

The sign of the loaves and fishes has been chosen to illustrate the cover of this leaflet. It reminds us of the story of when people were hungry and had nothing to eat. Jesus was able to take the few loaves and fish that a child had to offer and after he blessed them they became food sufficient to feed very many people.

Pope John Paul has asked that we keep this year – October 2004 to October 2005 – as a Year of the Eucharist. He asks that during this year we remember how Jesus continues to feed his people through the Mass. It is now not with loaves and fish that he feeds us but with bread and wine that, through the prayer of the Church and the ministry of the priest, becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist Jesus shares his life with us, so that we might live life well, in communion with him.

The sign of the loaves and fish perhaps also reminds of the ministry that you carry out in the Church. When we minister we bring what we have – our skills as a reader, or a server, or a musician or singer – and use them for the benefit of others. We prepare well and we do the best we can – but sometimes it might feel that we have little to offer.

Yet our contribution is an important part of the Mass. Both through the particular things we do as a minister, but also through the way we take part in the Mass as a whole, as people who are there to listen to God's Word, to join ourselves with the offering of the great prayer of Thanksgiving, and to receive Christ in Holy Communion. Our prayer and our gifts are received by Jesus and become part of the great blessing that is the Mass.

What do readers do?

The Reader proclaims the readings from the Bible set for the Mass – apart from the Gospel reading which is read by the priest or deacon. The reader may also read the Biddings in the Prayer of the Faithful (the Bidding Prayers) and, if the psalm is not going to be sung, it will be a Reader who will proclaim the Psalm between the readings.

Why?

Because one of the main things we are asked to do at Mass is listen to God's living word. The Reader reads so that everyone else might listen to the word. So it is important for the Reader to read clearly so that people might hear every word.

If someone reads too quickly we don't have chance to hear what is being said, so it is important to read slowly. It might seem too slow to the Reader – but just right for the congregation.

When the congregation has heard the reading they need to listen to it a little longer, so that they can listen to it with their heart, not just with their ears. So it is important that we have a little pause after each reading, before the psalm starts, or the Gospel acclamation – for people to listen to what God is saying to them.

As Readers grow in confidence and experience they not only read, but become more expert in helping people to listen.

Preparing to Read

One of the ways we prepare to listen to the reading of the Gospel, the high point of the Liturgy of the Word, is to trace the sign of the Cross on our forehead, lips and heart.

We might use those three things –lips, head and heart – as we prepare the reading we have been asked to read at Mass. To prepare well takes time and effort. It is good to read the reading to ourselves several days before we are to read it for the congregation to listen. And then after we have thought about what we are reading, to practice reading it out loud, and to speak to God in prayer about what the reading is saying to us.

- *Head – Understanding the reading.*

What is the passage about? What is important in the passage for people to know about?

- *Lips – Practising the proclamation of the reading.*

Read the reading out loud; get used to any unusual words; get used to the reading so that when you come to read it won't sound so much like a reading, but something you yourself want to say to the people.

- *Heart – Spending time in prayer.*

Speak with God about what you hear him saying in the reading. Pray for the people who are going to be listening to the word of God you will read to them..

Readers & their ministry at Mass

