

**THE LITURGY OF THE WORD
AND THE MINISTRY OF A LECTOR**

**Office for Divine Worship
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
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**PERTINENT ARTICLES
FROM THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL
FOR THE ROMAN MISSAL, THIRD EDITION**

III. PARTICULAR MINISTRIES

The Ministry of the Instituted Acolyte and Lector

98. The acolyte is instituted to serve at the altar and to assist the priest and deacon. In particular, it is his responsibility to prepare the altar and the sacred vessels and, if it is necessary, as an extraordinary minister, to distribute the Eucharist to the faithful.

In the ministry of the altar, the acolyte has his own functions (cf. nos. 187-193), which he must perform personally.

99. The lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel. He may also announce the intentions for the Prayer of the Faithful and, in the absence of a psalmist, proclaim the Psalm between the readings.

In the Eucharistic Celebration, the lector has his own proper office (cf. nos. 194-198), which he must exercise personally.

D) THE DUTIES OF THE LECTOR

Introductory Rites

194. In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing approved attire, may carry the Book of the Gospels, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest, but otherwise along with the other ministers.

195. Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. If he is carrying the Book of the Gospels he approaches the altar and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. Then, the lector takes his own place in the sanctuary with the other ministers.

The Liturgy of the Word

196. The lector reads from the ambo the readings that precede the Gospel. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the responsorial Psalm after the first reading.

197. When no deacon is present the lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce from the ambo the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful.

198. 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 (cf. nos. 48, 87).

B) THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

55. The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them. The homily, Profession of Faith, and the Prayer of the Faithful, however, develop and conclude this part of the Mass. For in the readings, as explained by the homily, God speaks to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word. By their silence and singing the people make God's word their own and they also affirm their adherence to it by means of the Profession of Faith. Finally, having been nourished by it, they pour out their petitions in the Prayer of the Faithful for the needs of the entire Church and for the salvation of the whole world.

Silence

56. 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. During the Liturgy of the Word, it is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, accommodated to the gathered assembly, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. It may be appropriate to observe such periods of silence, for example, before the Liturgy of the Word itself begins, after the first and second reading and lastly at the conclusion of the homily.

The Biblical Readings

57. In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable to maintain the arrangement of the biblical readings, by which light is shed on the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history. Moreover, it is unlawful to substitute other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God.

58. In the celebration of the Mass with a congregation, the readings are always proclaimed from the ambo.

59. By tradition the function of proclaiming the readings is ministerial, not presidential. The readings therefore, should be proclaimed by a lector, and the Gospel by a deacon or, in his absence, a priest other than the celebrant. If, however, a deacon or another priest is not present, the priest celebrant himself should read the Gospel. Further, if another suitable lector is also not present, then the priest celebrant should also proclaim the other readings.

After each reading, whoever reads the acclamation, to which the gathered people reply, honoring the word of God that they have received in faith and with grateful hearts.

60. The reading of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy itself teaches that great reverence is to be shown to it by setting it off from the other readings with special marks of honor, whether on the part of the minister appointed to proclaim it prepares himself by a blessing or prayer; or on the part of the faithful, standing as they listen to it being read, through their acclamations acknowledge and confess Christ present and speaking to them; or by the very marks of reverence that are given to the Book of the Gospels.

The Responsorial Psalm

61. After the first reading comes the responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the word of God.

The responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should, as a rule, be taken from the Lectionary.

It is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. Hence, the psalmist, or the cantor of the Psalm, sings the verses of the Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. The entire congregation remains seated and listens, but, as a rule, takes part by singing the response, except when the Psalm is sung straight through without a response. In order, however, that the people may be able to sing the Psalm response more readily, texts of some responses and Psalms have been chosen for the various seasons of the year or for the various categories of Saints. These may be used in place of the text corresponding to the reading whenever the Psalm is sung. If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God.

In the dioceses of the United States of America, the following may also be sung in place of the Psalm assigned in the *Lectionary for Mass*: either the proper or seasonal antiphon and Psalm from the *Lectionary*, as found either in the *Roman Gradual* or *Simple Gradual*, or, in another musical setting; or, an antiphon and Psalm from another collection of the psalms and antiphons, including psalms arranged in metrical form, providing that they have been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the diocesan Bishop. Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the responsorial Psalm.

