

# Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

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## The Structure of the Mass

The Liturgy of the Word *continued*

In the previous article, we began to reflect on how to best “receive” the word of God when it is proclaimed during the celebration of the Mass. We established that some people have very strong feelings about the importance of listening without the aid of a written text (a missalette), and others prefer to read along. As we begin such a discussion we presume upon the effective proclamation skills of the lectors, and the adequacy of the church’s sound system.

Regarding lectors’ skills, in 1980 the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship issued an official Instruction, *Inaestimabile Donum*, which states:

**“Proper measures must therefore be taken to ensure that there are certain suitable laypeople who have been trained to carry out this ministry. Whenever there is more than one reading, it is better to assign the readings to different readers, if available.... It is necessary that those who exercise the ministry of reader be truly suited and carefully prepared, so that the faithful may develop a warm and living love for Sacred Scripture from listening to the sacred readings.”**

Having been properly trained, lectors should seek updated training on a regular basis, especially during these times when we are experiencing changes in the liturgy.

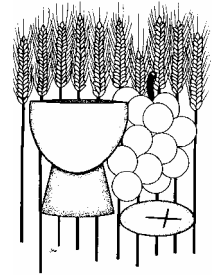
Allow one more consideration as we seek the “correct” answer to the question, “Is it all right to read along when Scripture is being proclaimed in the Liturgy?” When people attempt to solve a debate by looking to church documents and/or scripture for just the right phrase to support their positions, hope for real communication wanes quickly. Rather, having prayed for openness, we read a document or scripture passage in its entirety to get an overall sense of what is intended. Consider the following:

**FACT:** Everything in Church documents which refers to the proclamation of the word speaks of Christ being present, of God himself speaking, and of reverent and attentive listening on the part of all who are gathered. In his apostolic letter on the *Year of the Eucharist*, Pope John Paul II said, “*In order to truly listen to the Lord in the Liturgy of the Word, we need to learn how to listen with the heart.*”

**PONDER: #1.** If Christ himself physically stood before me, would I be better able to *listen with the heart* by looking up and listening to every word he said, or would I prefer to read a text of his message while he spoke?

**PONDER: #2.** If it is impossible for me to hear because of a personal physical challenge, and the only way I will hear God’s word to me is to read along, perhaps I should consider reading the Scriptures before I come to Mass. This might better enable me to hear *with my heart* during Mass.

**PONDER: #3** Remembering that the Liturgy of the Word is not a bible study session, but a time for God to speak to me and to my faith community, perhaps the key question to ask in prayer is, “How do I best achieve hearing and absorbing God’s unique word to my heart in such a way that I can go forth from this Sunday liturgy and live God’s word?”



FROM  
**THE GENERAL INSTRUCTION  
ON THE ROMAN MISSAL...**

**The Duties of the Lector**

#194. “In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector, wearing approved attire, may carry the *Book of the Gospels*, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest but otherwise along with the other ministers. “ [If there is no *Book of the Gospels*, the Lectionary is NOT carried in procession.]

#195. “Upon reaching the altar, the lector makes a profound bow with the others. If he is carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, he approaches the altar and places the Book upon it....”

#196. “The lector reads from the ambo the readings that precede the Gospel. If there is no psalmist, the lector may also proclaim the Responsorial Psalm after the first reading.”

#197. “When no deacon is present, the lector, after the introduction by the priest, may announce from the ambo the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful.”

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