

Instructions to Church Readers by G. Shimansky

Read reverently, with the fear of God.

A God-fearing reader ought always to remember that he is proclaiming doxologies and prayers for himself and for all who are praying in the church, where God Himself, His immaculate Mother, the angels and the saints are always invisibly present. The Lord, the Knower of hearts, knows the feeling and attitude with which the reader performs his obligations. A God-fearing reader knows that those standing in church also notice his mistakes, his inattention, etc., and that they may be tempted thereby. That is why he does not allow carelessness; he fears thereby to anger God. For it is said in Scripture: *Cursed is every man that doeth the Lord's work with carelessness* (Jer. 48:10). When reading words of prayer in the holy church in the hearing of all the faithful, we are carrying out God's work; therefore, we must read reverently and decorously, distinctly and unhurriedly.

Prepare carefully for reading.

One must prepare carefully for the reading which he is to execute: he must familiarize himself with it well in advance and read the text thoughtfully, paying attention to the pronunciation of the words, the accents, and to the contents, so as to read correctly, consciously, and in a way that makes sense. If you read badly, practice; read the appointed reading several times and ask someone else, who is knowledgeable, to check you.

Read in a way that makes sense.

Read so that first of all you yourself understand what you are reading, and so that the prayers and psalms that are read penetrate your heart. At the same time, do not forget the people standing in church, and read so that the people understand you, so that they too, together with you who are reading, would pray and glorify the Lord with one mouth and one heart. This is the purpose of our assembling in church.

When reading in church, always remember that by your lips the prayer of all who are present is uttered and raised up to the throne of God, and that each word you pronounce ought to penetrate the hearing and the soul of each person praying in the church.

Read unhurriedly, distinctly and precisely.

Therefore, do not hurry when reading the holy prayers, and do not demean the prayers by hurried reading; do not anger God. Hurried and indistinct reading is not

apprehended by the hearing, the thought or the heart's feeling of the hearers. Such reading and singing, according to the words of the holy Hierarch Tikhon of Zadonsk, is "complaisance for the lazy, heartfelt sorrow and sighing for the good, and temptation and harm for all who come (to church)."

In order not to deprive those praying of the possibility to pray reverently, a God-fearing reader will not read quickly and carelessly to please a few. Many are disturbed and tempted by a reader's carelessness and may even leave the church. Those who are inclined to sectarianism or in general are inclined to see shortcomings in Orthodoxy, having heard careless and irreverent reading and singing in our churches, may even fall away altogether from Orthodoxy into sectarianism or grow cool towards the Faith. In this way, through the fault of careless readers and singers, our Orthodox Divine services, churches, clergy, and Orthodoxy itself are subject to dishonor, while those praying are deprived of prayers abundantly rich in content and of religious and moral edification.

In view of this, the church reader ought not to allow fast reading that passes over to carelessness, and ought not to fulfill the requests of those who require him to violate his duty to read piously. *For we ought to obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29).

In order to know at what speed it is appropriate to read, it is essential to read with a comprehension of what is being read, not mechanically, and not to pay attention to the external side of reading, but rather to the content - at the same time to pray for oneself in one's soul.

One must learn to read freely, without strain, so that while reading there would be no difficulties in pronouncing the words, abbreviations (titlos) and accents, in the choice of pitch and volume of the voice, in the raising and the lowering of the voice, etc; briefly speaking, so that attention would be distracted as little as possible by the technique of reading, but would be concentrated on the meaning of what is read.

One must read in such a measured way that the hearers succeed in mentally apprehending each word of the prayer and in feeling it with the heart. Such a feeling in the reverent reader is acquired when he himself tries to pray attentively with the mind and the heart in church and at home. Then he will find out by experience that during rapid reading it is impossible for those praying to succeed in catching the content of the prayer and to pray with the mind and the heart.

At the same time, one should avoid the other extreme; one should not needlessly drag out the reading!

Read with pauses that make sense.

In order that the content of the prayers be more easily apprehended by those praying in church, one must separate each sentence (phrase) from another by a small pause, slightly drawing out the voice. Within the sentence itself, one should also make pauses (retardations) that enhance the sense, using them to divide definite meaningful groups of words one from another.

For beginning readers it is recommended that such pauses be made according to the punctuation marks in the text: commas, colons and periods. At commas, one should make briefer pauses; at periods and question marks - longer pauses (drawing out the voice).

Read correctly, in the church way.

While reading, the pronunciation of the words ought to be Slavonic, i.e., each letter in a word should be pronounced just as it is printed: for example, [.....] However, here, too, there are no rules without exceptions. Thus, for example, [.....].

