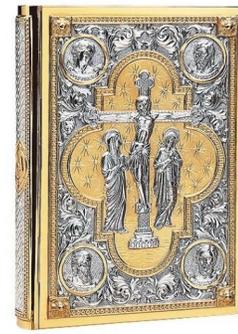
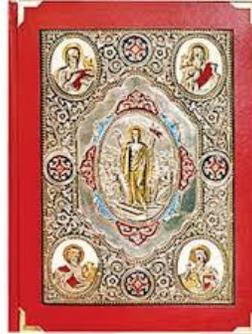
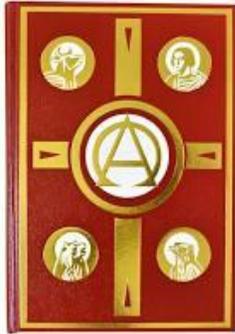


LITURGY QUESTION AND ANSWER: *On the Carrying and Use the Book of the Gospels*



Overview/Background: The Gospel Book, *Evangelion* or Book of the Gospels (Greek: Εὐαγγέλιον, *Evangélion*) is a codex or bound volume containing one or more of the four Gospels of the Christian New Testament – normally all four – centering on the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the roots of the Christian faith. The term is also used of the liturgical book, also called the *Evangelary*, from which are read the portions of the Gospels used in the Mass and other liturgical services, arranged according to the order of the Church’s liturgical calendar.

Liturgical use in churches of a distinct Gospel book remains normal, often compulsory, in Eastern Christianity, and very common, but not mandatory, within Roman Catholicism and some parts of Anglicanism and Lutheranism. Other Protestant churches normally just use a complete Bible.

Q: [First, is the use of the Book of Gospels required at the Sabbath or Holy Day of Obligation Mass?] As one who carries the Book of the Gospels at our Masses, I have some questions. When the book is being carried in, should it be at a modest elevation with the cover facing outward or facing the instituted lector/lay reader? I also read that one should make a profound bow when leaving the Book of the Gospels on the altar. Should that be a bow after depositing the book or before that act? — R.B., Rockport, Ontario

A: [The use and procession of the Book of the Gospels is not mandatory, as the gospel readings are also included in the published Lectionary, from which the Mass first and second readings are read. In many parish churches around the world (like our sister-parish in Barbados, St. Patrick for example), in that it is an optional-use liturgical book, it is unbudgeted for expense. As you may have noticed for the past few weekends, since I cannot hold the weight of the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the Ambo (as I recover from recent back surgery), its use has been omitted at my discretion as the presider, as it is not mandatory—but, a reverential and ceremonial symbol—which, as you will read below, if/when used, its movement within the sanctuary, is prescribed to the deacon, assisting priest, or the presiding priest (i.e., the ordained minister(s).]

There are some surviving examples of beautiful manuscript versions of the Books of the Gospels for liturgical use until about the 12th century. From about 1200 CE, onward the convention of including all the readings for Mass within the [presiding priest’s] missal [book of all of the Mass general and consecratory prayers] led to the practical disappearance of separate lectionaries.

Before the current [Second Vatican Council] liturgical reform reintroduced the Lectionary and the Evangeliary [Book of the Gospels] as distinct [and separate] books, it was possible for a local bishop to authorize the publication of separate lectionaries and Books of the Gospel extracted from the missal for certain solemn celebrations. This was far from being a universal practice, however.

[All conduct within the Order of the Liturgy of the Mass is governed by prescribed norms found in the General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM). As noted in the current GIRM:] The Introduction to the Book of the Gospels has the following indications:

“9. In the Entrance Procession, the vested deacon reverently carries the Book of the Gospels before him so that it may be seen by the faithful. With the priest he makes the proper reverence and goes up to the altar, placing the Book of the Gospels on it. The deacon then kisses the altar at the same time as the priest. In the absence of a deacon, the [first, lay] reader reverently carries the Book of the Gospels in procession. The reader follows the acolytes and other ministers in procession. The reader places the Book of the Gospels on the altar, but the reader does not kiss the altar.”

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) adds the following indications for deacons and lectors carrying the Book of the Gospels:

“D. THE DUTIES OF THE [INSTITUTED] **LECTOR** [AND/OR LAY **READER**]

“194. In coming to the altar, when no deacon is present, the lector [/reader], wearing approved attire, may carry the Book of the Gospels, which is to be slightly elevated. In that case, the lector walks in front of the priest ...

“195. Upon reaching the altar, the lector [/reader] ... carrying the Book of the Gospels, approaches the altar and places the Book of the Gospels upon it. ...

While it is clear that the Book of the Gospels should be elevated in the procession, nothing indicates the direction of the book as such. [That said,] it is customary to have the front of the book facing outward toward the people even though this means turning it when reaching the altar so that, in accordance with the practice of the Roman rite ... Indeed, precious bindings and covers for the Book of the Gospel frequently have finer decoration on the front, precisely with the different processions [and laying it upon the altar facing the gathered assembly of faithful] in mind.

In general, a profound bow is not made while carrying the Book of the Gospels, as one reaches the front of the altar and before entering the sanctuary to place the book upon the altar.

NB: Within the Liturgy of the Mass, the Book of the Gospels may be placed and laid flat on the altar or within an appropriately sized stand; to enable the book to stand up, facing the gathered assembly of faith – often in a beautiful, decorative binding and cover.

(SR: <https://zenit.org/articles/carrying-the-book-of-the-gospels/>)