

For all those involved in The Ministry of Reader



1. What change will I notice most?

At the end of every reading, instead of saying “This is the word of the Lord” (or, for deacons and priests, “This is the Gospel of the Lord”, you will be asked to say simply “The word of the Lord” (priests and deacons: “the Gospel of the Lord”).

2. Why is this happening?

Several reasons:

- (a) The Latin is *Verbum Domini* — the word of the Lord. “This is” does not appear there.
- (b) It emphasises that the word of the Lord is what is *proclaimed* by the reader and takes root in the hearts of the people, not what is printed in a book. Saying “This is the word of the Lord” can give the wrong impression.

(You have probably seen priests and deacons raising the book as they say “This is the Gospel of the Lord”. If they are going to raise the book, they should really be saying “This is the *Book* of the Gospel of the Lord”! Of course, they are not supposed to raise the book at all, and in future they will be asked to say simply “The Gospel of the Lord”, once again emphasising that the Gospel is present in the proclamation of the text, not in the printing on the page. The point is that the book is like a tabernacle of the word: it contains the word, but it is not actually the word itself, in same way that a score of Beethoven’s 5th Symphony contains the musical ‘instructions’, but the music itself only comes alive when the piece is played.)

- (c) Many other English-speaking countries have already been saying “The word of the Lord” and “the Gospel of the Lord” for many years. We are simply coming into line with them.

3. What else should I do?

An excellent start would be to leave a good silent pause — 10 seconds is not too much — at the end of the reading before you say “The word of the Lord”.

- (a) This makes it clear that the concluding formula is not part of the scriptural text (it isn’t!). Just tacking it onto the end can also sound silly.
- (b) It leaves a silence for people to reflect on what they have heard, and this is something the Church is always asking for (cf. GILM 28 (reproduced in GIRM 45), GIRM 56).
- (c) It avoids ‘switching people off’ too quickly, ready for the next thing that happens.
- (d) It also gives the reader time to make the reading their own.

If you don’t already do this, it will take a while for you to become used to it. And 10 seconds can seem like an eternity to the reader, though it seems much shorter for the listener. A good tip is to re-read the last two or three sentences of the reading silently to yourself before you say “The word of the Lord”.



4. Anything else?

Well, many readers read too quickly (sometimes this is due to nerves) and start before people are ready to listen. It's always a good idea to take a couple of good, deep, slow breaths at the ambo before launching into the reading. This gives the people time to focus on the reader after they have sat down, and also helps to calm the reader. Don't be afraid to look around to ensure that you have everyone's attention before you start. After all, this is the word of God, the most important word that we can ever hear.

As well as adopting a pace that is a little slower than you might think necessary (remember, this is *proclamation*, not mere reading aloud), make an effort to vary the tone of your voice sufficiently so that the reading is full of interest for the listener. It's possible to do this without being over-dramatic. (A good reader's course can help you with this.)

5. Conclusion

If, in the course of time, you manage all the suggestions above, the people's "Thanks be to God" response will be that much more heartfelt and full of meaning, and the word will have a chance to grow within them!

Useful resources

Our national Liturgy Office website:

<http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/>

especially <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Ministry/Readers.pdf>

A sample set of Guidelines for Readers:

<http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/userfiles/Guidelines%20for%20Readers%20Mar%202007.pdf>

A Handbook for Readers (a practical and liturgical guide)

Marian Tolley, Decani Books, ISBN 1-900314-01-0

A Workbook for Readers (a basic course for readers) — a supplement to the Handbook

Marian Tolley, Decani Books, ISBN 1-900314-14-2

Guide for Lectors

Virginia Meagher and Paul Turner, LTP, ISBN 978-1-56854-607-0 [available from McCrimmons]

Liturgical Ministry: a practical guide to spirituality

Donna M. Cole, Resource Publications, ISBN 0-89390-372-8

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