

A spirituality for Lectors

Sr Elizabeth West LCM



Your Word is a lamp to my feet



A Spirituality for Lectors

Being a Lector is more than just being a good reader. Our focus is centered on proclaiming God's Word as a living revelation and guide for His people. Lectors should have a genuine love of God's Word, embracing the Scriptures as part of their daily prayer life.

The ministry of reader calls us to be servants of the Living Word of God. In proclaiming the readings at liturgy, the reader does more than simply read. A reader's spirituality must include an understanding of Holy Scripture as God's Living Word made present to mankind throughout history, but most fully present in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

In the faithful proclamation of Scripture the reader has the privilege of sharing the Word of God with the assembly. When Scripture is truly proclaimed with conviction, the readings can stir souls to gratitude, call sinners to conversion, console the despairing and exhort those who have become lax.

The call to discipleship, inherent in Baptism, finds its expression through ministerial involvement. God's people respond to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to identify and offer their gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The word *proclaim* comes from the Latin *pro* meaning "before" and *clamare* meaning "to cry out." The Lector proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ, making God present to the gathered community. The ministry of Lector is a charism for the building up of the community.

It is an ancient teaching in the Church that Christ is truly present in His Word: the Word that is spoken, heard and acted upon. A willingness to study the Scriptures and time to pray with the readings before each liturgical assignment are necessary commitments for a Lector. The degree and kind of relationship that you establish with the Word is the wellspring of your service.

The Rule of St. Benedict advises us: “anyone can read Scripture in public; only a believer can proclaim them”.

As a help toward celebrating the memorial of the Lord with eager devotion, the faithful should be keenly aware of the one presence of Christ in both the word of God—it is he himself “who speaks when the sacred Scriptures are read in the church” — and above all under the eucharistic species. (No. 4)

The Word as Communion

In this light we can discern in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist something resembling the parallel rituals of proclamation and Communion. In both liturgies we show reverence for the presence of the Lord. These are perhaps more obvious to us in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with bows, genuflections, kneeling, the showing of the Eucharistic elements at the consecration, the deliberate and reverent extension of hands for the eucharistic bread and cup and the many other signs of reverence that individuals choose to make.

Consider the similar signs of reverence during the Liturgy of the Word: the solemn announcement of each reading; the reverent and avid listening to the proclamation of the readings; the special responses after the readings, especially the one following the proclamation of the Gospel that acknowledges the Lord’s presence; and the other signs associated with the Gospel readings — the posture of standing, the Gospel procession with use of candles and incense, the sign of the cross made on the book and by members of the assembly and the final kissing of the book.

Consider next the similar ritual flow of the rituals of word and table. The Liturgy of the Eucharist achieves its “center and high point” in the Eucharistic prayer; the solemn proclamation of God’s saving deeds. In this proclamation bread and wine become the Lord’s body and blood; and in the strength of this presence, the assembly offers prayers of intercession for the church, the world and the deceased and prays for the unity of the church. This solemn proclamation brings us to the breaking of the Eucharistic bread and the pouring of the Eucharistic wine, actions consummated in Eucharistic Communion. In receiving the Lord’s body and blood, we are made one with him and one another as food and drink for a world beloved of and longing for God in Christ.

In the Liturgy of the Word, the readings culminate in the solemn proclamation of the Gospel. This leads to the homily, a breaking open of the proclaimed word for the nourishment of the assembly. This Communion in the Lord, present in the word, is then extended during a period of communal silence, a time for savoring that word in the hearts of the assembly. Strengthened by this nourishment, the assembly then brings to the table its priestly prayers of intercession for the church, the world and those in particular need.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy says: “Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. . . . He is present in his Word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church.” This means that when a lector proclaims the Word of God during the liturgy, Christ himself speaks to the congregation. The lector’s voice becomes God’s voice; the lector is the voice of Christ. The power in the Word the lector proclaims is the power of Jesus himself.

The Lector Creates the Voice of Christ

The lector holds an awesome office: the lector’s task as lector is to create in sound the voice of Christ. The voice of Christ is not in the printed text on the page from which the lector reads; the voice of Christ is in the sound in the air the lector creates. Like all voices,

Jesus voice disappears when the sound ends. All meaning in the text can only be communicated by the lector while the sound is resonating in the air.

It is obvious, therefore, that all the lector's focus has to be on creating the meaning of the written text in the sound of his or her own voice. To create the sound of Christ -- is the fruit of many experiences of life. To read well is an utterance -- an expression -- of the lector's whole being: as a person, as a believer, as an artist, and most of all, as an expression of his or her personhood as a lover of Christ.

