. Some Finer Points

1. During the week the Lector should review the Reading in order to become familiar with the texts and its literary genre.
2. Before beginning the Reading, the Lector should pause and take several deep, but silent breaths. This will give the congregation sufficient time to get "settled" and prepared to listen to the Word of God. When all is quiet in the church, the Lector begins the Reading.
3. The Lector immediately begins the Reading with the introduction: *A Reading from the Book of N...* Nothing else is added. The references to chapter and verse, or summaries are omitted, and there is no need to announce that this is the First or Second Reading.
4. At the end of the Reading, the Lector pauses momentarily before announcing: *The Word of the Lord*. This makes it clear that the acclamation *The Word of the Lord* is not part of the biblical text.
5. A period of silence is observed after the people respond, *Thanks be to God*. Twenty seconds (the length of a silent "Our Father") is appropriate. During this time the Lector remains at the Ambo. The Lector leaves after THE silence or when the Psalmist approaches the Ambo to sing the Psalm, or when the first notes of the Responsorial Psalm are played. The time of silence after each Reading allows the Holy Spirit to act among the people, that they may reflect on what they have heard and let God's word sink into their hearts.
6. If the Book of the Gospels is used, the Lectionary is removed from the Ambo after the Second Reading and placed at the credence table or another dignified place.
7. Since the Liturgy of the Word is a dialogue between God and the assembly and it is the role of the Lector to proclaim God's Word, it is not appropriate that the Lector also lead the response of the people to that Word. Only when there is no other person to lead the Psalm should the Lector proclaim the Responsorial Psalm. When no Deacon, the same may be said of the Prayer of the Faithful.
8. The Book of the Gospels is carried out in the procession by the Deacon or a Lector.

E. Further Resources

A sample set of guidelines for Lectors and other resources may be found at the Archdiocesan website (see Liturgy and Roman Missal).