62. After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the *Alleluia* or another chant indicated by the rubrics is sung, as required by the liturgical season. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel, and professes its faith by means of the chant. It is sung by all while standing, and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated if this is appropriate. The verse, however, is sung either by the choir or by the cantor.

a) The *Alleluia* is sung in every season other than Lent. The verses are taken from the Lectionary or the *Graduale*.

b) During Lent, in place of the *Alleluia*, the verse before the Gospel is sung, as indicated in the Lectionary. It is also permissible to sing another psalm or tract, as found in the *Graduale*.

63. When there is only one reading before the Gospel:

a) during a season when the *Alleluia* is to be said, either the *Alleluia* Psalm or the responsorial Psalm followed by the *Alleluia* with its verse may be used;

b) during the season when the *Alleluia* is not to be said, either the psalm and the verse before the Gospel or the psalm alone may be used.

c) The *Alleluia* or verse before the Gospel may be omitted if they are not sung.

64. The Sequence, which is optional except on Easter Sunday and on Pentecost Day, is sung before the *Alleluia*.

The Homily

65. The homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day, and take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.

66. The Homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to the deacon, but never to a lay person. In particular cases and for a just cause, the homily may even be given by a Bishop or a priest who is present at the celebration, but cannot concelebrate.

There is to be a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with the participation of a congregation; it may not be omitted without a serious reason. It is recommended on other days, especially on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season, as well as on other festive days and occasions when the people come to church in greater numbers.

After the homily a brief period of silence is appropriately observed.

The Profession of Faith

67. The purpose of the *Symbolum* 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 call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist.

68. The Creed is to be sung or said by the priest together with the people on Sundays and Solemnities. It may be said also at particular celebrations of a more solemn character.

If it is sung, it is begun by the priest or, if this is appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir. It is sung, however, either by all together or by the people alternating with the choir.

If not sung, it is to be recited by all together or by two parts of the assembly responding one to the other.

The Prayer of the Faithful

69. In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world.

70. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

- a) for the needs of the Church;
- b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d) for the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.

71. It is for the priest celebrant to direct this prayer from the chair. He himself begins it with a brief introduction, by which he invites the faithful to pray, and likewise he concludes it with a prayer. The intentions announced should be sober, composed freely but prudently, and succinct, and they should express the prayer of the entire community.

The intentions are announced from the ambo or from another suitable place, by the deacon or by a cantor, a lector, or by one of the lay faithful.

The people, however, stand and give expression to their prayer either by an invocation said together after each intention or by praying in silence.

A) MASS WITHOUT A DEACON

The Introductory Rites

120. Once the people have gathered, the priest and ministers, clad in the sacred vestments, go in procession to the altar in this order:

- a) the thurifer carrying a thurible with burning incense, if incense is used;
- b) the ministers who carry lighted candles, and between them an acolyte or other minister with the cross;
- c) the acolytes and the other ministers;
- d) a lector, who may carry the Book of the Gospels (though not the Lectionary), which should be slightly elevated;
- e) the priest who is to celebrate the Mass.

If incense is used, before the procession begins, the priest puts some in the thurible and blesses it with the Sign of the Cross without saying anything.

The Liturgy of the Word

128. After the collect, all sit. The priest may, very briefly, introduce the faithful to the Liturgy of the Word. Then the lector goes to the ambo and, from the Lectionary already placed there before Mass, proclaims the first reading to which all listen. At the end, the lector says the acclamation *Verbum Domini*, and all respond, *Deo gratias*.

Then, as appropriate, a few moments of silence may be observed so that all may meditate on what they have heard.

129. Then the psalmist or even a lector proclaims the verses of the Psalm and the people sing or say the response as usual.

130. If there is to be a Second reading before the Gospel, the lector proclaims it from the ambo. All listen and at the end respond to the acclamation, as noted above (no. 128). Then, as appropriate, a few moments of silence may be observed.

