

Liturgy Newsletter

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of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

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Please note:
the *Liturgy Newsletter*
will no longer be published on a quarterly basis,
but rather, on an as needed basis instead.

WILL HE LET US GO?

A little girl was sitting in church, impatiently enduring a long and convoluted “sermon” when finally she turned and asked her mother in a loud child’s church voice: “If we give him the money now, will he let us go?”

The fact is, that when people are asked to comment on the state of liturgy in their parish, the two most frequently discussed matters are music and the quality of the preaching. This should tell us how important both are.

For better or for worse, Sunday Eucharist is a point of encounter between a parish and its priest, and the homily can be a particularly intense moment in that encounter. The *GIRM* says that the homily is “necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day, and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners” (#65). In #29 it says, “a fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness of the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, by the Homily, as part of the liturgical action.

If we unpack these statements from the *GIRM*, it is clear that the homily is a unique and specific thing. It is not a “sermon” on a theme or even on a point of doctrine. It is not catechesis. And it is most definitely not meant as a vehicle for the preacher’s favourite issues. Doctrinal content and catechesis can and should find a place in preaching. Some of the *RCIA* resources used for the breaking of the Word with catechumens provides an excellent model for including points of doctrine. But the homily itself is not a theological lecture, nor is it a time for moralizing on hot topics.

The homily is a specific thing. First of all, it is a “part of the liturgy” (SC #52). This statement seems so obvious that it needs not be said, yet it is often the first thing forgotten. It is “part of liturgy,” therefore, it is prayer and must be done prayerfully. It involves an intersection between the Gospel and the world as it is experienced by this concrete assembly. And therefore, the homilist must be prayerfully

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attentive to the Scriptures and just as prayerfully attentive to the lives of the people present in the assembly. The homilist must strive to know and to be sensitive to the struggles, the doubts, the concerns and the joys of this gathered people.

It is not the task of the homilist to give simple answers, especially to questions that people are not asking. To preach in such a manner as to imply that you are the only one aware of the truth, that you know what is best for everyone, or that there are no unresolved issues or possibility for dialogue—such an approach may satisfy a penchant for a clericalist ecclesiology, but it will not serve the preaching of the Word. It is a message that will not be heard by most of God's people. Just because a word is spoken does not mean it will be heard. For communication to take place, the word must be "heard" in the heart.

This community gathers to respond to a living and active God. But within that community, there will be some who are wondering if God is still at work or not in their lives. Where is a loving God in the midst of death? Where is the God who frees when I still feel trapped? The homilist is of this community and must voice its concerns, its fears and its demons. But the homilist also represents God and must speak a word of hope, of love, of challenge and of forgiveness.

People need a word that helps them recognize their own concerns, but also, they need a word that speaks of God's concern for them. Then faith is nurtured; then an encounter with the living God is engendered. And then we can proceed to acts of prayer and praise, praise of the God who calls us into greater communion with Him and with each other.

The homily is directed to faith, the faith of the Church. And so, from the homily we proceed immediately to profess that faith of the church in the Creed; this faith – though always personal – is never private. It is never lived as a thing divorced from the reality of the world. It challenges us to see that hearers of the Word must also be doers of the Word. Thus, once we have professed our faith, we proceed to introduce all the tumult of the world into our prayer. In the prayers of the faithful, we recognize that it is our duty to intercede for the world. We cannot ignore the world; for it is there that the kingdom is to be built.

The Liturgy of the Word is now complete. We have encountered the Lord in a prayerful act of faith. Now we prepare to move on to that great act of praise and thanksgiving, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.



Father Bill Burke
Director, National Liturgy Office

BLESSED JOHN PAUL II, THE MODEL HOMILIST

Bishop Sherlock

Bishop John Sherlock, Bishop Emeritus of London, ON.

In September, 1984, Blessed John Paul II came to Canada for the first time since his election in 1978. For twelve days he travelled across Canada, often remarking "Canada is not a country; it is a continent."

During his visit, he gave forty homilies or addresses, each one revealing a profound pastoral love for Canada and its people. I was privileged to accompany him on that memorable journey to listen to his homilies which were passionate, confident, fearless and clearly motivated by a shepherd's love for his people and a burning desire to share the saving truth of the Gospel.

Two homilies, of the many, impressed me then and remain an inspiration. In Montreal's Jarry Park on September 11, 1984, the first reading was from Exodus 3, the episode of the burning bush, where Moses encountered God and reluctantly accepted his call to lead God's people out of Egypt. "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground," said God.

Then John Paul II cried out, "For the place on which you stand is holy ground... yes, this earth, the place where we love is holy ground. It has been marked by the presence of the living God, whose fullness is in Christ and that presence remains on earth and produces the fruits of holiness. That Presence is reality. It is a grace."

Six days later, John Paul II was preaching a homily in Edmonton at the Canadian Forces Base. His homily flowed from the responsorial psalm of the day, Psalm 85: "I will hear what the Lord has to say, a voice that speaks of peace. Mercy and faithfulness have met, justice and peace have embraced." Addressing the issue of social justice, John Paul II thundered, "In light of Christ's words, the poor south will judge the rich north, and the poor people and the poor nations – poor in different ways, not only lacking food, but also deprived of freedom and other human rights – will judge these people who take these goods away from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others."

In all his homilies there was a prophetic and powerful challenge to the status quo but also the consolation of the continuing presence of Christ and guidance of the Holy Spirit in responding to the Gospel's call.

Every student of homiletics would be well advised to study his Canadian visit; an example of twelve pressure packed days which never once led him to sacrifice the time required for a powerful and meticulously prepared homily.

The greatest legacy of Blessed John Paul II to the Church is his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (at the Beginning of the New Millennium) issued on January 6, 2001, as he solemnly closed the Holy Door at the end of the great Jubilee of the year 2000.

It begins by referring to the Gospel of St. Luke 5.4-11, in which Jesus, after speaking to the crowds from Simon Peter's boat, said to him, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master we have been hard at it all night long and have caught nothing. But if you say so, we will lower the nets." Upon doing so, they caught such a great number of fish that their nets were at the breaking point. They signalled to their mates in the other boat to come and help them. These came and together they filled the two boats until they nearly sank.

At the sight of this, Simon Peter fell at the feet of Jesus saying, "Leave me Lord for I am a sinful man." Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people."

- "What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1.2-3)
- And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. (*Dei Verbum*, no. 8)

- The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. (*Dei Verbum*, no. 21)

Blessed John Paul II then continues *Duc in Altum* (Put out into the deep). These words ring out for us today and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever," Hebrews 13.8.