On the Role of the Lector and Scripture in the life of the life of the Church

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ. She has always regarded, and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith... In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life. (Divine Revelation, No. 21).

With these powerful words, the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council point to the centrality and importance of the Scripture in the life and worship of the Church. Since that Council in the 1960's Catholics have been nourished and strengthened by greater access to the Bible, as part of the Mass, and in their homes. It now plays a significant role in our prayer life. Reading it daily should be a part of our lives.

In this context, the Church calls forth lay men and women, lectors also known as lay readers, to read the Scriptures at Sunday and daily Mass. These lectors have the responsibility to make the Word of God better known in the Mass, and indeed beyond the Mass, to all the Catholics in their congregations.

Jesus the model for all lectors:

Lectors or readers today are part of the tradition going back to the Old Testament where religious leaders made the Word of God available to the people by reading it in public. Thus, towards the end of his life Moses instructs the leaders to read aloud the law: “Assemble the people, men, women and children as well as aliens – that they may hear the law and learn it and so fear the Lord, your God, and carefully observe all the words of the law” (Deut. 31:12). Another beautiful example of this is when Ezra the scribe and priest reads the law to the people. Ezra, the priest, “read out of the book from daybreak until midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law” (Nehemiah 8:3). At the end, “the people their hands raised high answered Amen, Amen” (8:6), renewing their commitment to keep their covenant with God.

In the New Testament, at the beginning of his public mission, Jesus comes to Nazareth, to the synagogue. *“He stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor’..... All wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.”* (Lk. 4: 16-22).

Jesus, known simply as the son of Joseph to the people of Nazareth, was a layperson, not a priest or Levite, not a Scribe. As a **lay reader** in the synagogue he proclaims the word of God from the Old Testament, from the prophet Isaiah. He read very well because it says that *“the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently*

at him” (Lk. 4: 20). Then Jesus says to them: “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21).

Lectors today carry on that tradition. Of course, we cannot say as Jesus did that the scripture is fulfilled in our own case. But our task is to proclaim, break open the Scriptures so that our congregation, young and old, rich and poor, can hear and respond to the Word of God, the word that gives life.

The power and significance of the biblical word at worship can be glimpsed in the early experience of the church. During times of persecution, lectors, or readers—whose ministry was to prepare and proclaim the word at worship—were among those local church leaders who were particular targets. The proclamation of Scripture was perceived by the persecuting authorities for what it was—a powerful and galvanizing force for Christian presence and action in the world.

A renewed understanding of the importance and power of this liturgical ministry led to its restoration in our time. Providentially, this restored ministry has as its purpose to break open the far richer treasury of biblical readings now available to the Catholic people at worship. This is symbolized by the bound Lectionary itself. Over the centuries it had become part of the book of Mass prayers used by the priest-celebrant. (This development coincided with the gradual absorption of various roles in the liturgy by the ordained.) The ministry of the reader once again has its own liturgical book, as does the ministry of the priest-celebrant.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH SEE THE WORK OF A READER?

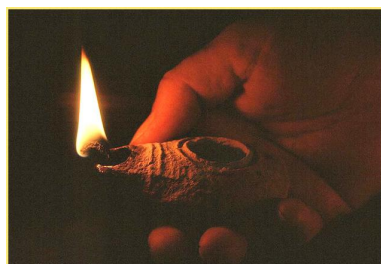
The Church sees the work of the reader as a **vocation** and a **ministry**, not simply a job or function. The readers of the parish do not form another parish society. Rather they are called in a special way to serve the entire parish community. Their ministry is to be a key part of the central act of worship of the parish, by

proclaiming the Word of God at Holy Mass. Their mission is not taken up on their own initiative, but they are chosen and called by the priest and the parish community to serve the community.

Another description of the ministry of the reader is found in the writing of Pope Paul VI. What he says here applies most directly to those who are officially installed into the office of lectors. This is not what most parish lectors receive, yet what it says about the office of lector applies very much to the lector who is not officially installed by the bishop or superior, but is commissioned by the parish priest for that ministry.

The office of the lector, and it is proper to him, is to read the word of God in the liturgical assembly.... He should meditate assiduously on the sacred scriptures so that he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions. The lector should be mindful of the office he has undertaken and should do all in his power to acquire increasingly that sweet and living love and knowledge of the scriptures that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord. (Ministeria Quaedam, Pope Paul VI, 1972, No. 5).

