

What is a Lector?

by Fr. Tom Bond



In view of the fact that the Nine O'Clockers are becoming "The Next Generation of the celestial Starship St. Peter's," taking on new ministries and responsibilities, I would like to share these observations regarding one of the more important ones, which is that of Lector.

This article in The Anglican Digest was written by Pamela Lewis of Elmhurst, New York. All that follows are her words.

One of the important lay ministries of Christian service is that of lector. It is seen by some as little more than a glorified narrator; someone who, for a few minutes in the Sunday mass, reads the scriptures. There may be lectors who hold this belief. Admittedly, when I began serving as a lector about twenty years ago, I looked upon my new role as a good way to serve the church and so it is. However, an investigation of the roots of this ministry reveals it is much more.

Throughout the Bible, we find examples of religious leaders who made the Word of God available to the people by reading it in public. Towards the end of his life, Moses instructs the leaders to read aloud the law: "*—Assemble the people, men, women and children and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear the law and learn it and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.*" (Deut. 31:12)

In the Gospel according to Luke, we read of Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, coming to Nazareth "*—where he had been brought up; and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stood up to read. And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor...' And all bore him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.*" (Luke 4:16-22)

To the people of Nazareth, Jesus is the son of Joseph, a layperson, neither priest, Levite nor Scribe. He is the model of how to be a lector. He rises from the congregation to proclaim God's word from the prophet Isaiah.

Lectors today carry on the ancient tradition of reading the Scriptures aloud to the congregation and imitate Jesus in proclaiming God's word to all present. While his words were — gracious, Jesus did not draw attention to how he read; rather, he drew the listening congregation into an encounter with God through the words of the Isaiah passage.

In *The Cloister Walk*, Kathleen Norris wrote of reading a passage from Isaiah during a morning worship service. While she rejoiced in its poetry, she took her reading to be an act of prayer to facilitate the congregation's encounter with God.

The lector's ministry is a gift as well as a special task. The lector sets the Liturgy of the Word in motion. Careful preparation should be evident to all, yet reading is done with self-effacing decorum. The lector — disappears! behind the Word of the Lord. A humbling challenge, but one the lector embraces with gratitude.

