42. When we think about preparing for liturgy, we usually think of the ministers—the choir rehearsing, the lectors engaging their readings all through the week, the homilist spending some time every day of the week until it all comes together on Saturday, those who care for the sacred space keeping it clean and beautiful. But the liturgy is the work of the whole assembly, and here we begin to see that many take this seriously. Many have prepared themselves to come together today and participate fully in this Eucharist.

52. All the readers of Scripture know what they are there to do. They know that these readings could be read privately by each individual, but that this public reading is quite different. For two years now there have been no booklets for the assembly to follow the reading, although by the front doors there are Sunday Missals for the hearing impaired and for those whose language is different from the one used at this Mass. The assembly gives all its attention to the lector.

53. These lectors have been struggling with the assigned Scripture for the past few days. Their manner and understanding may vary, but they open this Lectionary and read knowing that this church is full of people hungry for the Word of God.

54. The lectors have taken the time to hear anew old words, to let the images of Scripture reflect against and mingle with their lives. Each has found something to cherish in a reading, something to be passionate about. But they also know how to communicate their passion without calling attention to themselves. The assembly is hearing God’s Word. You can tell that the main activity going on during these readings is good listening. And what a treasure that is! The liturgy—God’s word proclaimed and God’s word listened to—is being carried by the assembly and they mean it when they say, “Thanks be to God/Demos gracias a Dios.” Every Sunday the Sacred Scriptures have been opened and read aloud. God’s Word proclaimed and listened to will be the foundation for all else that this Church does. (Lectionary, Introduction, 1 and 10; General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 8)

55. Silence follows the first and second readings at Our Lady of the Angels, and again after the homily, lasting about a minute. People are used to it, and know what to do with it. They will tell you: Let that reading echo in your head, cling to a word or a phrase, savor it, stand under it. It becomes a very still time. Babies fuss, but people are not distracted.

56. The psalm after the first reading is almost an extension of this silence. No one gets out a book because the parish uses a repertoire of perhaps a dozen psalms—and each year they learn one or two more—where all can sing the refrain by heart. The cantor at this Mass, like the other cantors at Our Lady of the Angels, knows that people want to hear the words. Good articulation is as important as a good voice. Sometimes the homilists have borne the psalm, and especially the refrain, into the homily. Sometimes the texts appear in the parish bulletin with the suggestion that these psalms be prayed at home. In these ways and more (seasonal evening prayer, for example), the people of Our Lady of the Angels are coming to know the Church’s oldest prayer book, the Psalter.

57. Another reader comes forward for the second Scripture and again silence follows. . . .

96. “Active” is the third quality of the baptized person’s participation. Please do not see “active” as the opposite of “contemplative.” Some of our activity at liturgy is contemplation. Part of the genius of the Roman Rite is that it presumes a beauty on which our spirits can feast. If we have too often seen “active” as “busy,” consider the liturgy at Our Lady of the Angels and see the wealth of silence, as well as the powerful reading of Scripture, and preaching and singing of psalms to engage our contemplation.

102. The core of ministry is the assembly: The ministers I imagine at Our Lady of the Angels have been and continue to be exemplary assembly members in their full, conscious and active participation. These people understand what it means to step forward and proclaim a reading,
minister Holy Communion, or sing in the choir. Parishes might set a limit on the number of years a person serves in a ministry, asking that each person take off a year after four or five years in a single ministry. This limit would refresh people in their primary role as assembly members.