Lectors are to be disciples of the Lord. A disciple is one who learns from the master, and one who follows the example and way of life of the master. All Christians are called to be disciples of Christ, but lectors, commissioned to proclaim the Scriptures in the Church, are called in a very special way to follow Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh. Thus the ministry of lector is a gift and a task. It is a privilege that also involves responsibility and disciplined training.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD IN THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

We have seen that in the Jewish tradition the Word of God was proclaimed to the people when they assembled to pray. As we see in the story of Jesus reading in the synagogue in Nazareth, the Jewish people read from the Scripture at their services. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the first Christians continue this tradition. Eventually the New Testament is formed, with the gospels, and the letters of St. Paul, and the other writings. These are read out to the people when Christians gather for the breaking of bread, for Holy Mass. According to church historians, at first they read directly from the Bible. Gradually, special books were put together with those parts of the Scripture that would be read at Mass. This is the origin of the book of readings we use today, called the Lectionary.

The writings of St. Luke give us several examples where we see how the earliest celebration of Christian sacraments always involved the reading of the Scriptures. Word and sacrament are inseparable. Thus before the two disciples on the road to Emmaus sit down with Jesus and break bread with him, they have explored and prayed over the Scriptures, in this case, the prophet Isaiah (see Lk. 24:27-31). In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:26-40), before Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch, he helps him to understand the Old Testament passage of Isaiah, showing how it points to Jesus.

The official instruction on the Mass points to this unity of word and sacrament when it states:

The Mass is made up of two parts: the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. These two parts are so closely connected that they form but one single act of worship. For in the Mass the table of God's word and of Christ's body is laid for the people of God to receive from it instruction and food.... General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 28

Note the change from the earlier, pre-Vatican II explanation of the Mass. Before Vatican II, we spoke of the three main parts as the offertory, consecration, and communion. We did not give sufficient emphasis to the Scriptures, the Liturgy of the Word. Now, we speak of two main parts of the Mass, liturgy of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist. And we no longer speak of, or even use the word “offertory” but speak of the “Preparation of the Gifts.” The reason for this is that the real offertory takes place as part of the canon, or Eucharistic prayer. There we offer Jesus Christ to the Father, and unite ourselves to Jesus in this offering. This reaches its climax in the “Great Amen” at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer.

In another passage the Instruction on the Mass points to the Scripture as a principal element of the liturgy, where God himself speaks to his people.

When the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel. The readings must therefore be listened to by all with reverence; they make up a principal element of the liturgy. In the biblical readings God’s word addresses all people of every era and is understandable to them, and a fuller understanding and efficacy are fostered by a living commentary on it, that is to say, by the homily, understood as an integral part of the liturgical action (General Instruction of the Roman Missal 29).

How important it is for the reader to be well trained and prepared! The reader is an instrument of God. God is speaking to the people through the voice of the lector. The Scriptures will be understandable to the people only if they are clearly, forcefully proclaimed by the lector.

We note too that in the responsorial Psalm and the chants, God’s Word is also being proclaimed.

Readings from Scripture and the chants between the readings form the main part of the liturgy of the word... In the readings, explained by the homily, God is speaking to his people, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit; Christ is present to the faithful through his own word. Through the chants the people make God's word their own.... (General Instruction on the Roman Missal, No. 33)

In addition to giving more emphasis to Scripture as part of the Mass, the Church wishes that the chants and hymns sung at Mass or at Benediction should be based upon, faithful to, rooted in Scripture. The Psalms, in fact, are the key Christian hymn book. Other hymns should take their inspiration from the Psalms or other parts of the Bible.

REVERENCE FOR THE WORD OF GOD

When we think of how Jesus Christ is present at Mass, we normally first think of his presence in the Blessed Sacrament, in the bread as the Bread of Life, received in Holy Communion. But as we read in the Instruction on the Mass, Jesus Christ is present in four ways, namely (1) in the people who gather (where two or three gather, I am in your midst), (2) in the person of the priest, (3) in the Word of Scripture, and (4) in the consecrated bread and wine, which is the Body and Blood of Christ.

Christ is really present in the assembly gathered in his name; he is present in the person of the minister, in his own word, and indeed substantially and permanently under the Eucharistic elements (No. 27).

Thus the lector is handling and proclaiming something very sacred and worthy of reverence, namely the Word of God. In passage we already referred to, but which bears repeating, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council make this point very strongly. We read:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy (Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, No. 21).