We who preach the Gospel could easily say with Peter, in the light of recent statistics regarding the decline in church attendance, "We have been hard at it all night long and have taken nothing." But Blessed John Paul II's response is to remind us that Jesus is with us in the barque of Peter and commanding us to *Duc in Altum*.

As fishers of people, the command to lower our nets for a catch is a command to preach the Gospel with new boldness, new courage and new enthusiasm.

In this Year of Faith, which began October 11, 2012, and the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization, we look for guidance in implementing an evangelization new in ardour, new in method and new in extent.

Faced with the homiletic challenge of our moment in history, Blessed John Paul II has advice for us regarding our own preparation to preach and the content of our teaching. "It is important that what we propose, with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer." He then reminds us to resist the temptation of "doing for the sake of doing" by trying "to be" before trying "to do."

What we are to contemplate is the face of Christ inspired by all that we are told of Him in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments "in a veiled way in the Old and revealed fully in the New."

It is Jesus who is the centre of all our preaching and planning for the New Millennium. His presence with us, the assurance that He supports and guides our efforts through the Holy Spirit, is the inspiration for the new evangelization. The Paschal Mystery is the supreme revelation of His love for all people. The new commandment that we love one another as He has loved us is our irresistible motive for revealing His love to others by unveiling for them: "the mystery of Christ, unknown to men in former ages as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets. It is no less than this, in Christ Jesus, the Gentiles are now coheirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the Gospel" Ephesians 3.5-6.

It is of us that Paul is speaking and the joy we experience in reflecting on divine gift of grace is a joy we need and want to share.

Blessed John Paul II in section 3 of his millennial document proposes certain guidelines for pastoral planning. These guidelines are significant also for preaching since they deal with the essence of the Christian life.

The first guideline is the universal call to holiness which he calls a gift and a task. People of today would be startled if we addressed them as the saints of St. Mary's parish or the holy ones at St. Joseph's. Yet, that is exactly how Paul, in writing his letters, addressed their recipients. Paul had no illusions that those he addressed were perfect, but he knew that they had been sanctified, made saints by the gift of divine life in baptism. His task now was to exhort them to walk worthy of the vocation they had received.

People today need reminding of their God-given holiness, not something attainable only by the heroic few, but as a gift already given. As Blessed John Paul II points out, holiness does not require extraordinary acts but ordinary actions done with extraordinary love. Blessed John Paul II then concludes that the life of holiness requires a life of prayer, particularly a life that includes contemplating the face of Christ. Pastors and homilists need to be teachers of prayer and parishes must be schools of prayer. He also helped us to do that by giving us an extraordinary reflection on the Rosary as a contemplative prayer.

In October of 2002, John Paul II published an Apostolic Letter *On the Holy Rosary*, a letter designed to assist people to contemplate the face of Christ in the school of Mary. In paragraph 3 he writes: “in continuity with my reflection in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* in which, after the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the People of God to start afresh from Christ.” I have felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary as a kind of Marian Complement to that Letter and an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, His Most Holy Mother. To recite the rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ.

For John Paul II, the rosary is a Marian Prayer which is essentially Christocentric; Christocentric because it is a meditation on the mysteries of the life of Christ. To ensure that the entire life of Christ should be contemplated, John Paul II added the mysteries of Light which are the mysteries of Jesus’ public life which completed what was missing between the Joyful and Sorrowful mysteries.

The Rosary becomes contemplative when it is a Scriptural Rosary, either because of an extended meditation before each decade or when a Scriptural verse drawn from the mystery is inserted between each Hail Mary. To promote the Scriptural Rosary is to promote the contemplation of the face of Christ; a universally available road to holiness.

Of course, liturgical prayer is the summit and source of the Church’s life. Homilists therefore, are clearly aware that we receive Christ from both the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist. Effective homilies are those which lead to more profound participation in the Eucharist. All preaching has a Eucharistic goal; the exercise of the universal priesthood of all the baptized.

In many of his documents – and this is no exception – John Paul II addresses the crisis in the sacrament of reconciliation. It is a challenge to priests not only to ensure that time is available, conveniently and adequately for penitents but that this sacrament be preached as essential for a holy life.

Listening to the Scriptures and having available opportunities for bible study in parish based groups is a way to nourish the contemplative life. Well prepared biblical based homilies can stimulate the thirst for biblical study which is an essential way of learning Christ. It is easy to forget that the effect of homilies is enhanced when the homilist prays not only for his own inspiration, but for his hearers.

For priests, there are obligations of prayer attached to their office. Every Sunday and Holy day, they must offer the Mass for their people, the *missa pro populo*. With diaconal ordination they committed themselves to pray the Divine Office daily for the people. The neglect of these duties results – although the effect is not readily obvious – in a people deprived of spiritual help to listen eagerly to the word of God.

- Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This is to be done so that none of them will become “an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly” since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. (*Dei Verbum*, no. 25)

As Supreme Pastor of the Church, Blessed John Paul II prayed tirelessly for the people of the Church. During his visit to Canada, he prayed ceaselessly for us. To see him at prayer was to see one in such profound intimacy with the Lord that he was oblivious to any distraction around him. Today, he prays ceaselessly for us and for all who preach the Gospel; that they do so with new ardour, new method and a new extent. He prays too for those who hear; that the Gospel preached will cause discernment and response to their personal call to holiness.

That was the goal of John Paul II's preaching. It must be ours as well.

HOMILIES: THE VIEW FROM THE PEW

By Bernadette Gasslein

Bernadette Gasslein, editor of Canada's award-winning pastoral magazine, Celebrate!, was involved in offering workshops for the implementation of the Roman Missal in Canada. She holds a Licence in Sacred Theology with Specialization in Pastoral Catechetics from the Institut Catholique de Paris. As a young pianist, she earned an A.R.C.T. in performance in piano from the Royal Conservatory of Toronto.

What makes a good homily – when you're on the listening end? In a completely unscientific survey, I asked friends, colleagues, parishioners and acquaintances from one side of the country to the other to respond to a simple question: what makes a good homily? The only criterion I applied was to ask only people who go to church and who would care enough to respond. In the middle of an unusually hot summer, I was pleased to receive replies from many people, some responding from cottages and family reunions where they polled other relatives. That in itself is a good indicator that homilies are important to people's experience of the liturgy, and to their ongoing faith growth. What did we say? (I include my own voice and experience here as well as that of the respondents.)

