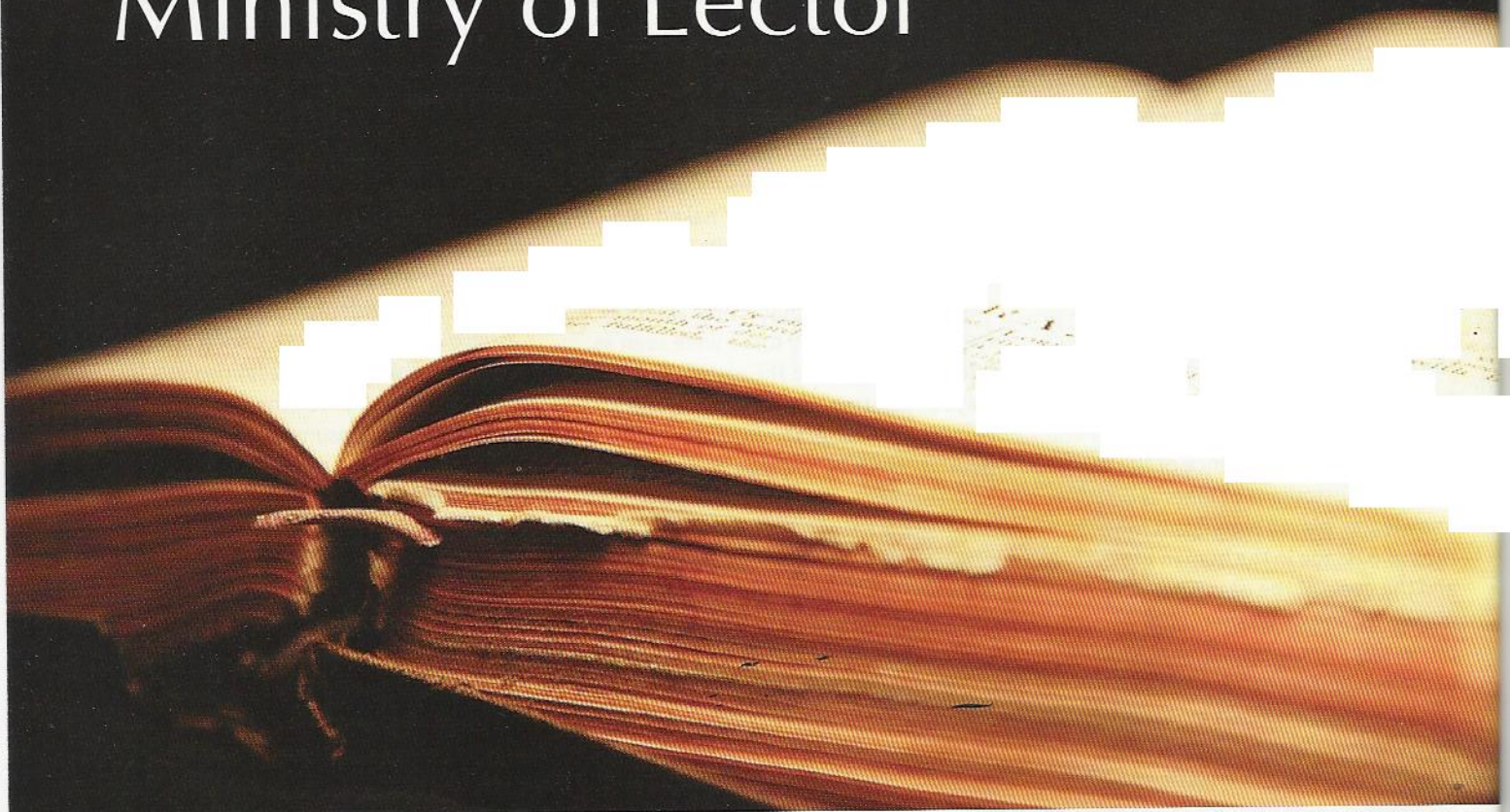


# Ministry of Lector



**T**imothy and Maura were a loving and devoted couple. They had been married for only 20 days when Timothy was arrested and tortured. He had red hot iron rods forced into his ears, then he was hung upside down with a heavy stone tied to his neck and a wooden block put in his mouth.

