

How to Use the Children's Lectionary



The Lectionary for Masses with Children was published in English in 1993 as an adaptation of the regular **Lectionary for Mass** (see separate listing, *How to Use the Lectionary*). It was designed to be used at Masses where a large number of (pre-adolescent) children are present.

Examples of such gatherings include Sunday Masses at which a large number of children are present along with adults (under certain circumstances; see below); Masses in which a separate liturgy of the word for children is celebrated; Masses at which most members of the assembly are children, such as school Masses or Masses for religious education students; other liturgical celebrations that include a liturgy of the word; and family prayer.

The Introduction to the **Lectionary for Masses with Children** places its use in the following theological and liturgical context: God communicates with us through words and especially through Christ, the living Word. When the inspired word of Scripture takes on a human voice and is proclaimed as the word of God in the liturgical assembly, it becomes a sacrament," that is, it has an effective power to communicate and reveal God's presence. If that sacramental presence is to be communicated effectively in the proclamation of the word, then we need to use whatever skills and resources are available to help people experience and "give assent to God's Good News." The Introduction notes that even when a classroom is used to celebrate the word of God, the ritual nature of this event must be highlighted: "Even when classrooms or other non-liturgical spaces must be used for celebrations of the word with children, care must be taken that these spaces be well prepared, and that the environment is suitable for the worship of God."

A Ritual Event

"The Church's liturgy is first and foremost ritual prayer. The liturgy of the word is neither a catechetical session nor an introduction to biblical history. The liturgy celebrates the word of God in narrative and song, makes it visible in gesture and symbol, and culminates in the celebration of the Eucharist."

Because the proclamation of the word is a ritual event, not primarily a catechetical one, there are certain resources we can use, and others that are inappropriate to ritual behavior. The usable resources include careful preparation of the assembly and its ministers; effective proclamation of the reading; and "dialogue in song, silence, and reflection, with the use of appropriate gestures and symbols." Inappropriate resources would include "translations" of the Scriptures (really, paraphrases) that may obscure the meaning of the text; activities that turn the proclamation of the word into a classroom lesson; the use of non-Scriptural readings to replace the assigned texts; and so on. Such catechetical activities, the Introduction to the Lectionary says, are best used before Mass to prepare the children, either in the religious education program itself, or even at home. "This Lectionary," it says, "is intended to encourage families to prepare together those readings which will be used in common both by the adults and the children for the celebration of Sunday Mass (at least the gospel) and to reflect after the celebration of the word proclaimed there."

Children need to be led slowly into the complex of ritual gestures, songs, and words that make up our worship, but that doesn't mean we have to re-invent the wheel. What it might mean is that we need to adapt our current ritual practice so that it is the liturgy itself that leads children, bit by bit, into a fuller celebration of and a richer participation in worship. That is one of the chief points made in the Directory for Masses with Children (see also *How to Prepare Mass with Lower and Middle School Children*): "The liturgy has the power to form children and all believers in the paschal mystery. The worthy celebration of the liturgy itself is the best introduction to liturgy."

The intent of the **Lectionary for Masses with Children**, then, is to lead children "into one community of faith, formed by the proclamation of the word of God" by using approximately the same readings used in gatherings of the full assembly, but with texts selected, adapted, and arranged according "to the needs and capacities of children."

Arrangement of the Lectionary

The readings for Sundays, solemnities, and feasts of the Lord in the regular Lectionary for Mass were adapted in this special Lectionary according to the following criteria:

- The gospel assigned in the regular **Lectionary for Mass** is never omitted, though it might be shortened or adapted for one reason or another (too long, too abstract, using images that might confuse or disturb children).
- Other readings might also be shortened or eliminated for the reasons given above; readings which "children could perceive as anti-Semitic or racist" have also been edited or shortened.
- "When one of the first two readings for Sundays or solemnities or feasts of the Lord was judged inappropriate for children, it was omitted and not replaced with another. In cases where both of the two first readings in the Lectionary have been dropped, a replacement has been provided. The gospel selections appointed in the **Roman Lectionary for Mass** have been retained although in particular cases they have been shortened or otherwise adapted."
- The responsorial psalms of the Lectionary have been adapted as well "in order to foster the singing of these texts. Some refrains or psalms have been shortened or replaced." As in the **Lectionary for Mass**, some seasonal or "common" texts have been provided for the various liturgical seasons and for the common of saints; these may be used in place of the assigned psalm of the day.

In addition to adapting the texts in the **Lectionary for Mass** for major celebrations and certain other feasts, the **Lectionary for Masses with Children** has added a few sets of texts for special occasions in the lives of children. Here is a list of the seasons, feasts, and occasions for which there are texts in the **Lectionary for Masses with Children**:

1. Sundays in Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.
2. Three Solemnities of the Lord that are celebrated during Ordinary Time and are likely to occur during the school year: Holy Trinity (the Sunday after Pentecost); The Body and Blood of Christ (the Sunday after Trinity); and the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the Friday after the Body and Blood of Christ).
3. Common texts for the sung responsorial psalms for the great seasons and for Ordinary Time.
4. Readings for weekdays in Advent, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time.
5. Gospel acclamations for weekdays in Ordinary Time.
6. Readings or references to the common sets of readings for all the solemnities, feasts, memorials, and optional memorials in the calendar (also called the "proper") of saints.
7. "Common" sets of readings among which you may choose when these readings are assigned for a celebration of the Blessed Virgin or one of the saints.
8. Readings for celebrations of baptism, confirmation (may also be used for Masses of the Holy Spirit), Holy Eucharist, and reconciliation.
9. New sets of readings for various needs and occasions, including the beginning of the school year, the end of the school year, and other occasions.