Indeed, as we have seen, in our churches, there are two tables at Mass in the sanctuary – namely the altar and the lectern. We are strengthened and fed from both of them. We receive the Word of life and the Bread of life.

Writing in the 6th century, the theologian Caesarius of Arles shows us what respect and reverence is due to the Word of God: *Tell me which seems the greater - the body of Christ or the Word of Christ? If you wish to answer accurately, you must say this: the word of God is not less than the body of Christ. Therefore, as the solicitude which we observe when the body of Christ is ministered to us is such that not a particle of it falls from our hands to the earth, so too, with as much care should we see to it that the word of God, which is his gift to us, does not perish from our heart, while we are thinking or talking about something else. Because we will be no less guilty.*

The Word of God is very precious, so much so that not one word should be lost. Our proclaiming of the word must be so clear, and well-prepared that not one word of the Scripture is lost or not heard by God's people. Further ways that the Church shows special reverence to the Word of God is by carrying the Book of the Gospels, held high, in the procession at the beginning of Mass. So too, the Gospel may be incensed before it is proclaimed. And the introduction to the reading of the gospel ("A reading from the holy gospel...") and the refrain spoken by the priest after the reading of the gospel ("This is the gospel of the Lord") may be sung. This serves to emphasize the importance of the gospel and to foster the faith of the listener (Cf. *Introduction to the Lectionary*, No. 17).

Finally, to show the reverence due to the Word of God, there is a special place in the sanctuary from where it is proclaimed, namely the ambo or lectern. This should be prominent, and “suited by its design and high quality to the dignity of the word of God, a clear reminder to the faithful that in the Mass is the table of God’s word and the table of Christ’s body” (*Introduction to the Lectionary, No. 32*).

As we read in the Instruction on the Roman Missal (No. 309):
The dignity of the word of God requires the church to have a place that is suitable for proclamation of the word and is a natural focal point for the people during the liturgy of the word. As a rule, the lectern or ambo should be stationary, not simply a movable stand. In keeping with the design of each church, it must be placed so that the ordained ministers and readers may be easily seen and heard by the faithful.

When we look from the pews of the Church to the sanctuary, three items should be prominent. These are the altar, the lectern, and the presidential or priest’s chair. Everything else is secondary and of less importance. The lectern – traditionally called the pulpit – should be prominent, perhaps raised a bit, and clearly visible to the entire congregation.

The books from which the readings are taken should be “of high quality, tastefully and even beautifully produced” (*Introduction to the Lectionary, No. 35*). This same official document reminds us that “the dignity of the word of God demands that the books of readings which are used in the celebration should not be exchanged for other pastoral aids, such as leaflets designed to help the faithful prepare the readings, or to be used by them for their own meditation” (No. 37).

THE LECTORS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORD AT HOME AND IN THE PARISH.

Baptism and Confirmation have made every Catholic to be a messenger of God's word. Not only has every Christian heard God's Word, but each and every Christian is to be one who carries, lives, and shares that Word of God wherever he or she may be, both in the Church and in the world. If this is true of all Christians, how much more true of lectors, those especially chosen to be proclaimers of the word at Holy Mass!

As lectors you have official responsibility for the proclamation of the Word of God as part of the liturgy. But your responsibility does not end there. You are called to do your best to assure that the word of God is enfolded in your own life, and then make sure that it plays a vital role in the parish, in the parish community, and in the homes of parishioners.

The priest and Special Ministers of Communion have special responsibility for Holy Eucharist, assuring that it remains central to the parish, that it is available to the sick, and that proper reverence is given to it. So too, readers or lectors exercise special care for the Word of God

DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY: THE SPIRITUAL AGENDA FOR ALL WHO READ OR PROCLAIM SCRIPTURE:

*In the Scriptures, by the Spirit
May we see the Saviour's face,
Hear his word and hear his calling,
Know his will and grow in grace.*

This hymn, from the Divine Office readings of Tuesday, Week I, sets out a spiritual agenda for all who read or proclaim the Scriptures. For you as lectors, this is especially important because you are

called to the special ministry of the word. For this you need a spirituality that relates the Scriptures you proclaim to your daily lives. How can we develop this spirituality, this way of life?

We will suggest three points as essential in leading to a spirituality of lectors. 1) a way of Praying with the Scriptures, 2) Specific Scripture texts that remind us of the power and importance of Scripture, and 3) the importance that the Church gives to Scripture.