1. "Land the plane, Father." The length of homilies was an issue for many people. Eight to ten minutes was the maximum in our world of short attention spans. Some respondents thought six minutes would be better. Twenty to thirty minutes is too long under any circumstances. Short is memorable.

2. Closely related to the issue of length was the number of points: one is ideal, three at the most. This reflected the concern voiced by many people: the priest must be prepared. One respondent indicated that it takes a week to prepare a good homily for the coming Sunday.

3. The issue of exegesis or the background of the readings was raised frequently. There is a tension here. Often the assembly doesn't know the background to the scriptural texts, and sometimes homilists think that their job is to provide "the historical context, literary criticism, social commentary on biblical times." See points 1 and 2. If all the time is given over to exegesis, length and focus will suffer. However, sometimes hearers need the context in order to understand the point of the biblical story, and to enable us to be caught up in the story. How homilists deliver that information and make it part of the homily is an important skill that can make or break a homily.

- Together with the Synod, I ask that the liturgy of the word always be carefully prepared and celebrated. Consequently I urge that every effort be made to ensure that the liturgical proclamation of the word of God is entrusted to well-prepared readers. Let us never forget that "when the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel." (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 45)

At the same time, some respondents identified a sense that some homilies aren't rooted in a strong knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of the homilists themselves. The consequence is flat homilies that don't respond to people's hunger.

4. Frame the message for a particular assembly. Know your hearers. Preachers who reprimand their hearers came in for particular critique: it's the wrong audience. Don't criticize those who aren't here by criticizing us who are here! Pay attention to the age and demographic of the hearers.

"Canned" homilies – either downloaded from the internet, taken from a book, or received from some homiletic service – were identified as particularly irrelevant. If homilists think their hearers don't know when it's canned – sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but we do know. How? Well: if we've been looking around on line for inspiration, sometimes we've already found the same homily that was used. Homilies that begin with a literary reference, inevitably to a classic American novel or novelist, particularly when delivered by a homilist who prides himself on never reading, are a dead giveaway. Liturgical ministers who clean up after Mass and find the pages from the homiletic service on the ambo, with the chosen sentences highlighted, get an unwanted insight into the source of the reflection they listened to. Canned homilies are like canned veggies: insipid. They don't sound like the homilist, and they don't reflect the lives of people in these pews.

One respondent wrote, "When a homilist preaches to the residents of a Seniors' Home, homilies need to be single focus and applied to the lives of the elderly. An example of a poor homily that we heard at a Seniors' Home focused on the theology of Thomas Aquinas and prompted me to remark, 'The residents are probably wondering, Who's that? When did he move in here?'"

Another respondent raised the question of funeral homilies, where generic homilies came under scrutiny. The importance of taking time to get to know the deceased, and to weave their life and the readings together, challenging as that is today when we often celebrated funerals for people whom we don't know, was considered crucial. The same can be said about wedding homilies.

5. Challenge us, inspire us, console us. Several respondents asked for this. One wrote, "If we are continually affirmed without being gently pushed to critically reflect, then we are at risk of being spiritually lazy. We want to grow spiritually through the homily. By the end of the homily, if I am not left with a nagging nugget for reflection, then it was just words." At the same time, respondents clearly rejected moralizing: "Don't moralize. Open up good news. Then let people decide how they will respond in daily life." "Stop preaching at people! A complete turn-off." "No verbal finger-wagging." "Change from seeing the homily as reinforcing a belief system. We are people of 'the experience' today. Jesus had a helluva time doing that; they killed him for his stories and for wanting people around him to allow themselves to experience what he was saying." "Let them be transformational – challenge the hearers to be better than they are; call them to action."

One person adopted the via negativa: "A bad homily is one that is so complete with the perfect answer and meaning that I don't have to think any further." Another respondent pointed out that "It does not

- Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as he is present in the liturgical action. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 45)
- Given the importance of the word of God, the quality of homilies needs to be improved. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 46)

- The homily is “part of the liturgical action” (139), and is meant to foster a deeper understanding of the word of God, so that it can bear fruit in the lives of the faithful. Hence ordained ministers must “prepare the homily carefully, based on an adequate knowledge of Sacred Scripture” (140). Generic and abstract homilies should be avoided. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 46)

have to solve a problem. Especially a complicated problem. But it will give us something to think about.”

A homily is good news delivered in the context of our weekly thanksgiving (Eucharist). It should enable us to move forward to the Liturgy of the Eucharist filled with gratitude because we have become more aware that the good work that God has done in the past is still happening in our midst today.

6. Connect with our lives. This *cri de coeur* appeared in almost every response. It manifested itself in a variety of comments: “A good homily makes me feel like they’re talking to me.” “It doesn’t insult my intelligence.” “It challenges me to look at things differently.” “Relevant to the context of the day and the real life experience of the people of the community.” Link it to everyday events in the world, community or family.” “Do not talk about what you cannot or do not know given your particular vocation or lifestyle.” “When you hear how Scripture talks to our day-to-day experiences, then we know that the Word continues to inspire and that our faith is a living faith.”

Making these connections is very challenging. It requires homilists to be deeply in touch with real – and thus very complex – issues in peoples’ lives, and to reject any simplistic, pat applications of the Scriptures to stereotypical situations. In making these connections, avoid theological, spiritual or psychological drivel.

7. Delivery of the homily was as important as the content. McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” is very important here. The first medium was the homilist himself. “If the priest has not ingested the Scripture readings to the degree that he can bring meaning to himself, and to all those present, then the message is lost. If you don’t believe it, then we won’t accept it. We know the difference.”

“If I can’t hear it, it doesn’t matter how good it is.” A variant of this was, “If I can’t understand it, it doesn’t matter how good it is.” Where homilists speak English with a heavy accent, accent-reduction training is an investment that dioceses would be wise to make. A good sound system is important, but it can only use what it can pick up. The homilist’s delivery is significant; he must pay attention to tone, voice inflection and pacing. Speakers still need to project, even if they’re using a microphone. Avoid a monotone voice or a paternalistic delivery.

Talk to us, not at us. Don’t give a lecture or lecture us.

8. Jokes and stories are hot-button issues. A touch of humour can bring a point to life – but only if it is relevant. Starting with a joke is not required. Humour is culturally conditioned; be sure to know what the joke is about. Make sure that any humour is in good taste. Don’t use jokes every time. “Stories and anecdotes work if they relate very closely to, and illustrate the theme.”

