

Reading at a Funeral

This guide is intended for those who have been asked to proclaim a Scripture Reading at a Funeral, in particular for those who may not have read in church before.

Introduction

The proclamation of scriptural readings is a key part of the Funeral liturgy. The readings may have been chosen by the deceased or by the bereaved they will express faith in God's providence and mercy, and consolation to those who mourn. To proclaim the readings is therefore a privilege.

When speaking about the readings the verb which is usually used is 'proclaim' rather than 'read'. This highlights that it is not enough to just read the text but that needs to be communicated to those who are listening.

Preparation

Before the Funeral

- When you are asked to read you will need to know what the reading is.
- The readings for the Funeral service can be found on the Liturgy Office website and you can download the individual reading laid out ready for use.
 - <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/OCF/Lectionary.shtml>
- It will also be helpful to know if there is one or more readings and therefore where your reading is placed.
- You will read out loud the text in black. The text in red is for reference.
- The text is laid out in sense-lines which help to indicate the structure of the text.
- Read through the text quietly a couple of times first.
- What do strikes you about the reading? Does it remind you in anyway of the deceased? You will proclaim the reading better if you have something to communicate.
- You might ask the bereaved why they have chosen the reading — why do they like it?
- Read the text out loud.
 - To be heard and understood most people need to speak more slowly — not so slow that the connection between words and ideas is lost — but at a moderate pace.
 - The punctuation will show you where to pause and shape the text.
 - The short sense-lines will help you to look up from time to time — this helps to connect with those who are listening and therefore communicate

with them. If you are worried about losing your place keep a finger on where you are in the text.

- Though most churches will have microphones they can only amplify what is expressed clearly. Generally you will need to speak loud enough that those nearby would hear you without the microphone.
- There should be a break between the announcement of the passage (A reading from...) and the text itself.
- There should be a pause at the end of the reading before the acclamation 'The word of the Lord'. This is both to show that the acclamation is separate from the passage and to allow people space to absorb the text. Some suggest counting silently 1-10 slowly — silence will seem longer to you than those listening, don't rush it.
- Take time to read through the text, both silently and out loud, a number of times before the wedding.

On the Day

- Arrive in good time so that you have time to prepare.

Check

- Where you will be reading from — usually the ambo which will be on the sanctuary
- What you will be reading from — there should either be a Lectionary (a book of readings) or a worthy folder, provided by the parish, with the readings in. It is not good practice to take a piece of paper with the reading up to the ambo.
- If the Lectionary is used you will find that the layout of the text may be different. You may also need to check that it is on the right page.
- The microphone — it is good to try out the amplification beforehand. Different microphones pick up sound in a variety of ways, also the amount of amplification can affect how you read.

Access

- Sometimes approaching the ambo will involve climbing some steps.
- If you have difficulty with this (e.g. if you use a wheelchair) the church should make provision for this. If there is not an alternative route to the ambo a portable microphone could be used.

Proclamation

When

- The readings (in the Liturgy of the Word) follow the first part of the liturgy (the Introductory Rites). They will be immediately preceded by the Collect, a short prayer said by the Priest which begins with the invitation 'Let us pray.'
- The service leaflet will help indicate the order of the liturgy.
- Often the Priest will indicate for the readers to come to the ambo. In some places this may be done by another minister.
- The readings follow the following pattern:
 - First Reading
 - Psalm (may be sung)
 - Second Reading (may be omitted)
 - Gospel Acclamation or Alleluia
 - Gospel (read by Priest or Deacon)
- You will be reading either the First or the Second Reading.

Where

- Depending on the practice and layout of the church if there are 2 readers they may approach the ambo together, with one standing to the side while the other reads.
- Readers should approach the sanctuary. When in front of the altar, face the altar and bow, and then continue to the ambo.
- It is not usually necessary to adjust the microphone.
- Check that the correct reading is in front of you.
 - If not the Priest or another minister will assist you.

How

- Read the text out loud as you have practiced it.
 - Only read the text in black.
 - If the text has not been printed in two colours (this includes the Lectionary) only the following is read: the introduction (A reading from... the Scripture passage, the closing acclamation 'The Word of the Lord')
 - Read the text in a measured way with clear and direct articulation.
 - Allow for some silence before the closing acclamation.
- After the reading either stand to one side if you are with another reader and/or return to your place, stopping and bowing to the altar when you pass it.

- The task of the reader is not simply to read the text but to communicate so that the listener understands and can engage with God's word speaking to them.

The Responsorial Psalm

- The Psalms are the songbook of the Bible and are therefore intended to be sung.
- Within a funeral liturgy this may not always be the case and you may be asked to read the Responsorial Psalm.
- The psalm comes after the first reading and has a short response ('The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want') which is said by everyone. The psalm is a meditation on scripture and a response to the first reading.

Reading the Psalm

- It is not usual to announce the psalm.
- Begin by saying the response which is repeated by all.
- The response is said after every verse.
- The easiest way to 'cue' the response is by looking up at people at the end of verse.
- The verses are poetic and should be read as such.
- Often the lines come in pairs where a similar idea is expressed in two different ways.

*Lord,
be on my lips and in my heart,
that I may worthily proclaim
your holy word.*