1) A way of Praying with the Scriptures, *Lectio Divina*.

Reading the Scriptures has been the great way of creating faith-filled people, following the Lord's commands in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. In the Synagogue the word was sacred. Jesus proclaimed it in the small synagogue in Nazareth (Lk 4). Before it was read it was carried in solemn procession to prepare the hearts and minds of the people present for that truth that would nourish their lives. In the Catholic liturgy, the Lectionary has a revered place and is often carried in procession with lighted candles before the Gospel, and then the candles accompany the Gospel reading.

But what of the Bible in our personal lives? Is it a closed book from one Sunday to the next? Do we have personal copies of the Bible from which we pray daily? Have we as great a devotion and love for the Bible as Christians of other traditions? Until recently, we had lost one of the oldest spiritual practices of the Church, namely that of *Lectio Divina - Holy Reading*. This goes back to the early Church, to the Fathers and Mothers of the Church. Holy Reading is distinguished from scholarly study of the Bible. It is the reading that nourishes private prayer and meditation. It involves, reading, reflection, repetition on Scripture texts as a stimulus to personal prayer. The end sought is that a person would have his or her whole life molded or shaped by the Word of God. As blood flows in our veins, so the word of God should flow in our consciousness. St. Benedict in Chapter 48 of his famous Rule, states that without the

word of God, the monk was in danger of becoming lazy. Thus a section of the Scriptures was to be read regularly by the monks, individually and in common. Today many parishes promote groups who meet for spiritual reflection on Scripture. It would be expected that lectors would take part in, or indeed be leaders of such groups.

Lectio Divina, Holy reading, should lead to prayer as conversation with God, and to personal friendship with Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit assures us through Isaiah: "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it."

Aspects of Lectio Divina.

- a) It is not trying to cover a specified amount of Scripture, and it thus does not necessarily stop at any particular point. One is led by the Spirit.
- b) At bottom it is listening in faith to the word of God, making ourselves open to that word, and responding in love. It can be done by an individual alone, or in a group.
- c) It involves the whole person. We assimilate the truths of faith through reflection using our minds and imaginations. We pray from a full and generous heart. And so we come close to God, the author of Scripture, and dwell prayerfully on the great truths we have reflected upon. As a result, our lives are more focused on the person of Jesus Christ. As St. Jerome has written: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."
- d) Our aim, in the words of St. Paul, is to have "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor.2:16). The letter to the Hebrews shows the power of Scripture: "God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Heb. 4:12-13).
- e) Jesus equates following the Scriptures with freedom. "If you live according to my word, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8: 31-32).

f) The Church reminds us of the effect of Scripture. “Let the word of God enlighten your mind, strengthen your will, and set your heart on fire with the love of God” (Constitution on Divine Revelation, No. 23).

THE PROCESS OF LECTIO DIVINA

A very ancient art, practiced at one time by all Christians, is the technique known as *lectio divina*—a slow, contemplative praying of the scripture which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God. *Lectio divina* enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm. Within this rhythm we discover an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father, and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

Lectio—reading/listening

The art of *lectio divina* begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear “with the ears of our hearts” as St. Benedict encourages us in the Prologue to the Rule. When we read the Scriptures we should try to imitate the prophet Elijah. We should allow ourselves to become women and men who are able to listen for the still, small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12); the “faint murmuring sound” which is God’s word for us, God’s voice touching our hearts. This gentle listening is an “atunement” to the presence of God in that special part of God’s creation which is the Scriptures.

The cry of the prophets to ancient Israel was the joy-filled command to “Listen!” “Sh’ma Israel: Hear, O Israel!” In *lectio divina* we, too, heed that command and turn to the Scriptures, knowing that we must “hear”—listen—to the voice of God, which often speaks very softly. In order to hear someone speaking softly we must learn to be silent. We must learn to love silence. If we are constantly speaking or if we are surrounded with noise, we cannot hear gentle sounds. The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, requires that we first quiet down to hear God’s word for us. This

is the first step of *lectio divina*, appropriately called *lectio*—reading.

The reading or listening which is the first step in *lectio divina* is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books, and even to the Bible. *Lectio* is reverential reading; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will speak to us personally—not loudly, but intimately. In *lectio*, we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God’s word for us this day.