Be sure that the story doesn’t become the point of the homily. Sometimes we leave remembering the story, but the Gospel itself has receded from our memories. It’s the Gospel we need to remember: “If God lives in God’s Word, God has to emerge from it.”

9. Treat preaching the homily like the privilege it is. “If you are preaching, you are probably the only person in the building whom the Church allows to do so. It’s not, ‘I have to preach this Sunday.’ It’s ‘I get to preach this Sunday.’”

10. “Don’t be afraid to take on the spirit of a poet. Use metaphor and rich language. Let pictures form in the minds of your listeners.” Hymns and songs from our hymnals – *Catholic Book of Worship, Celebrate in Song, Breaking Bread*, to name just a few – are great sources for metaphor and rich language. In Protestant congregations, preachers and musicians often work together to offer this rich language to the assembly each Sunday. As a liturgical musician, I know that sometimes a hymn leaps to mind during the homily – but it’s too late then, even if it’s well known. Had there been collaboration earlier, it would have enabled the assembly to chew on the message of the homily in yet another medium.

The challenge is to bring all these elements together, since these ten angles of the view from the pew can seem overwhelming. One respondent suggested a fail-safe recipe for a homily: “provoke thought, evoke emotion, add a touch of humour, encompass it all with love and intend to improve our relationship with Jesus and each other, and to bring Jesus to our world.” That’s a fine summary of “the view from the pew.”

THE FUNERAL HOMILY—A SHORT CUT

By: Leo F. Hofmann

Leo Hoffman is a priest of the archdiocese of Edmonton and is a liturgist.

The title is misleading. There is never really a short cut to writing a funeral homily—unless of course the preacher takes a fill-in-the-blank generic approach to preaching without any connection to the readings or to the person who has died. I have heard those generic types on more than one occasion and I hope that I have not given them. What I propose in this article are some techniques to help the preacher to develop a homily which will bring some comfort to those who grieve.

Before looking at techniques, preachers need to become familiar with the *Order of Christian Funerals (OCF)* and in particular what it says about preaching.

“A brief homily based on the readings is always given after the Gospel reading and may also be given after the readings at the vigil service; but there is never to be a eulogy. Attentive to the grief of those present, the homilist should dwell on God’s compassionate love and on the paschal mystery of the Lord, as proclaimed in the Scripture readings. The homilist should also help the members of the assembly to understand the mystery of God’s love and the mystery of Jesus’ victorious death and resurrection were present in the life and death of the deceased and that these mysteries are active in their own lives as well. Through the homily members of the family and community should receive consolation and strength to face the death of one of their members with a hope nourished by the saving word of God (*Order of Christian Funerals*, Canadian Edition, Concacan Inc., 1990, page 8, no. 27).”

One of the key words in the above quote is ‘brief.’ How long is brief? I do not have an answer for that question. I recall my father’s words about a good funeral. “It is not too long and they have a good lunch.” While we wish to offer hope to the mourners and reflect upon how the

- In particular, I ask these ministers to preach in such a way that the homily closely relates the proclamation of the word of God to the sacramental celebration (141) and the life of the community, so that the word of God truly becomes the Church’s vital nourishment and support (142). (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 46)

- The preacher invites the community to repent and be saved, to be converted to God, to open their hearts to further action. The preacher speaks God's message in order to lead them to deeper faith and love.

Sidebar quotations found on pages 10-15 come from the *National Bulletin on Liturgy*, Volume 10, number 60, September-October 1977.

deceased person lived his or her faith in Christ, our purpose is not to 'win everyone over to our side' with a lengthy preaching. At funerals, there is usually a variety of people present. There may be fervent Christians of the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant traditions. There may be Christians who nominally practice the faith or who, as the new evangelization describes, are baptized and have drifted away. There could be people present who practice various non-Christian world religions. There may be those who do not believe in God. While we always preach Christ crucified and risen, it is better if we give an appetizer that meets their immediate needs and whets their 'spiritual appetites' rather than a heavy duty full course meal that leaves the listeners overly full and wanting the preacher to stop. This is not to say that we preach Christianity 'light'; it is that we take into account the needs of the mourners.

The *OCF* says, "There is never to be a eulogy." Unfortunately, there is no further explanation of what is meant by eulogy. John Allyn Melloh says the following: "While there is a documented fourth-century tradition of the funeral encomium or eulogy, one should note that these orations were not set within a liturgical context nor did they necessarily occur at the time of death; further they were part of a specific cultural context where classical rhetoric held sway.

Second, some may believe that only the eulogy is "personal." On the contrary, much of the eulogistic preaching I have heard is impersonal as a resume, a document read by strangers. What is most deeply personal is that which we, as part of the human family, share in common—our deepest yearnings, our shared beliefs, our common attitudes. Of course the homily needs to advert to the deceased; it is the deceased who has brought us together! But not by listing of what is already known by the assembly. The homilist should seek to discover the taproot of the deceased's existence and the deceased's life as a Christian. The word "eulogy" derives from the Greek words meaning to "speak well of" or to offer a "good word." But that word of goodness and grace is essentially proclaiming the Gospel, specifically belief in the resurrection of the dead, and it may also include naming our gratitude to God for gifts, especially the Christian faith, given to the deceased ("Preaching at the Vigil/Wake". *Preaching on Death: An Ecumenical Resource*, The Liturgical Conference, 1997, page 42)."

Melloh's comments help us to understand why there is never to be a eulogy. It ought to be noted that there are times in the *OCF* where someone other than the preacher may give a reflection upon the life of the deceased. This may occur at a Vigil. Following the Concluding Prayer, "A member or friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased." At the Funeral Liturgy Outside Of Mass, following the Lord's Prayer, "A member or friend of the family may speak in remembrance of the deceased before the final commendation begins (*OCF*, page 210, no. 368)." It should be noted that in both cases the assembly is standing when these words of remembrance, as they are frequently and incorrectly called, are given. What this tells us is that these words are brief—even briefer than the homily. While not mentioned in the *OCF*, there are other times for someone to speak in remembrance of the deceased. This may be done at the cemetery or at the funeral luncheon. The luncheon is the place for power point pre-

sentations and people giving eulogistic type of speeches. (Families might need to be reminded that the presentations at the luncheon should not be too long. While people are interested in hearing about the deceased, many want to greet the family, visit with other mourners, and, of course eat. Some will be anxious to begin what could be a long journey home.)