When to use the Children's Lectionary

The **Lectionary for Masses with Children** is designed to be used primarily with "hearers of the word" who are "children of elementary grades [pre-adolescents]." It is not required that this Lectionary be used with such gatherings of children; use of this book is an option offered as an alternative to using the regular Lectionary for Mass.

It may be used with such "hearers" at any celebration of the Eucharist "in which a considerable number of children are present," such as Sunday Masses "when a large number of children are present along with adults, or when the children have a separate liturgy of the word." However, this Lectionary should not be used "exclusively or even preferentially at Sunday Masses, even though large numbers of children are present."

At the great feasts and seasons (Christmas Day, Epiphany, the Sundays of Lent, Easter Day, Ascension, and Pentecost), this Lectionary "may be used only when the liturgy of the word with children is held in a place apart from the main assembly. This is to ensure that on these days the **Roman Lectionary for Mass** will take precedence over the **Lectionary for Masses with Children** in the main assembly of the faithful."

However, parishes planning to use this Lectionary, especially on the great occasions of the church year, should weigh carefully the benefits to children of a separate liturgy of the word against the benefits of having the children be part of the full assembly, especially during the great seasons. Children should experience themselves as part of the "great church," hearing and singing the same things as everyone else, and not grow to think of the word of God as something that is "just for kids."

The **Lectionary for Masses with Children** may also be used "for Masses at which most of the congregation consists of children (e.g., school Masses)."

It may be used as a resource for other celebrations with children that include readings from Scripture, especially if those planning such celebrations want to do so "within the context of the liturgical year."

Additional Details

Music - The Introduction to this Lectionary emphasizes the role of music in the liturgy of the word, and not only with children! It says (#51): "The Eucharistic liturgy requires the full use of music which is integral to the whole celebration, including the proclamation of the word of God. The responsorial psalm is normally sung by a cantor with the assembly singing the refrain. The gospel acclamation must always be sung. A sung response to the petitions of the general intercessions can enhance participation."

Readers - We need to think about why we ask people to perform one or another ministry. Some people think it is "cute," for example, to have children proclaim the readings at a first communion celebration, or to act as cantor. The **Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children** (#21, 23) gives us these principles for choosing ministers, especially readers:

The goal in making any choices about how to perform the liturgy is to prepare a "worthy" celebration of the liturgy that will "form children and all believers in the paschal mystery."

"All liturgical ministries are exercised for the sake of the prayer of the assembly. Therefore, ministers should be selected on the basis of liturgical competence. It should not be presumed that children should proclaim the word of God in the celebrations in which this Lectionary is used."

The selection of ministers of whatever age who are "able to read the Scriptures competently, . . . ministering graciously and reverently to young children engaged in liturgical prayer, is more conducive to the children's growing reverence for the word of God, than the peer ministry of embarrassed or ill-prepared children."

Dismissal from the Full Assembly - When a parish offers a separate liturgy of the word with children, there is a ritual to be followed, as described in the Introduction #7-8. First, the children assemble with everyone else for the opening rites of Mass (song, procession, greeting, penitential rite, Gloria, opening prayer). After the opening prayer, but before the first reading, the children gather before the priest who is presiding. The priest presents the Lectionary to the person presiding over the children's liturgy of the word (who may be a woman or a man), and he dismisses the children and their ministers with an appropriate statement (two are suggested in the Introduction).

Led by the Lectionary which represents the word of God, the children go to a separate space for the liturgy of the word. "At the conclusion of their liturgy of the word, and before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins, the children return to their families."

Similar Shape - One goal of a separate liturgy of the word with children is to prepare them to participate in the full assembly of the church. "This is best accomplished when the basic shape of the ritual used with the children, its symbols, gestures, and language are similar to that of the full assembly. The children are thus enabled to celebrate the paschal mystery of Christ on their own level of understanding and are led to the celebration of those same mysteries in the full assembly of the faithful."

Additional Resources

"To Listen and Tell" contains the Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children along with a commentary by Sister Kate Dooley, O.P. Published by The Pastoral Press, 1993. (Resources from The Pastoral Press should soon be available from OCP Publications, Portland, OR.) Phone (OCP): 1 (800) 548-8749.

"A Guide to the Lectionary for Masses with Children," prepared by Peter Mazar and Robert Piercy, includes suggestions for readings, music, psalms, and sample general intercessions for every week of the liturgical year. It includes both the Directory for Masses with Children and the Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children. Available from Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago. Phone: 1 (800) 933-1800.

"Liturgy of the Word for Children" is a guide to presenting and explaining the Sunday readings to children in first and second grade. Written by John and Jill Boughton, available from The Liturgical Press. Phone: 1 (800) 858-5450.