***Meditatio*—meditation**

Once we have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures which speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and “ruminate” on it. The image of the ruminant animal quietly chewing its cud was used in antiquity as a symbol of the Christian pondering the Word of God. Christians have always seen an icon of *lectio divina* in the Blessed Virgin Mary “pondering in her heart” what she saw and heard of Christ (*Luke 2:19*). For us today these images are a reminder that we must take in the word—that is, memorize it—and while gently repeating it to ourselves, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. This is the second step or stage in *lectio divina*—*meditatio*. Through *meditatio* we allow God’s word to become his word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

***Oratio*—prayer**

The third step in *lectio divina* is *oratio*—prayer: prayer understood both as dialog with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. Just as a priest consecrates the elements of bread and wine at Eucharist, God invites us in *lectio divina* to hold up our most

difficult and pain-filled experiences to Him, and to gently recite over them the healing word or phrase he has given us in our *lectio* and *meditatio*. In this *oratio*, this consecration-prayer, we allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

Contemplatio—contemplation

Finally, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God.

Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition—*contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

Suggested Scripture Texts to use with Lectio Divina. These texts are chosen and presented because they emphasize and explain the grace and power of the Word of God. These are taken from the official Lectionary, and are suggested for use during a Mass or prayer service at which lectors are officially instituted. Thus they are most appropriate for reflection by lectors and for use with the method of Lectio Divina.

OLD TESTAMENT PSALMS

1. Psalm 19: 7-11 Your words are spirit and life
The Law of the Lord is perfect, refreshment
for the soul; The decree of the Lord is
trustworthy, Wisdom for the simple
Thus your servant is formed by them;
Observing them brings great reward.
But who can detect his own failings?
Wash away my hidden faults.

COMMENT. This psalm begins with the splendor and glory of God. His splendor comes to us through his word, his commandments, which are light and joy for the soul.

2. Psalm 119: 9-16. I will not forget your word
Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light
on my path. I have sworn – and shall
maintain it – To keep your upright
judgments.

COMMENT. This is the longest Psalm in the Bible, and it repeats without tiring that to follow the word of God is the way to life and happiness. Pope John Paul II preached on this Psalm in 2001.

3. Psalm 147: 15-20 His word runs swiftly
Praise God - it is good to sing psalms to our
God How pleasant to praise God.
God, Builder of Jerusalem!
He gathers together the exiles of Israel,
heals the broken hearted, And binds up their
wounds. He counts the number of the stars,
and gives each one a name.

COMMENT; God protects the people of his Holy City and gives his word that he will attend to the pains and sores of the little ones, just as he attends to the details of the stars and the universe.

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS.

1. Deuteronomy 6: 3-9. Keep these words in your heart.
The Ten Commandments are also called the ten words of God. Listen, then, Israel, keep and observe what will make you prosperous and numerous, as the God of

your ancestors has promised you, in giving you a land flowing with milk and honey.

COMMENT: This text was the creed of the Jewish people, to be recited every day, to be engraved on their hearts, to be repeated to their children, engraved on their doorsteps, because God is a jealous God, jealous in his total love for them.

2. Deuteronomy 30: 10-14. Let the instruction, the words of the Lord be near you. Look, today I put before you life and prosperity, death and disaster. Choose!

COMMENT. This text reminds us of the importance of our free decisions and of God's respect for human freedom. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy faithfulness to God is linked together with his promise of reward here on earth.

3. Isaiah 55: 10-11. As rain makes the earth fruitful, so the word of God is fruitful.

4. Nehemiah 8: 1-10. They read out the law, and the people renew their faith.

5. Numbers 3: 24-27

May God Bless you and Keep you.

May God let his face shine on your and be gracious to you.

May God bring you his peace.

This is how they must call down my name on the Israelites, and then I shall bless them.

COMMENT: This beautiful prayer and blessing from the Old Testament is used at Mass on New Year's Day. St. Francis of Assisi frequently used this blessing. How often have you prayed and reflected on it?

NEW TESTAMENT --THE GOSPELS

1. Matt. 5: 14-19 *Not the smallest letter will be lost.* This is from the Sermon on the Mount. You could slowly pray, reflect, read the entire Sermon on the Mount or parts of it.
2. Mark 1: 35-39 *Jesus came preaching.* Jesus was a teacher and preacher –sharing with his listeners the Word of God
3. Luke 24: 44-48 *Jesus, ascends, sends the apostles to preach the Word in his name.*
4. John 7: 14-18 *My teaching is not mine, but of him who sent me.*

NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

1. 1 Cor. 2: 1-5 My message is power
2. 2 Tim. 3: 14-17 All Scripture is inspired by God, useful for teaching
3. 2 Tim. 4:1-5 Preach the Good News: fulfill your ministry
4. Hebrews 4: 12-13 The Word of God is like a two edged sword
5. 1 John 1:1-4 We make known to you the Word of life

A REFLECTION FOR LECTORS

Yours is a share in the work of the Lord's Spirit who opens our hearts to God's holy word.