Reginald Fuller provides further insights. “It is all too easy to represent a person’s achievements as personal merits rather than as the fruit of grace, and to forget the apostolic injunction “Judge nothing before the time.” And because of the charitable rule *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* (of the dead, nothing but good), any summary of the deceased’s life will probably be limited... with a restrained evaluation of significant contributions to the community of which the person was a part (*Preaching the Lectionary*, Order of St. Benedict, 1984, page 593).”

“Obviously the *opus proprium* of the homilist at a Christian funeral service is to address the realities of death and bereavement. But here we have to beware of offering secular comfort. For instance, it may be tempting to posit for the dead person a pseudo-immortality, suggesting that the deceased lives on in his or her works and thoughts and lasting achievements, or in our memories, or in his or her descendants. No, the only Christian message in the face of these realities is the word of the Gospel with its offer of judgment and salvation, of repentance and faith.” Fuller offers one final point. “Catholics believe that at death the faithful dead enter an intermediate state, usually called purgatory.” He points out that Anglicans and Protestants do not believe the same thing as Catholics (*Preaching the Lectionary*, page 594). This realization is important for a preacher at the funeral of a non-Catholic because, as was discussed above, the assembly will often consist of a variety of people. While not denying Catholic teaching, we are to be ecumenically sensitive and even more so when people are very vulnerable.

The *National Bulletin on Liturgy (NBL)* has numerous articles regarding funeral preaching. *The Christian Funeral (Volume 22)* focuses on the then-newly issued *OCF*. It has good advice for preachers. “The issue raised here is the long-standing dilemma about how personal one should get in a funeral homily. On one hand, one is to deal with the scriptural texts that have been proclaimed; on the other, one is to avoid the artificial cataloguing of virtues typical of funeral preaching among some Christians.” The article goes on to say, “The best way of truly expanding on the message of God’s loving action, as proclaimed in the Scripture texts, is to reveal how that loving action was manifested in the life of the deceased. Whatever the realities of the person’s life might be, one can see the finger of God at work; and when this is pointed out, the congregation can readily identify with and be in awe of such a mystery (*NBL*, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Volume 22, Number 119, December 1989, page 257.)”

In an article by Leo Klug and Claire Dowbiggin, several models for analyzing funeral homilies are given. The authors recognize that ‘official church documents do not provide complete and systematic models of what a funeral homily should be (*NBL*, Volume 29, Number 146, page 184).’ They present several unofficial models.

- Preaching is most important in the life of the Church in every age. By our preaching, the living word of Christ is spoken to a specific congregation, and his work continues in their midst.

- Christian preaching has for its primary purpose the salvation of those who hear God's word. Its ultimate thrust is not to inform as much as to save, to lead the listeners to respond in faith and love, to be converted, to follow then Lord Jesus, who alone is our way to the Father.
- The preacher does not replace God's word with his own, but helps the people to be more open to the power of the word.

The model by Lawrence Frankovich builds on three foci: God's activity through Christ, the deceased person's life and the feelings of the bereaved (*NBL*, volume 29, Number 146, page 184).

Robert Krieg's model is discussed at length. Krieg's model of funeral preaching is rooted in two principles: 'the quest for God and the quest for self are in fact one reality (and) that funeral preaching is a dialectic wherein the paschal mystery, on the one hand, and the experiences of the deceased and the assembly, on the other hand, are held in tension (*NBL*, Volume 29, Number 146, pages 184-185).' It is Krieg's model of five phases that I find most helpful in preparing a funeral homily.

- Phase One: The opening in which the preacher empathizes with the next of kin, and the deceased's final days are recalled.
- Phase Two: The preacher articulates the pain and other feelings present in the hearts and minds of the assembly.
- Phase Three: Enunciating the sense of the Scriptures proclaimed at the funeral, relating and contrasting this with the sentiments of the assembly and with the paschal mystery.
- Phase Four: The preacher presents a verbal portrait of the deceased, focusing on a unifying theme in that person's life-response to God.
- Phase Five: Finally, the preacher reiterates the thrust of the message: To stand in wonder and gratitude at God's ways, and to honour the deceased (*NBL*, Volume 29, Number 146, Page 185).

Whatever the model used, the preacher needs to be familiar with the most popular choices of readings for funerals (and vigils). In this way, a great deal of research into the meaning of the text will not need to be done under the short time constraints of most funerals. It is important for the families to make some selections in regard to the Scriptures. In my present parish, for example, the family picks an Old or New Testament reading for the Vigil and the preacher picks the Gospel. The family picks the Old and New Testament readings and I pick the Gospel. If the family has a favourite Gospel passage then it is used at the Vigil and/or the Funeral.

One of the most important things I do is to meet with the deceased person's family. Usually, my lay associate is part of these meetings. Not only do we learn about the deceased, we learn about the interpersonal dynamics of the family. This is a very helpful thing. On many occasions we find out much about how powerfully the person lived his or her faith. Sometimes when an elderly person dies after a long illness, the only way to find out about the deceased is to speak with the family.

In the meeting with the family, I have also found out that some marriages were not happy marriages. Sometimes there has been abuse. Sometimes there is anger with the Church or with a particular priest or bishop. Sometimes there is anger over a particular teaching. At other times, individuals who do not practice the faith or have little knowledge of the faith, need simple explanations of the Church today. These meetings, while at times very difficult, are so necessary. They sometimes are occasions of reconciliation and discovery that the Catholic Church and its representatives are persons of kindness and compassion.

On rare occasions, there is no close family. The deceased may have lived in the area for a long time. Parishioners, particularly in smaller parishes, can be a great source of information. Parish staffs can be

very helpful as well. In preaching (or presiding), never say something such as, "I did not know this person." It is much better to say what you know (or have been told) and then to focus mainly on the readings. I remember the funeral of a man who had died without family. He lived in a very run down apartment building with minimal facilities. Many of the people who lived there were the poorest of the poor. Many had alcohol and other drug dependencies. The well-meaning funeral director suggested that I might not want 'those' people in the Church. I told him that the Church was the best place for 'those' people. We celebrated a Liturgy of the Word Funeral. There were no words of remembrance. I had asked parishioners to attend because I was not sure if anyone would come and so there would be people to respond and sing. A few parishioners attended the funeral as did many of the people who lived in the apartment building. I did not have much to say about him except what I observed. I said something such as 'John was so fortunate to have friends like you. You have come here to thank God for his life and bid John farewell until you meet again in heaven.' After the funeral someone came up to me and asked how I got to know John. It was only then that I replied that I never met him. The person commented that I must have known him to speak so well of him. I remember replying that I said what I observed and then focused on the Word of God. Focusing on the Word of God is what ought to be at the centre of all of our preaching and especially at funerals.

