

The Acts of the Apostles

Prior to the beginning of the Vigil of the Resurrection, we read the Acts of the Apostles in its entirety. In this book, we learn of the spread of the Church and of the many who were brought into the saving bosom of the Church in those early days after the Resurrection of the Saviour, and we are reminded of our own mission as the Church of the risen and ascended Lord.

At our parish, we usually place chairs around the nave for the use of those who wish to sit while listening attentively to the holy reading. There needn't be plenty of chairs laid out as it is unlikely that everybody will need to sit down. Also, it must be kept in mind that these chairs will need to be put away by a small number of people, within a limited time, later in the service.

At some time between half past 8 and 9 o' clock in the evening, standing in the middle of the nave, the reader announces the reading in the usual way and asks the blessing, to which the priest replies, 'Through the prayers of the Holy Apostles...', with the reader giving the *Amen*.

The reading now begins. It is customary at our parish for the reading to be shared among various people who may wish to read in various languages, taking one chapter each. This is a very long reading, and can pose a great challenge to the voice if done by a single reader – particularly as these services call for strict fasting from food and drink. Therefore, if the current reader asks if anybody would like to take part in continuing the reading, able readers in the congregation might bear in mind that this is just as likely to be a request for help and much-needed relief as it is to be an act of politeness.

Most people usually arrive during the reading of Acts. Candles with drip-shields/cases should be prepared and placed near the door so that people can take one each as they arrive. As with all services at this time, the people venerate the tomb of the Saviour as they arrive by making prostrations and kissing the hands or feet of the Saviour on the burial shroud (*plashchanitsa*).

The people may also light candles around the tomb in honour of the Saviour. However, all other lights in the church remain unlit. For this reason, the votive candle-stands near to the other icons may be removed until later.

The reading continues until the conclusion of the Acts of the Apostles or until the time for the beginning of the Midnight Office – whichever comes sooner.