Yours is the task of telling our family story, the story of salvation. Yours is to proclaim the true and saving word of God. You are the messenger of God's love for us.

Your task is to proclaim that word, which challenges, confronts, and captures our hearts.

You proclaim a word that heals and comforts and consoles. Yours

is the ministry of the table of God's word, which feeds the hungers and the longing of our hearts for the truth.

Yours is to offer the story of the "great things the Lord has done for us," that we might turn to the table of Eucharist with good cause to give thanks and praise. Yours is nothing less than the ministry of the Lord's voice calling out in the midst of God's people.

Come to your work from your personal prayer, praying that the Spirit will open your heart to what you proclaim. Prepare the word which is yours to speak: study the scriptures, understand the passage, let it dwell deep within you.

Come to your work in awesome reverence of the word you proclaim: it is the Lord's word.

Come to your ministry as one judged and saved by the word you speak. Anyone can read the scriptures in public; only the believer can proclaim them.

Approach the ambo, the table of the Lord as you would the Lord himself, with reverence and awe. Handle the book of the Lord's word with great care; it is a tabernacle of the Lord's presence. Let your eyes fall often on the faces of the assembly; they are the body of the Lord whose word you proclaim. Let the Lord's peace settle in your heart, that your voice may be clear and steady, Let your voice echo the sound of the word, with conviction, with gentleness, with strength, and with wonder.

Remember that the story you tell is filled with a drama you need not supply, but must always convey. Like the prophet, you will sometimes proclaim what no one wants to hear; remember always your own need to hear the hard saying, and never imagine that your ministry places you above what you proclaim.

If you are the best of the parish lectors, be gentle in helping others to improve. If you are the least of the parish lectors, seek out that help which others can give. If you do not know how well you read, ask: be grateful to constructive criticism and humbled by any

praise you receive. Every lector wants to read at the Easter Vigil but not all will be assigned: be patient in waiting your turn and nourish by the word that others proclaim.

Let no minister of the word think that there is nothing left to learn; another commentary and another workshop cannot but help the open mind and heart. When your brothers and sisters praise and thank you for your work, take delight in the word that you have heard and rejoice in the work the Lord has accomplished through you.

Be faithful in the work you do, for through it the Lord saves his people.

APPENDIX 1A The Importance the Church Gives to Scripture

Perhaps we are not as familiar as we should be with the strong emphasis that the Church gives to Scripture. The Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, on Divine Revelation, has an entire section, Chapter VI, entitled “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.” Here are some of the statements of the Council on Scripture and its important place in our lives.

- Scripture “shares with us divine benefits which entirely surpass the human mind to know” (Revelation, No. 6).
- Access to Scripture should be opened wide to the Christian faithful: “The Church with motherly concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are available in various languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. If it should happen that when the opportunity presents itself and the authority of the Church agree, these translations are made in joint effort with the separated brethren, they may be used by all Christians” (Revelation, No. 22).
- “All who are officially engaged in the ministry of the word should immerse themselves in the Scriptures by constant sacred

reading and diligent study. For it must not happen that anyone becomes ‘an empty preacher’ to others, not being a hearer of the word in his own heart” (Revelation. No. 25).

- “Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man” (Revelation No. 25).
- “There are many links between the message of salvation and culture. In his self-revelation to his people culminating in the fullness of manifestation in his incarnate Son, God spoke according to the proper culture of each age. Similarly the Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and various aspects of life of the faithful” (*The Church in the Modern World, No. 58*).

APPENDIX 1 B

UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES YOU WILL BE PROCLAIMING

The Bible is a complex book. Actually it is a gathering together of a number of books written over a long period of time. Some of the books are short and simple, others long and complex. Some are poetry, others story, some history, and some prophecy. In order to read correctly the selection from the Bible for the day when you are a reader, it is important to know what type or form of writing you will be proclaiming.