There is an advantage for preachers to write three or four really good homilies. In this way, under the time constraints presented by funerals, the preacher will not have to write a new homily for each funeral. This is a good idea; however there is a risk that the homily could sound like a fill in the blank generic homily. This is especially true in smaller communities where many of the same people attend funerals. On the other hand, no matter how good the preaching, not everyone will remember the exact contents of the homily. I write a homily for each funeral even if this means getting up extra early in the morning. To me it is necessary. This is not to say that each homily has all new ideas; it is that I need to personalize the preaching as much as possible. Each Sunday assembly is different from the other and the circumstances of life have changed from when the readings occurred three years before, so too is each person who has died and his or her circumstances in life.

While some might not think that the preaching at funerals is very important, I beg to differ. People will listen to good preaching and they will remember a few words or ideas. Good preaching may help to begin the healing. Good funeral preaching might help people to see beyond the realities of this life. Good funeral preaching might inspire someone to further advance on the Christian journey, to come back to Christ or to come to Christ for the very first time. Preachers should never underestimate the power of preaching. So powerful is preaching that we need to make the time to do it well. So is there a short cut approach to writing a funeral homily? There is never a shortcut, however with practice and doing what the *OCF* (and other texts) ask us to do, we will be able to teach what Christ himself proclaims. We will be doing as the Gospel of Matthew says about those who mourn. "They will be comforted (Matthew 5.4)."

- The homily is not merely an exegesis of the scripture readings or the texts of the Mass: this would belong to a school or to a lecture hall.
- Christian preaching does teach the truth of Christ, but moves beyond intellectual instruction to appeal to the heart. Conversion rather than conviction is the goal of the preacher. He wants the people to become more deeply committed to Christ and to his Gospel.

INSIGHTS ON PREACHING FROM ECCLESIAL TEACHING

By: Al Momney

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The great ecclesiologist Yves Congar, O.P. in the late 1960's, made the following bold assertion:

“I could quote a whole series of ancient texts, all saying more or less that if in one country, Mass was celebrated for thirty years without preaching and in another there was preaching for thirty years without Mass, people would be more Christian in the country where there was preaching.”¹

Whether or not we are inclined to agree with this statement, no one would deny the importance of preaching within the life of the Church, and in particular, during the Sunday liturgy. In its formal teaching, the Church has taken a significant interest in the liturgical homily, in its nature and function within the liturgy. While in recent history, a full document dedicated exclusively to the topic of preaching has not yet been published by the universal magisterium, various statements, when drawn together, can provide a formidable theology of preaching. This article will largely, but not exclusively, draw from some selected ecclesial teachings and, even though liturgical preaching is broader than the Eucharist, it will deal most specifically with preaching within the context of the Eucharistic celebration.

First, a word about terminology. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the term commonly used for the preaching during the Sunday liturgy was ‘sermon.’ A sermon could be a reflection based on the Scripture readings of the liturgy, or it could be a topical address on some aspect of the Catholic faith (eg. the seven sacraments, the ten commandments, etc.), which might or might not be directly related to the Scriptures which had been proclaimed. In Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Fathers of the Council used the terms ‘sermon’ and ‘homily’ interchangeably, but at the same time brought about somewhat of a shift in understanding, asserting that whatever term was used, preaching in the liturgy was to derive its content from the scriptural or liturgical sources found in the liturgy.²

According to Vatican II teaching, a homily is to be “a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, that is, the mystery of Christ, which is ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 35). In this carefully worded description of liturgical preaching, the Council makes an explicit link between word and sacrament. In liturgical preaching, what God has done and is doing is proclaimed, and in the sacrament (substantially, in the case of the Eucharist), what has been proclaimed in word is made present. What God says (in word), God does (in sacrament). It can be said theologically, that all Scripture finds its culmination in Eucharist. The two elements, word and sacrament, then, are seen as being essentially related, and integrally part of the

- After the bible and the lectionary, the liturgical year may be considered as an important source for the Church's preaching. The arrangement of the Church's year provides a setting in which the scriptures are presented for the guidance of the Christian community through preaching and meditation.

¹ Yves Congar, O.P. “Sacramental Worship and Preaching,” in *The Renewal of Preaching: Theory and Practice* (Concilium 33). New York: Paulist Press, 1968, p. 62.

² For the purposes of this article, ‘homily’ will be the preferred term.

liturgy. “The homily...is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 52). Far from a ‘time out from the liturgy for a talk’, the homily is seamlessly woven into the flow and dynamism of the liturgy, and serves a specific function within that flow. In fact, the homily is not only part of the liturgy, it is liturgy. It is itself an act of worship. What, then, is the function of the homily within the flow of the liturgy? The General Introduction in the *Lectionary Sundays and Solemnities* (2009), page xviii, no. 24, names it clearly: “[The homily]...must always lead the community of the faithful to celebrate the Eucharist wholeheartedly.” The purpose of the homily is to help the gathered assembly to enter into the sacramental act of Eucharistic sacrifice. The homily, when it authentically accomplishes its goal, inspires the faithful to gratefully join their lives with the sacrifice of Christ made present sacramentally in the midst of the believers.

What are to be the sources of preaching? As noted earlier, preaching in the liturgy has a potentially twofold source: “[The homily] should develop some point of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day....”³ Preaching from the Scriptures has become quite common, but preaching from the other liturgical texts is perhaps a less developed practice among preachers. In this time when there is wide concern about many Catholics’ level of understanding of what they are doing when they are celebrating sacraments, preaching, for example, on the collects, or the Eucharistic prayer, or any of the other prayers of the Mass, helps to draw God’s people into the depth of what they are celebrating in the Eucharistic Mystery.

Other teachings, outside of the Church’s universal magisterium, have aided in understanding the task of preaching. In 1982, the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, wrote a document they entitled, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*.⁴ Thirty years later it is still considered, in the contemporary field of homiletics, to be a guiding document for thinking about the preaching act. One of its key insights was on the nature of preaching, and what the preacher is trying to accomplish when they preach in the liturgical assembly. In *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* the Committee wrote:

Since the purpose of the homily is to enable the gathered congregation to celebrate the liturgy with faith, the preacher does not so much attempt to explain the Scriptures as to interpret the human situation through the Scriptures. In other words, the goal of the liturgical preacher is not to interpret the text of the Bible (as would be the case in teaching a Scripture class) as much as to draw on the texts of the Bible as they are presented in the lectionary to interpret peoples’ lives. To be even more precise, the preacher’s purpose will be to turn to these Scriptures to interpret peoples’ lives in such a way that they will be able to celebrate Eucharist—or be reconciled with God and one another, or be baptized into the Body of Christ, depending on the particular liturgy that is being celebrated. (52)

³ *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 65.

