

SEPARATE LITURGIES OF THE WORD WITH CHILDREN DURING SUNDAY MASS GUIDELINES

The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children* explains that the fullest reality of the Sunday liturgical assembly is adults and children together. It is important that adequate attention be given to the children's presence. Separate celebrations can lead to a diminished sense of participation for children in the liturgical assembly. (LMC, Intro #54)

The Church recognizes however, that sometimes because of children's inability to participate or to understand what happens and what is proclaimed, it will be appropriate to celebrate liturgies of the word with them in a place apart from the main Sunday assembly. (Directory for Masses with Children, n. 17)

These guidelines are offered to assist parishes on such occasions. They are primarily for parish leaders who minister to children enrolled in the primary and intermediate grade levels, the age level intended for use of the *Lectionary for Masses with Children*.

These separate liturgies of the word do not take the place of regular catechetical classes. They are a counterpart to the main assembly's liturgy of the word. As ritual prayer 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. (LMC In, n. 24)

It is advisable that those responsible for developing separate liturgies of the word with children read and reflect on both the *Directory for Masses with Children* and the *Introduction to the Lectionary for Masses with Children*.

Outline

1. Dismissal from the Assembly
2. Welcome
3. Proclamation of the Word
4. Reflection on the Word
5. Celebration of the Word
6. Creed
7. General Intercessions
8. Return to the Assembly

1. DISMISSAL FROM THE ASSEMBLY

The children participate in the introductory rites of the Mass with the entire assembly. After the opening prayer, the dismissal of the children from the assembly takes place. The presiding priest may call the children and their leaders to come forward and invite them to celebrate the word. He may then present the Lectionary to the one who will preside over the liturgy of the word with the children and formally dismiss them with the following or similar words:

- A. Receive this book of readings
and proclaim God's word faithfully
to the children entrusted to your care.

- B. My dear children,
you will now go to hear God's word,
to praise God in song,
and to reflect on the wonderful things God has done for us.
We will await your return
so that together we may celebrate the eucharist.⁴

The leaders and children then process to the place of celebration carrying the Lectionary. A cross bearer and candle bearers may lead them.

It is important to carefully choose a designated place for celebration. Even if it is necessary to select a space outside of the usual place of worship such as a classroom or other non-liturgical space, the environment is to be made suitable for worship. (LMC In, n. 49)

2. WELCOME

The children should be welcomed by their adult leaders with words or gestures which help them to feel at ease. A sung acclamation, sign of the cross or short prayer may be said at this time to focus the children's attention. The essential goal of this brief re-gathering is to enable them to listen to the Word of God which is about to be proclaimed.

Mindful of our belief in Christ's presence, the children should welcome the proclamation of the word in some ritual manner such as:

- * with a prayerful silence;
- * with a procession of the Lectionary to the place of proclamation;
- * by lighting candles placed beside the Lectionary.

The actions should be simple and appropriate to the age and development of the children.

3. PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

As far as is possible, the readings assigned from the *Lectionary for Masses with Children* should be used. No other English lectionary for Masses with children has been approved for dioceses in the United States.

The *Directory for Masses with Children* indicates that if three or even two readings on Sundays or weekdays can be understood by children only with difficulty, it is permissible to read two or only one of them, but the reading of the gospel should never be omitted. (DMC n. 42)

Scripture readings should be proclaimed in a slow, clear, expressive manner. Visuals may be used to enrich the listening experience, but the Mass is not an historical reenactment of the events of salvation history and care should be taken not to give the impression that the liturgy of the word is a play.

This is not to say that dramatic elements may not be used, e.g., the readings may at times be divided into parts distributed among the children; however, the use of costumes, etc. is more appropriate in the context of other celebrations or services. (LMC In, n.52)

Readers should be selected based on their competence. It should not be presumed that children proclaim the Word of God in these celebrations. Some younger children are able to read the Scriptures competently, but the witness of older children, teenagers, or adults, 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. (LMC In, n. 23)

The responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation are integral to the celebration of the liturgy of the word. The responsorial psalms of the Lectionary for Masses with Children have been adapted to encourage the singing of these texts. Normally the psalm is sung by a cantor with the children singing the refrain. Responsorial psalm settings and gospel acclamations composed specifically for children's liturgies of the word may be used, or it may be preferable to use the same musical settings as the assembly. The objective in choosing music is that it enable the children to express their faith.

The gospel acclamation, the Alleluia, (or other appropriate acclamation during the Lenten Season), is always sung. If the Alleluia cannot be sung it is omitted. Before the gospel is proclaimed it is appropriate for the children to gesture the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart. They may accompany this by the words, May the Word of God be in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

4. REFLECTION ON THE WORD

Following the proclamation of the Word of God, the adult leader guides the children in applying the Scripture's message to their own lives. Although some underscoring of the passage's main elements may be appropriate, this reflection should not take the form of repeating the Scripture in the leader's own words.

The age level, attention span, and cognitive development of the children should be considered in preparing the reflection. The use of visuals will keep the children's attention.

Questions which draw out the children's own responses and suggestions for the application of the Scripture to daily living will open the children to new insights and prayerful reflection on the Christian life. If the group is small a dialogue format may be used.

5. CELEBRATION OF THE WORD

Separate liturgies of the word provide an opportunity for active participation of children growing in the faith of their parents.

Activities which engage children to celebrate the word should appeal to their sensory abilities and acquaint them with the symbols common to worship when the Church gathers. Integrating the following is encouraged:

- * music and song to highlight the Scripture texts and messages;
- * incense to appeal to their sense of smell;
- * candles to appeal to their sense of sight;
- * gestures and postures of reverence to appeal to their sense of touch;
- * processions, dance, or silence to help them interpret the mood of the Scripture passages.

6. THE CREED

It is fitting that the Profession of Faith be included in these liturgies of the word with children. The Apostle's Creed may be recited in place of the Nicene Creed. A musical setting may be sung or if it is more in keeping with the children's level of understanding, the leader could recite the creed, stopping at the end of each of the three main tenets for the children to respond, "We believe".

7. THE GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The general intercessions, often called prayers of the faithful, are to be included in separate liturgies of the word with children to acquaint them with the custom and obligation of the baptized to pray for the needs of others. The sequence of intentions should be:

- * for the needs of the Church;
- * for public officials and the salvation of the world;
- * for those oppressed by any need;
- * for the local community.

The general intercessions may be prepared in advance or with the guidance of the adult leaders the children may make their own spontaneous intentions. A sung response can foster participation.

8. RETURN TO THE ASSEMBLY

As the liturgy of the word with children comes to a close, one of the adult leaders should observe the assembly to assess where they have progressed in their order of worship. If the adults are still engaged in their celebration of the liturgy of the word, the children should be guided in song or another prayer activity. When the assembly has completed the general intercessions, the children should return in procession by way of the center aisle to the places where their parents are seated.