The type of Word of God, the literary form (story, prophet, poem, letter, song, parable, history, law) affects the way one reads it. Different materials require different treatment. Thus you read the theological part of a letter of Paul as if you were conducting an argument. One reads Sirach or Wisdom or much of

the Gospel of Matthew (Sermon on the Mount) so as to bring out individual wise sayings. One should read the strong words of the prophets with power, as if you are the prophet speaking to his people. One reads the love poetry of some of the Psalms with passion. If it is a Psalm of praise or joy, show you are joyful, excited too. In general, note that the Psalms are poetry, and so the style and rhythm of reading the psalm is different from reading a story of freedom or liberation from the book of Exodus. Read the laws as if you are a lawgiver, with a clear, no-nonsense voice.

For each reading, you try to discover and determine the central mood or tone of the reading and convey that to the congregation by the way, tone, manner of your reading. This will take some time, practice, and experience.

PREPARING TO PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD.

Readers require scriptural preparation. It is therefore important to:

- have an attitude of awesome reverence for God's word.
- understand the style of writing of the passage.
- know the context of the passages that are to be read.

How to prepare to proclaim God's Word in an effective and appropriate way can be an individual thing – what works for one, may not work for another. Listed below are some ideas that can be used to help understand the reading and thus assist in proclaiming the passage well.

- Read the selection silently several times
 - Sit with the text
 - Ask yourself how does this passage affect my life?
 - What does this mean for proclamation?
 - Use the passage as prayer
- Understand the selection
 - Know the pronunciation of the words
 - Know the meaning of the words
 - Know the meaning of the phrases/reading

- Use the Bible, the 'New Jerome Biblical Commentary', or 'Break Open the Word' to check the context of the passage you are proclaiming. Look at what precedes and follows the passage

- Read the passage out loud
 - Ask someone to listen to you read the passage
 - Decide where pauses, inflections, and emphasis are.

Whatever the way that you find is best for your preparation, it is essential that this be undertaken in the week prior to your rostered turn.

HERE ARE SAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF TEXTS. THEY CAN SERVE AS MATERIAL FOR PRACTICING READING ALOUD.

1. Prophetic Denunciation: Amos 6: 1, 4-7

Woe to the complacent in Zion! Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall! They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils. Therefore now they shall be the first to go into exile, and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

2. Prophetic Denunciation: Amos 5

I hate, I spurn your feasts, says the Lord. I take no pleasure in your solemnities.

Away with your noisy songs! If you would offer me holocausts, then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream.

3. Prophetic Warning Joel 2

Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all who dwell in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. Yes, it is near, a day of darkness and of gloom, a day of clouds and somberness!

4. Humor Jonah 4

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry that God did not carry out the evil he threatened. "I beseech you, Lord," he prayed, "is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? This is

why I fled at first to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, rich in mercy, and loathe to punish. And now, Lord, please take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." But the Lord asked, "Have you reason to be angry?"

5. Letter, Warm Greeting The Beginning of the letter of Paul to the Romans.

Greetings from Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart to proclaim the gospel of God which he promised long ago... To all in Rome, beloved of God and called to holiness, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...

6. Exhortation - Isaiah 2

Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

7. Poetic, image-filled - Isaiah 11

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on my holy mountain.

8. Prophetic command Isaiah 58

Thus says the Lord: Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; cloth the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed...

9. Personal witness 1 Corinthians 2

As for myself, brothers, when I came to you I did not come proclaiming God's testimony with any particular eloquence or "wisdom." No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

10 Commands, commandments and threat - Exodus 22

You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword. Then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.

11. Hope Wisdom 3

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead. But they are in peace. Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself.

12. Dialogue Acts 8

The Spirit said to Philip: "Go and catch up with that carriage." Philip ran ahead and heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He said to him: "Do you really grasp what you are reading?" "How can I," the man replied, "unless someone explains it to me?" With that, he invited Philip to get in and sit down beside him.

13. Dialogue A Reading from the first book of Kings

Elijah went to Zarephath. As he arrived, a widow was gathering sticks. He called out to her: "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." "As the Lord your God lives," she answered, "I have nothing baked; there is only a little flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. When we have eaten this, we shall die." "Do not be afraid," Elijah said to her. "God and do as you propose. But first make a little cake and bring it to me. For

the Lord, the God of Israel says, “The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the Lord sends rain upon the earth.”
She left and did as Elijah ha said. She was able to eat for a year.

14. Instruction, challenge, questions. A reading from the letter of James 2: 14-18

My brothers, what good is it to profess your faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food, and you say to them, “Good-bye and good luck! Keep warm and well fed,” but do not meet their needs, what good is that? So it is with the faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless. To such a person one might say, “you have faith and I have works – is that it?” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you the faith that underlies my works!