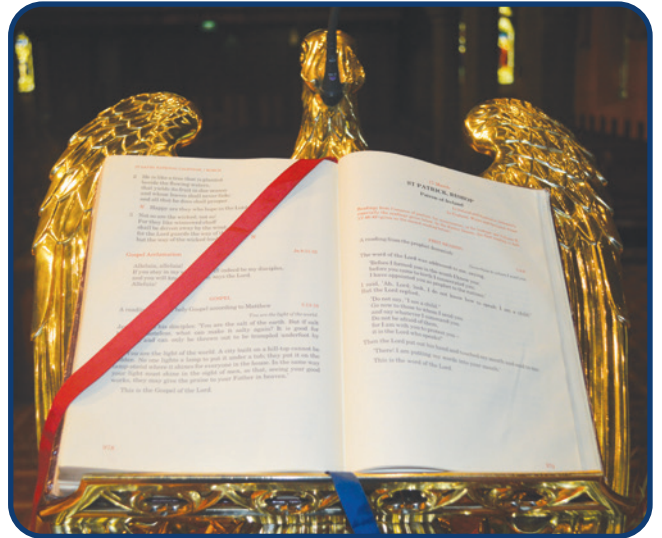


Ministries of proclaiming God's word: Why are they so important?

If we think of any of the services that people provide in the community, we might ask, "What's so important about their particular role?" For example, what's so important about the roles of doctors and nurses? We recognise the importance of their role especially when we are sick. Doctors and nurses provide treatment that can restore our health. In some cases, their service is vital in the literal sense of being life-saving. A person might be critically injured in a car crash and the care they receive can save their lives.



Those who proclaim God's word provide similar services in a spiritual sense. The word of God can be a healing word, bringing comfort in times of suffering or calling us to repentance so that God might heal the wounds of our sins. God's word can also be vitally important in the sense of being a word of life, an invitation to open our hearts to receive the fullness of life that God wishes to give us.

If we look back to the beginning of the Christian story, we find Jesus himself proclaiming God's word. In the gospel according to Luke, we have Jesus going into the synagogue at Nazareth on a Sabbath day. He stood up to read, and he was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Jesus then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, "Today this text has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus provided a first important service by reading a message from the prophet Isaiah. In this case, it was a message of consolation, a message of joy about someone being anointed by the spirit of God to bring good tidings to people in need. Jesus then provided a second service by explaining that Isaiah's prophetic words were being fulfilled at that very moment in the synagogue. Firstly Jesus proclaimed the vital message of the prophet and then he explained that message for those listening so that they might understand that God's word was a word of salvation for them.

Those who proclaim God's word in our liturgies today are continuing the ministry of Jesus. Whether they are readers who share the Scripture texts with the congregation or homilists who explain the Scriptures, they are carrying on the mission of Christ



in bringing God's good news to people of our time. In fact, we can see readers and homilists as channels through which Christ himself speaks to the congregation. As the Second Vatican Council said, "Christ is always present in his church, especially in her liturgical celebrations . . . He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the church." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, paragraph 7)

The bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council recognised the importance of the Scriptures in the life of the church. For this reason, they decreed that a fuller selection of texts from the Bible should be read in the liturgy in the course of the year. "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word. In this way a more representative portion of the Holy Scriptures will be read to the people over a set cycle of years." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, paragraph 51)

The more we appreciate the importance of the Scriptures, the more we will appreciate the importance of the role of those who proclaim the Scriptures in the midst of the assembly.

The introduction to the Lectionary highlights the need for readers to be qualified and prepared for their ministry. "It is necessary that those who exercise the ministry of reader, even if they have not received institution, be truly qualified and carefully prepared so that the faithful may develop a warm and living love for Scripture from listening to the sacred texts read." The readers' preparation should include some biblical formation so that they can understand the readings in context. It is helpful if readers look for a key point in each reading so that they can convey this key point more clearly to the hearers. Their preparation should also include some technical formation in the art of public reading, with appropriate pace and volume, so that the congregation can appreciate the message as fully as possible. (Lectionary, General Introduction, paragraph 55)

Before reading the gospel, a deacon asks the bishop or priest for a blessing and the bishop or priest prays, "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips, that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well."

This would be a good prayer for any of us who proclaim God's word. "May the Lord be in my heart and on my lips, that I may proclaim God's word worthily and well."

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The pictures are the Eagle Lectern at St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat