



## *Praying the Mass Anew*

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal  
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

### **13. The Readings: Proclaiming, hearing, and meditating on God's Word.**

**T**he *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) refers to two main parts of Mass that are “so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship:” the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The biblical readings with the Liturgy of the Word are understood as one of the more important elements of each Mass. These readings are to be proclaimed well and listened to with reverence. Hence, while there are *no changes in the people's responses to the readings*, it is fitting to devote a column specifically to the readings, that all might participate more fully and actively in this part of the Mass.

On Sundays, there are two passages proclaimed by one or two readers. Usually, the first reading comes from the Old Testament, while the second reading comes from one of the “letters” in the New Testament. During the Easter Season, the first reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles, while the second remains as a passage of a New Testament letter. The Responsorial Psalm that is placed between the readings and is typically sung serves the first reading, emphasizing in its words and the response a particular meaning or theme of the first reading, promoting deeper meditation upon God's Word.

The Gospel passage comes as the peak of the Liturgy of the Word, with Christ himself speaking directly to us. Accordingly, the Gospel passage is paid the

highest reverence. The proclamation of the Gospel is reserved to the clergy, who through the sacrament of Holy Orders, have been configured to Christ. All stand and turn toward the deacon or priest proclaiming the Gospel as an expression of their reverence and attentive listening.

#### *The Task of the Reader*

When it comes to proclaiming the biblical readings at Mass, a first note of importance from the GIRM is that the reading of the biblical readings is termed “ministerial” and not “presidential.” In other words, he who “presides” over the assembly, leading them in the offering of the sacrifice is not meant to read the readings. Rather, one (or two) of the faithful carry out this task in service of the priest and the people. The ministry of “lector” that all men who are preparing for Holy Orders are to receive during their time of preparation for ordination more officially confers the task of proclaiming Scripture readings on those who receive it. However, in almost all parishes, those who read are not recipients of this ministry. Rather, the readers are given this responsibility simply by proper training to proclaim the readings at Mass and by their designation as readers.

To be a reader at Mass carries particular responsibilities. Of great importance is the **preparation on the part of the reader prior to Mass**. Biblical passages are of several styles of writing:

including narrative passages, prophecy, poetry, dialogue, and didactic writings (that is, teaching). Each style requires different voice inflection, proper awareness of those being addressed in the text itself by the human author, along with the awareness of those in the present moment of proclamation. In so many words, readers should proclaim each passage as if they were speaking on behalf of the author, not as simply reading the words on the page. The reader should always strive to proclaim each passage in order *to most properly convey the intended meaning*. Likewise, the pace with which one reads should be such that it allows for the proper nature of the writing style be clearly communicated. All of these details, along with seeking to communicate the proper emotion of the reading, are facilitated by sound preparation.

### ***The Participation of the People***

When the readings are proclaimed well, the participation of the people through **meditation on the spoken word** becomes more realistic. Such meditation allows

what the people to be led to a deeper personal relationship with God. Just as the reader must proclaim the text according to the intent of the author, so the hearer must listen well, so that the author's true message may be heard and meditated upon.

Often, parishes will have the readings available in the little books that people in the pews often use for Mass called "missalettes." While missalettes serve a good purpose to familiarize the people with the readings and prayers, full participation in the liturgy by the faithful means **listening well** to the readings without relying on a written text. Challenging though it may be, all are encouraged to practice listening to the readings, without looking on in the book – that the spoken word itself may become our point of focus, and whatever particular message strikes at our heart may be that which we truly meditate upon (even if it is only one word or phrase). In this way, participating fully in the readings, our "Thanks be to God" will resound with a deeper appreciation for God working in our life.

### ***Questions of the Week:***

➤ ***Why don't all of the parishes have the same missalettes?***

It has become common that parish churches have books that contain the specific readings for each day, along with all the prayers for Mass, called "missalettes." Since there are several publishers of these books, often the layouts of each version are different. What is important to note is that each missalette will have the essential content for the prayers at Mass, along with the given readings for each day.

As mentioned above, missalettes can be a great help in becoming familiar with the Mass. They are also useful for those who may have difficulty participating in Mass for one of a variety of reasons. However, as we grow in our knowledge of Mass, the goal should always be to become **less dependent** upon the missalette. We should become more easily able to meditate on the spoken word simply by hearing it spoken, rather than relying upon words printed in the book.

➤ ***Is it ever permissible to use readings from other sources besides the Bible?***

Non-biblical readings are not permissible for the Liturgy of the Word. The Second Vatican Council gave renewed emphasis to the readings from the Bible as an essential part of every offering of the Mass, referring to these readings as the means by which "the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them" (GIRM, 57). The readings deliver to us God's own word. Accordingly, the readings can never be replaced by non-biblical readings – which do not contain His word.