⁴ U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1982.

- Sunday is not just one more day of the seven: it is the spiritual feast day of the week, and the foundation and heart of the liturgical year.
- GOOD PREACHING NEEDS GOOD PREPARATION!!!

- ... (A) fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness if the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is by the Homily, as part of the liturgical action. (GIRM no.29)

While exegesis is to be an important background to the preaching event, the actual preaching, therefore, is not so much a sharing of exegetical points. Preaching, rather, is about helping the listeners to see how God is present and acting and speaking in their lives today. It is about helping them to recognize that what has been read in the Scriptures is now ‘fulfilled in their hearing,’ that is, it is happening in their present lives. This ‘interpreting’ of their lives through the lens of the Scripture, is what inspires the listener to desire to give thanks and praise to God at the table of the Eucharist.

What is to be the ‘tone’ of preaching? In 1999, the Congregation for the Clergy published a Circular Letter entitled *The Priest: Teacher of the Word, Minister of the Sacrament, Leader of the Community*.⁵ In that document the Congregation wrote:

Like that of Christ, priestly preaching should be positive, stimulating and draw men and women to the goodness, beauty and truth of God. Christians are bound to make known “the divine glory which shines on the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4-6) and present revealed truth in a captivating way. (p. 204)

Preaching, even when it is communicating the great challenges of Gospel truth and living, is to attract people to the goodness, beauty and truth of the God who reveals Himself and calls us to holiness. Even the most difficult truths can be presented in such a way that they inspire people to want to reach higher and deeper for the holiness they are called to. Even hard truths can be preached in a way that people will want to go to the table and give thanks to God.

Finally, what are the ingredients of a good homily? Pope Paul VI, in his 1975 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, comes to our rescue:

[The homily] expresses the sacred minister’s profound faith and is suffused with love. ...But it must be simple, clear, direct, well adapted, profoundly dependent on the Gospel, faithful to the magisterium, animated by the balanced apostolic ardor that is of its essence, full of hope, fostering belief, and productive of peace and unity. Many parochial or other communities live and are held together thanks to the Sunday homily, when it possesses such qualities.” (43)

There is much here for reflection for the preacher. What implications follow from the Holy Father’s words? A full commentary would demand another full article. I comment on only three of the Pope’s descriptions of a good homily.

First of all, the homily is to be ‘simple.’ This does not necessarily imply that it be ‘simplistic.” The preacher does not have to forego sublime thought and beauty of expression. The prologue of the Gospel of John is our model here. John’s Gospel begins with thoughts that are sublime, yet with words that are simple and clear. The first three hundred words of the prologue include two hundred and fifty-eight words of one syllable! According to the homiletics theologian David Buttrick, the average vocabulary of a theological school graduate is about 12,000 words. The average American vocabulary is about 7,500 words. This would probably be comparable in Canada. The implica-

⁵ Cf. *Origins* Vol. 29, no. 13, September 9, 1999, pp. 198-211.

tions are clear. The homilist has to be careful in the choice of words, so that the message gets across. The only thing that is communicated, is what is heard!

Second, the homily is to be 'clear.' The now-deceased former bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, Ken Untener, wrote delightful book he entitled *Preaching Better*.⁶ Bishop Untener, who was a former homiletics professor, had taken an interest over many years in what lay people had to say about homilies. He spoke with thousands of lay people, asking them what they thought about homilies, and what recommendations they would make. The number one complaint he heard over the years was that homilies typically had too many ideas! A clear homily for most will imply that the homilist develops one idea, and carries it throughout the whole homily. Untener called this the 'pearl of great price.' The homilist chooses one 'pearl' and goes deep with it. This demands solid preparation, but is also at the service of the listener.

Finally, the homily is to be 'well adapted.' The more the homilist knows about the assembly they are speaking with, the more effective they can be in their preaching. Good preaching demands not only the exegesis of biblical and liturgical texts, but also the exegesis of the assembly. Here I have found helpful the thoughts of the theologian Karl Rahner on the notion of preaching as "translation":

The form of preaching in a particular age must be translated into another form of preaching to make the message understood, particularly if the meaning of the message must remain the same. This preservation of identity cannot be achieved by mere repetition of old expressions if the mentality and concepts change in secular society through the historical development which is not under the church's control.⁷

The homilist as 'translator' must be intimately familiar with two worlds, the biblical world and the world of the listener. The task of the preacher is to translate the biblical message into a message that is faithful to the Scriptures, yet speaks to the world of the listener today. And so, the more the homilist knows about the assembly's worldview, about its wants and desires, about its worries and fears, etc., the more the homilist will be able to speak to the existential situations of the listeners. This proposes a challenge in large communities, where the homilist cannot realistically know every individual intimately, but even here, through daily pastoral ministry within a community, the preacher can come to know a lot about the mindset that is operating in a community.

It is a wonder to consider Pope Paul VI's assertion that many parish communities are "held together thanks to the Sunday homily" when it possesses the characteristics he listed. Our ministry of preaching is essential to the vibrancy and life of the Church. It is worth all of the blood, sweat and tears it calls forth from us!

⁶ Ken Untener, *Preaching Better: Practical Suggestions for Homilists*. Paulist Press, 1999.

⁷ Karl Rahner, "Demythologization and the Sermon," in *The Renewal of Preaching: Theory and Practice*. (Concilium 33). New York: Paulist Press, 1968, pp. 20-38 at 21).

- The Homily is part of the Liturgy and is highly recommended:¹ for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.² (*GIRM* no. 65)

¹ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, no. 52; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 767 § 1.

² Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, On the Orderly Carrying out of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, September 26, 1964, no. 54 [AAS 56 (1964), p. 890].

WHAT I LOOK FOR IN A HOMILY

By: Ken Bryson

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How can we imagine an all loving, powerful, omniscient, ubiquitous God caring about us? The earth is a grain of sand in an expanding universe of seemingly infinite proportion. Seven billion of us live on that grain of sand. At the celebration of the Eucharist, I feel a bit like Job, an insignificant worm standing in the presence of the Almighty. The mystery of our faith is that Creator God loves us to the point of sending his Son to die for our sins. I want the homily to capture the gift of eternal life. I try to imagine eternity but cannot do so. The disproportion between our short life and eternal life is staggering. I use stories: a small bird comes to Kelly's mountain once every ten thousand years to sharpen its beak. When the little bird wears out the mountain, one second of eternity will have elapsed. No wonder faith is a grace. God's love for us, the great gift of faith, makes redemption and eternal life possible.