Timothy was a reader in the early days of the Church. He was charged with the safe-keeping of scripture rolls, a great honour for a Christian. He refused to hand over the sacred scriptures, saying it would be like handing over one of his own children.

Timothy was the son of a priest and had been brought up in a sleepy, rural, Egyptian village. His devotion to his ministry not only caused his own suffering, because when he refused to cooperate, the Roman governor Arian brought Maura before him and she too suffered terrible torture. Her hair was torn from her head and her fingers cut off. Finally she was placed into a boiling cauldron. Timothy urged her to be strong, and she was. 'I am prepared to die with you,' she uttered.

Eventually they were both crucified and faced each other in suffering for ten days. They died in the year 286. Arian later repented and became a Christian who was also martyred.



Going through such suffering is unimaginable. How far would we go? How seriously do we really take our ministry? Timothy knew that there was nothing more precious than the Word of God held in scripture and paid the ultimate sacrifice. What we can do is our best, for God deserves it.

The word 'Reader' is such an underestimation of the role. We can all read to a greater or lesser extent. Let's use 'Lector' or 'Proclaimer.'

*'This is not a mere reading of an ancient document ... God is speaking to us. It is not merely lines recited by an actor, God is speaking to us. When the scriptures are read to us, it is as if the book disappears. The Lector becomes the mouthpiece of God.'*<sup>1</sup>

Wow! This amazing! Is this what we feel when we approach the lectern?

**The Lector becomes the mouthpiece of God.**

I need to say it again, because it is such an enormous reality.

**The Lector becomes the mouthpiece of God!!!**

*The Lector has a daunting responsibility ... the lector needs to carry God's voice. The Lector communicates a divine message.*<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, think of your own experience, as someone proclaiming the Word or as an active listener. Are you a worthy mouthpiece or an enthusiastic listener?

There is a great responsibility for making sure that this truth comes across as much as it does in the Liturgy of the Eucharist where we recognise Christ's presence in the form of bread and wine.

The Liturgy of the Word should be transformational. But it gets hindered by so many mundane things ... a bad microphone, a vocal baby, late arrivals, a fidgety altar server. You know the sort of thing! Though we are human, and God knows this, we should be striving for perfection. Because God is worthy of it! We should be doing all we can, not accepting the mediocre. I wonder if Timothy would be impressed with the dedication we show.

I travel to parishes and schools, talking to groups about their ministries, helping them gain a deeper understanding and looking at the practical issues that are so very important. Here are some key elements I think are crucial to being a really effective reader.

## **KNOW YOUR HISTORY**

We should know about the Liturgy of the Word that has gone before us, particularly in the light of Vatican II. In



the history of the Church, having lay proclaimers and being able to hear and understand the words is amazing!

### KNOW YOUR LITURGY

We can never be told enough that 'Christ is really present to the assembly gathered in his name, he is present in the person of the minister, in his own word and indeed substantially and permanently under the Eucharistic species.'<sup>3</sup>

Also that 'when the scriptures are read in church, God himself is speaking to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, is proclaiming the Gospel.'<sup>4</sup>

The Liturgy of the Word is not a prelude to the main event!

### KNOW THE BIBLE

A reading from the prophet who? St Paul meant what?

If you don't know, find out! A really great resource is [www.lectorprep.org](http://www.lectorprep.org).

It looks at the readings for the week ahead (though you can access any Sunday and prepare weeks ahead!) It focusses on understanding and proclamation. It's a simple layout and very reader-friendly language. Strongly recommended!