While reading in Slavonic, one should pay attention to the accents and the titlos (abbreviation marks), in order to pronounce the words correctly. One must keep to the ancient manner of church reading. While reading, one should not artificially shade or underscore, as it were, the meaning of what is being read. In church reading, worldly, artistic expressiveness is inappropriate. One needs to read without pouring out one's own feelings through modulations and changes of voice; one should not impart tenderness, emotion, sternness or any other personal feeling. Even more, assumed feeling ought not to have any place: The church reader is not an actor. Let the holy words of prayer act on the hearers through their own spiritual merit. The desire to impart one's own feelings and experiences to others or to affect them by changes of voice is a sign of conceit and pride (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov).

One must read in one's natural voice, and not in an assumed one. One should not read in low pitches: The reading then turns out muffled, inaudible, and the reader quickly becomes tired. For reading, one needs to take the pitch of the tone closest to the pitch of his natural voice while singing. One should read simply, evenly, in a chanting voice (as if half singing), on one pitch, with small raisings and lowerings of the voice (one tone or half tone). This has been the manner of reading in the Orthodox Church from earliest times.

One must read in a moderate voice and not lower or raise it too much, but make it balanced so that all the words clearly reach the hearing of each person praying. Obviously, the larger the church or the more people there are, the more essential it is to amplify the voice, but one should never reach the point of shouting.

The reader ought to stand erect before the book, without bows and without shifting from foot to foot or putting one foot to the side; he ought not to sway his body or shake his head; his arms should hang freely; he ought to read unhurriedly, but also not draw it out; he should pronounce the words precisely, distinctly (with clear diction and correct articulation, making pauses that enhance the sense within the sentence itself).

If the reader is reading at a stand (analogion), he ought to watch that the cloth cover on the stand lies straight, and to pick it up if it should fall down.

Learn to read well.

If one of the readers does not know something, he ought to ask the cantor* or the ecclesiarch beforehand. For, after having begun to read, it is already awkward to learn, to search for what is necessary or to rely on prompting. Every mistake, every delay produces confusion in those present and distracts them from prayer.

Even a good reader can be grossly mistaken about something. Therefore, it is better to check oneself and not to be offended, but to be grateful if someone else points something out. Ask someone else (the cantor or a very knowledgeable reader) to listen to your reading and to point out mistakes, which in the future you should try not to repeat.

Do not be vainglorious; read without embarrassment or timidity.

Vainglory usually seizes the best readers, especially when preference over others is given to them, or when they are only beginning to read in church. It is only possible to overcome it by self-reproach and by being aware that one's abilities and voice are given by God, and we ought to use them for good, for we shall give an answer to God concerning their use. And why exalt ourselves if we are simply fulfilling what is due?

It is especially necessary on the cliros for readers and singers to avoid every kind of envy and animosity among themselves; on the contrary, one must rejoice that others, too, are laboring for the Church to the glory of God.

Readers, especially young and beginning readers, should overcome in themselves unnecessary embarrassment and excessive timidity while reading in church. We are reading prayers before God and to God, and we ought to read in spiritual self-collectedness, not thinking about how people are looking at us or what they are thinking about us.

Take care of the church books.

Treat with reverence and care the divine-service books, in which are located the hymnody and prayers written by the holy fathers according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These are not simple books, but holy books, precious treasures of the whole Church's centuries-old, inspired, prayerful creativity. Therefore, it is essential to treat the church books very carefully, and not to tear them, not to soil them, but to leaf through them carefully and accurately, not to bend the pages, not to lick one's fingers while turning the pages, not to make one's own pencil and ink marks and corrections.

While reading with a candle, one should not move it along the lines, lest wax begin to drip on the book. It is better to hold the candle to the side, to the right or to the left, whichever is more convenient.

May the Lord bless good and diligent readers and singers who love God's work, and may He help them become better, so that they might be vouchsafed to hear from the Lord the desired words: Good and faithful servant thou into the joy of thy Lord (Matt. 25:21). And you, the careless and lazy, do not forget the words of the prophet: Cursed is the man that ... doeth the Lord's work with carelessness (Jer. 48:10).

Preparation at Home for the Church Service

The intelligent, sober, honest and religious cantor will consider it his sacred duty to prepare himself at home for the church services. For this purpose, he will take church books home, and in his free time he will read from them those things that he will be reading in church during the Divine services. There, he is able both to follow the whole order of the service and, through attentive, unhurried reading and repetition, to make sense out of what is read, feeling all its power. Then - as is self-evident - his reading and singing in church will be correct, intelligible, animated, understandable to everyone, beneficial and pleasant, as indeed they ought to be.

Translated by Daniel Olson from *The Orthodox Divine Services, Practical Guidance for Clerics and Laity*, pp. 181-187. The instructions were taken from a 1956 typewritten publication by G. Shimansky, an instructor at the Kiev Theological Academy.