I am pleased to be a reader at O.L.F. with the privilege of breaking open the word of the Lord. I ask God to work through me and other readers to reach people with the beauty of Scripture. The Word of Christ breaks out of the book and flies freely throughout the church, to bathe us in the warm glow of divine love. I love how the word of Scripture connects with the Blessed Trinity. I thank God for giving me a spiritual appreciation for mysteries such as the incarnation.

I belong to a Scripture group. We meet weekly to discuss how the word of God applies to our daily life. We are not theologians, but we are Christians in the making as we invite the Holy Spirit to guide us in our study of the ways of God. We pray God for the wisdom to know his will for us. We strive to apply Scripture to our daily life. We pray for the courage to love one another as we love ourselves. This is not always easy. We make progress towards God's calling, but we never completely get it right.

Once the homilist has invited us to reflect on our spiritual needs, the first thing I look for is evidence of a sincere love of Scriptures. I want my homilist to be on fire with love for the word of God. The love of Scripture is contagious. This spirit of humility, gratitude, and dedication shines through a homily, as does the burnout brought about by distress, and overwork. I need to feel your sincerity before your words can move me to action. Tell me a bit about your personal sufferings as a bridge to my own brokenness. If God's love shines through your words, you will help me heal myself. Together we build church, one homily at a time. This suggests, of course, that we all have to practice our kindness lessons.

The other thing I look for in a homily is the relevance of the spoken word to my spiritual life. Does the homily connect with prayer intentions? Does it help me to appreciate the mystery of God's love for me? Does it motivate me to embrace my own Calvary? I need to identify with the Gospel message for only in this way does it resonate in my soul and motivate me to carry the word of God beyond church walls. For instance, when I meditate on the crucifixion of Christ, I connect

- The Homily should ordinarily be given by the Priest Celebrant himself or be entrusted by him to a concelebrating Priest or from time to time and, if appropriate, to the Deacon, but never to a lay person.³ In particular cases and for a just cause, the Homily may even be given by a Bishop or a Priest who is present at the celebration but cannot concelebrate. (*GIRM* no. 66)

³ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 767 § 1; Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, response to *dubium* regarding can. 767 § 1 [AAS 79 (1987), p. 1249]; Interdicasterial Instruction on Certain Questions regarding the Collaboration of the Non ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests, *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, August 15, 1997, art. 3 [AAS 89 (1997), p. 864].

the suffering of Christ left to die and dry on a cross to my own struggles. The suffering of Christ assures me I am not alone. Christ dies for everyone. We build church on that foundation because it assures us that a resurrection follows.

Another thing I look for in a homily is the depth of study or preparation brought to the interpretation of the Gospel. I yearn for a comprehensive grasp of Scripture, that is, I like to see how one part fits into another, how the Gospel of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John are integrated into a comprehensive picture of Christ. I like to learn something about Jewish culture and law, about Jesus as revolutionary and visionary, about Jesus as human and divine, about Jesus as loving, compassionate, and forgiving. The story of Jesus is my gateway to the Father. I cannot know God except through Jesus. I cannot relate to God except through Jesus as human and divine. I am not looking for an academic treatise on God in a Sunday or weekday homily, but I am looking for imaginative ways to increase connections with neighbours that have more zip that is Christian. I like spiritual connections. I like to hear reflections on the Apostle's Creed that increase my faith. I know that faith pleases God and I want to please God. Doing so is a great honour. I weep because we do not know what we do when we sin or refuse God's love.

The next thing I look for in a homily is the sound of happy times. I want to hear celebrations and shouts of joy, hoorahs and yahoos ... we are saved, not doom and gloom! God loves. Let us dance and sing Alleluia. I do not want to dwell on sin, failure, guilt, punishment, been there done that. We stand face to face with a loving God. The love of God brings redemption. What an incomprehensible gift. Jesus walks with us, breaks bread with us, tells stories, weeps and laughs with us. I want the homilist to help me to transform the likeness of God in me into the image of God in me. I want to make spiritual progress as I act towards God as my ultimate end. I am happy and proud to be a catholic. Thank God for the Trinity. Thank God for faith. Thank God for the Apostle's creed. Thank God for our teachers, Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Thank God for Mother Theresa, and the good people in our own church communities. Thank you for trees and flowers, for water and air, for the sky, for people, and yes even for suffering as we develop character through it. Thank God for self-discipline, thank God for priest as they dedicate their whole life to service of God. What an example for us as we answer our own vocation call.

I like to see the homilist use whatever resource is available to help us make the words of Christ come to life in our communities. These include personal stories (when I was in the seminary etc...), and humour. I think that spiritual wellness and laughter go hand in hand. I am confident that Jesus has a wonderful sense of humour. I appreciate the role of music and singing by the congregation to loosen the hold of left-brain thinking on us. If religion is a process of reconnection with the divine and if we accomplish this spiritual welding using rituals and symbols, then surely the homilist will use as many tools as available to make the healing word of God come to life in our churches.

Can we integrate audiovisual material into the homily? Electronic technology can help us attract more young people to church, as well as retain the interest of an older crowd. For instance, I would love to

- On Sundays and Holy days of Obligation there is to be a homily at every Mass that is celebrated with the people attending and it may not be omitted without a grave reason. On other days it is recommended, especially on the weekdays of Advent, Lent, and Easter Time, as well as on other festive days and occasions when the people come to church in greater numbers.⁴ (GIRM no.66)

⁴ Cf. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, On the Orderly Carrying out of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, September 26, 1964, no. 53 [AAS 56 (1964), p. 890].

- It is appropriate for a brief period of silence to be observed after the Homily. (*GIRM* no.66)

take an electronic tour of the holy land and places of historical significance to the development of our faith tradition. Further, I think that we could use electronic resources to illustrate the beauty of religious faith at work in the world. I would like to see a video of housing initiatives for young orphan girls in Honduras. Show me where development and peace funding is allocated. In some ways, we are like doubting Thomas, but more importantly, a picture is worth a thousand words. Why not upload a great homily on YouTube, or invite young people to download their homilies for processing on parish websites? These tools can help us to reinvent church and perhaps attract more young people to the celebration of mass.

I could go on but I have to end somewhere. This reminds me to file a closing observation: please keep unnecessarily long-winded homilies to a minimum.