131. Afterwards, all rise and the *Alleluia* or other chant is sung as required by the liturgical season (cf. nos. 62-64).

132. During the singing of the *Alleluia* or other chant, if incense is used, the priest puts some into the thurible and blesses it. Then, with hands joined, he bows profoundly before the altar and quietly says, *Munda cor meum*.

133. If the Book of the Gospels is on the altar, the priest then takes it and goes to the ambo, carrying the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated and preceded by the lay ministers who may carry

the thurible and the candles. Those present turn towards the ambo as a sign of special reverence to the Gospel of Christ.

134. At the ambo, the priest opens the book and, with hands joined, says, *Dominus vobiscum*, and the people respond, *Et cum spiritu tuo*. Then he says, *Lectio sancti Evangelii*, making the sign of the cross with his thumb on the book and on his forehead, mouth, and breast, which everyone else does as well. The people say the acclamation, saying, *Gloria tibi, Domine*. The priest incenses the book, if incense is used (cf. nos. 276-277). Then he proclaims the Gospel and at the end says the acclamation *Verbum Domini* to which all respond, *Laus tibi, Christe*. The priest kisses the book, saying quietly, *Per evangelica dicta*.

135. If no lector is present, the priest himself proclaims all the readings and the Psalm, standing at the ambo. If incense is used, remaining at the ambo he puts some into the thurible, blesses it, and, bowing profoundly, says, *Munda cor meum*.

136. The priest, standing at the chair or at the ambo itself, or, when appropriate, in another suitable place, gives the homily. When the homily is completed, a period of silence may be observed.

137. The Creed is sung or recited by the priest together with the people (cf. no. 68) with everyone standing. At the words *et incarnatus est* all make a profound bow; but on the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

138. After the recitation of the Creed, the priest, standing at the chair with hands joined, by means of a brief introduction invites the faithful to participate in the Prayer of the Faithful. Then the cantor, the lector, or another person announces the intentions from the ambo or from some other suitable place while facing the people who take their part by responding in supplication. After the intentions, the priest, with hands extended, concludes the petitions with a prayer.

B) MASS WITH A DEACON

The Liturgy of the Word

175. If incense is used, the deacon assists the priest when he puts incense in the thurible during the singing of the *Alleluia* or other chant. Then he makes a profound bow before the priest and asks for the blessing, saying in a low voice, *Iube, domne, benedicere*. The priest blesses him, saying, *Dominus sit in corde tuo*. The deacon signs himself with the Sign of the Cross and responds, *Amen*. Having bowed to the altar, he then takes up the *Book of the Gospels* which was placed upon it. He proceeds to the ambo, carrying the book slightly elevated. He is preceded by a thurifer, carrying a thurible with smoking incense, and by servers with lighted candles. There the deacon, with hands joined, greets the people, saying, *Dominus vobiscum*. Then, at the words *Lectio sancti Evangelii*, he signs the book with his thumb and, afterwards, himself on his forehead, mouth, and breast. He incenses the book and

proclaims the Gospel reading. When the reading is concluded, he says the acclamation *Verbum Domini*, and all respond, *Laus tibi, Christe*. He then venerates the book with a kiss, saying privately, *Per evangelica dicta*, and returns to the priest's side.

When the deacon is assisting the Bishop, he carries the book to him to be kissed, or else kisses it himself, saying quietly, *Per evangelica dicta*. In more solemn celebrations, as the occasion suggests, a Bishop may impart a blessing to the people with the Book of the Gospels.

Lastly, the deacon may carry the Book of the Gospels to the credence table or to another appropriate and dignified place.

176. If, in addition, there is no other suitable lector present, the deacon should proclaim the other readings as well.

177. After the introduction by the priest it is the deacon himself who normally announces the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful, from the ambo.

The Ambo

309. The dignity of the word of God requires that the church to have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word.

It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a movable lectern. The ambo must be located in keeping with the design of each church in such a way that the ordained ministers and lectors may be clearly seen and heard by the faithful.

From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it.

It is appropriate that a new ambo be blessed according to the rite described in the Roman Ritual.¹¹⁸ before it is put into liturgical use.