### PRAY

Find a quiet moment and focus on the words you are about to proclaim. Which word or phrase catches your eye? There will always be something! Repeat it, ponder on it, and think about it in the presence of God. Ask for the grace to make those words meaningful to everyone listening.

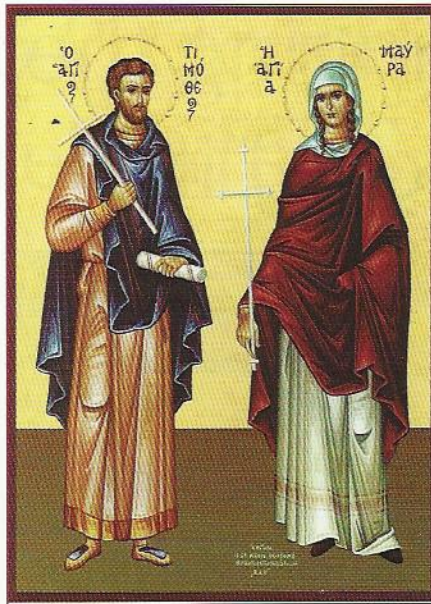
### PRACTICE!

I know there are always times when we are asked to read at the last minute, but they should be rare. Stand at the bottom of your stairs at home and proclaim your reading upwards. Don't just practice in your head ... it's not the same!

When approaching the ambo, always bow to the altar (the symbol of Christ). A slow nod of the head would be sufficient ... but everyone should do the same. Hold your head up, looking confidently out to the congregation, and let your eyes look down at the words.

### PREPARE

When you get to church, don't presume the Lectionary is open at the right page. Check it and the microphone beforehand!



Orthodox icon of Saint Timothy and Maura the Martyrs

### SIT NEAR THE FRONT

You might be a back bench/behind pillar person, but on the day you read, you should be on hand. There is no such thing as the procession of the readers, yet in many places we all sit down and watch as the readers come down the aisle, bow (not always to the altar, the symbol of the presence of Christ) and take their places. It's not right and gives a misleading message of importance.

### STICK TO THE TEXT!

It's all in the book! No need to say 'The First Reading ...' just 'A reading from ...'

Neither do we need 'Please stand to greet the Gospel.' If the Alleluia is proclaimed with due spirit, then we should all know what to do!

If you make a mistake, pause, check and carry on. No need to say anything else!

### USE YOUR VOICE!

The scriptures are to be **proclaimed**. Even the best PA system won't do this. It involves elements of drama; voice projection, good enunciation, eye contact, varying pitch and speed. Don't rely on any microphone ... you still have to do the work.

### BE SILENT!

Pause! Take a breath! There's no hurry. It is recommended that we observe silence before the Liturgy of the Word begins, after both readings and after the homily. We need this silence to internalise what we hear. And we also need to get out of the habit of thinking that silence means somebody has forgotten to do something!

Though I'm across the Irish Sea, I am available to travel to your parish, school or community.

I can work with groups of any size, in formation and developing practical skills across all lay ministries.

I have put a collection of written resources for lectors on my website, where you can find out more about me and what I can offer.

[www.mariahall.org](http://www.mariahall.org)

email: [info@mariahall.org](mailto:info@mariahall.org)

### USEFUL RESOURCES

*General Instruction of the Roman Missal.*

*Lectionary for Mass: Introduction.*

[www.lectorprep.org](http://www.lectorprep.org)

YouTube: 'Lectortrainer' Short videos on all aspects of the ministry by Denise Thompson.

*A Handbook for Readers*, Marian Tolley, Decani Books, 2001.

*A Workbook for Readers*, Marian Tolley, Decani Books, 2004.

*Guide for Lectors*, Meagher and Turner, Liturgical Training Press, 2006.

Facebook group: Pastoral Liturgy

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Guide for Lectors*, Virginia Meagher and Paul Turner, LTP, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> IBID

<sup>3</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* 7.

<sup>4</sup> IBID 9.



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