

## The Homily

In the dogmatic Constitution **Sacrosanctum Concilium** of the Second Vatican Council, it says: *“The homily is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself; in fact, at those Masses which are celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and feasts of obligation, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason.”* (SC, 52).

After the proclamation of the Word of God in the readings, an ordained minister, bishop, priest or deacon, gives the homily. The minister should explain in a concrete way how the Word of God which has just been proclaimed can be applied to daily life.

The explanation of the prayers and actions of the liturgy itself can also be explained in the homily so that the faithful may grow in knowledge and participate more fully in the mysteries that are celebrated.

The homily already took place in the synagogue, like the one that Jesus gave on the Sabbath in Nazareth. (Lk. 4:16-30) It also existed in the Christian Eucharistic liturgy from the very beginning, as St. Justin testifies around the year 153. (I Apology 67)

The proper place for the preaching of the homily is the priest's chair or the pulpit. It is the most sublime moment in the ministry of apostolic preaching and in it is especially fulfilled the promise of the Lord, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me.” (Lk.10:16)

Thus the ministers of the Word must feel the responsibility of



this grave mission given to them by Christ and the Church. The name “minister” means “server” and therefore the priest can never preach his own opinions. His mission is to guard and transmit the faith of the Church. The Word of God cannot be made use of!

The preaching of the Word is not the mere intellectual transmission of a message, but rather “God’s power to save all those who believe.” (Cf. Rom.1:16) It participates in a certain way in the saving character of the Word itself. This is not simply because the ministers speak about Christ, but because they announce to their hearers the Gospel, with the power to speak which proceeds from their participation in the consecration and mission of the incarnate Word of God.

The sacred ministers can say with Paul, (1 Cor. 2:12-13) The preaching is thus a ministry that arises from the sacrament of Holy Orders and that is practiced with the authority of Christ.

The preacher should be the first to be personally very familiar with the Word of God. He should be the first “believer” in the Word, fully conscious that the words of his ministry are not “his”

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but of the One who sent him. He should be first a worshipper then a preacher.

The fruit of one’s personal prayer is a sermon that is incisive not only because of its intellectual coherency, but because it comes from a sincere and prayerful heart. He is conscious of the fact that his mission is not only to teach his own wisdom, but the Word of God and to insistently invite all to conversion and holi-

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ness.

The new evangelization needs an ardent ministry of the Word, that is integral and well founded, with clear theological, spiritual, liturgical and moral content, attentive to satisfying man's specific needs. Obviously it is not about falling into the temptation of intellectualism which, more than enlightening, could even darken Christians' consciences. It is rather about carrying forth a permanent and patient catechesis on the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith and moral and their influence on the spiritual life.

*The homily is a means of bringing the scriptural message to life in a way that helps the faithful to realize that God's word is present and at work in their everyday lives. It should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as a summons to mission, and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy.*

Verbum Domini  
Pope Benedict XI

This catechetical announcement cannot take place without sane theology since it is obviously not only about repeating the revealed doctrine, but about forming the intellect and conscience of the believers by using that doctrine so that they can coherently live the commitments of their baptismal vocation.

The insistence on the theological and spiritual formation of the ministers is inevitable and of greatest importance. It is necessary that those who practice the ministry of the Word be able to respond to the needs around them. Their efficiency, based first of all on the divine assistance, will depend on whether they do so with the greatest human perfection possible or not. A renewed doctrinal, theological and spiritual announcement of the Christian message – which should first set on fire and purify the consciences of those baptized – cannot be lazily or irresponsibly improvised.

The principal source of the preaching should logically be the Sa-

cred Scripture, profoundly meditated in one's personal prayer and known thorough the study and reading of suitable books. The pastoral experience shows that the force and eloquence of the Sacred Text profoundly move the hearers. In addition, the consideration of the lives of saints –with their struggles and her- oisms- has always produced great fruit in the souls of Christians.

*Homilies are supposed to bring about the heart-to-heart dialogue between God and his people, proclaiming God's work of salvation, restating the blessings and demands of the Covenant he has made with us, and guiding us to respond with faith and enter into a life-changing communion in the Eucharist.*

Evangelii Gaudium  
Pope Francis

The preaching of the priests, as that of Jesus Christ, should be carried forth in a positive and stimulating way, pushing men towards the Goodness, Beauty and Truth of God. Christians should make shine “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that is in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6) and present the truth they have received in an interesting way. It would be harmful to hide the force of the full Truth so as not to “displease their listeners.”

Those who hear the Word should maintain that disposition about which St. Augustine speaks, “The same care that we take when we are given the Body of Christ so that no particle may fall to the ground from our hands, must be taken when the Word of God is preached to us, so that it may not vanish from our heart because we are speaking or thinking of our own things. The one who negligently hears the Word of God will not have a lesser sin than the one who negligently lets the Body of Christ fall to the ground.” (ML 39, 2319). St. Jerome was of the same conviction when he said, “I consider the Gospel to be the body of Jesus. When He says, ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood’, these words can be understood as referring to the Eucharist, but also certainly the Scripture is the true body and blood of Christ.” (ML 26, 1259)