



Liturgy is the heart of Christian life, the sacred place where the Church meets God in prayer, sacrifice, and praise. Within this framework, the proclamation of the Word holds a central place, and readers have the responsibility of transmitting God's voice to the assembly. However, the role of the reader has not been uniform throughout history. In the traditional Latin Mass (*Vetus Ordo*), the proclamation of Scripture was the prerogative of the clergy, whereas in the ordinary form (*Novus Ordo*), established after the Second Vatican Council, laypeople fulfill this role. How did this ministry originate? What is its spiritual significance? And what differences exist between both forms of the Roman Rite?

## 1. Origin and Evolution of the Ministry of the Reader

### The Role of Scripture in the History of the Church

Since biblical times, the proclamation of God's Word has been a pillar in the life of the people of Israel and the nascent Church. In the Old Testament, the Levites and scribes had the task of reading the Law of Moses before the people. A key example of this act is found in Nehemiah 8:

*"Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and as he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground."*  
(Nehemiah 8:5-6)

This passage reveals that the reading of Scripture has always been a sacred act requiring reverence and preparation.

### The Ministry of the Reader in the Early Church

In the first centuries of Christianity, the lectorate was consolidated as a minor order within the clergy. St. Justin Martyr (2nd century) mentions in his *Apology* that during the Eucharistic celebration, a reader proclaimed the Scriptures before the bishop's homily. In a society where most of the faithful could not read, this function was essential.



In the 3rd century, Pope Cornelius listed readers among the minor clergy. Their mission was not only to read at Mass but also to teach catechumens and assist in catechesis.

## The Proclamation of the Word in the Vetus Ordo

During the Middle Ages, with the consolidation of Latin as the liturgical language and the centrality of the priest in the Mass, the institutionalized lectorate lost prominence. In the Tridentine Mass (*Vetus Ordo*), the readings were proclaimed exclusively by the priest or deacon, never by a layperson. This was due to the conception of the altar as a sacred place where only ordained ministers could officiate. Proclamation in the vernacular was only permitted outside of Mass, for example, in preaching or catechesis.

## The Reader in the Novus Ordo and the Opening to Laypeople

The Second Vatican Council restored the importance of the proclamation of the Word in the vernacular and allowed laypeople to assume this role within the Liturgy. In 1972, Pope St. Paul VI, with the *motu proprio Ministeria quaedam*, reformed the minor orders and established the lectorate as a lay ministry. More recently, in 2021, Pope Francis opened this ministry to women as well.

This reform marked a clear discrepancy with the *Vetus Ordo* tradition, where the reader was not a layperson but a minor cleric or a subdeacon. For those who defend the traditional Mass, the reading of Scripture within the Liturgy should remain a function reserved for ordained ministers, as it is part of the liturgical sacrifice and not merely an act of reading.

## 2. The Spiritual Mission of the Reader

Being a reader in the Liturgy does not simply mean reading a text aloud. It means being the voice of God for the community. St. Paul reminds us:

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

The proclamation of the Word must be carried out with reverence and preparation, for in it, God Himself speaks to His people.



## Spiritual and Technical Preparation

To properly fulfill this ministry, a reader must prepare in two dimensions:

1. **Spiritual:** Read and meditate on the passage in advance, pray, and ask for the grace to proclaim with faith.
2. **Technical:** Master pronunciation, intonation, and pacing so that the message reaches the assembly clearly and effectively.

In the *Vetus Ordo*, this preparation was entrusted to the priest or deacon, who studied Scripture theology in depth. In the *Novus Ordo*, the challenge is for lay readers to receive sufficient formation to proclaim God's Word with dignity.

## 3. Differences Between the Vetus Ordo and the Novus Ordo in the Proclamation of the Word

Aspect	Vetus Ordo (Tridentine Mass)	Novus Ordo (Mass After 1970)
<b>Who Proclaims the Word</b>	Only the priest or deacon	A layperson (reader) may do so
<b>Language of Proclamation</b>	Latin	Vernacular language
<b>Moment of Proclamation</b>	At the altar, as part of the sacrifice	At the ambo, as instruction to the assembly
<b>Reader's Formation</b>	Cleric with theological studies	Any layperson with basic preparation

## Conclusion: The Word of God and Its Liturgical Transmission

The proclamation of God's Word is an essential element of the Liturgy. In the ordinary form of the Roman Rite (*Novus Ordo*), laypeople have the opportunity to proclaim the Scriptures, reinforcing the active participation of the people in the Mass. However, in the extraordinary form (*Vetus Ordo*), the proclamation remains the prerogative of the clergy, emphasizing the sacredness of the altar and the priestly function in the transmission of the faith.

Beyond liturgical differences, what is truly important is that God's Word is proclaimed with reverence, fidelity, and a spirit of prayer. As Hebrews 4:12 reminds us:



*“For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

May every reader, whether in the traditional Mass or in the reformed Mass, always remember that they are an instrument of God to bring His message to the world.