

ARCHDIOCESAN GUIDELINES THE HOMILY

PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD

1. Integral to the celebration of the eucharist is the proclamation of the Word of God and its exposition in the homily. Just as the eucharistic bread is broken that it might be shared and so nourish those who receive it, so too, the bread of God's Word must be broken for the gathered community that it might share in and be nourished by the living Word of God (see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 41).

2. When the scriptures are read in the church, God himself speaks to his people, and it is Christ, present in his Word, who proclaims the Gospel.

The readings should be listened to with respect; they are a principal element of the liturgy. In the biblical readings God's Word is addressed to all persons of every era and is understandable in itself, but a homily, as a living explanation of the Word, increases its effectiveness and is an integral part of the service (*GIRM*, no. 9).

LECTIONARY

3. The revised Lectionary for Mass provides the scripture readings which are the basis for the liturgical homily. It is essential that bishop, priest and deacon be thoroughly familiar with the structure and content of the Lectionary and, for this purpose, a careful reading of its introduction will be of great assistance.

4. It may be helpful for the presider or another suitable minister to indicate the theme of the readings or put them in a proper context either before the readings themselves or in the introduction after the greeting (*GIRM*, nos. 11, 29). These should be brief and prepared in writing by the homilist.

PROCLAMATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

5. Reading the scriptures is traditionally considered a ministerial, not a presidential function. It is desirable that the gospel be read by a deacon or, in his absence, by a priest other than the one presiding. The other readings are proclaimed by a reader (from the same lectern as the gospel in order to point up the unity of the Scriptures). In the absence of a deacon or another priest, the presider reads the gospel (*GIRM*, no. 34).

6. The Word of God must be proclaimed unhurriedly and clearly in order that it might be properly heard and understood by the congregation.

Readers should have adequate training in public speaking before reading for the first time, so that they can properly proclaim the Scriptures.

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THE HOMILY

7. The homily is to be given on Sundays and holydays of obligation at all Masses which are celebrated with a congregation. It is recommended on other days, especially the weekdays of Advent, Lent and the Easter season, as well as on other feasts and occasions when people come to church in large numbers (*GIRM*, no. 41).

8. The homily attempts to "develop some point of the readings or of another text from the ordinary of the Mass of the day. The homilist should keep in mind the mystery that is being celebrated and the needs of the particular community" (*GIRM*, no. 41).

Thus, liturgical preaching, based on the Lectionary and Mass texts, should treat the basic mysteries and doctrines of our faith insofar as they are mentioned or suggested by the readings themselves or the particular feast or season.

Care must be taken, however, not to overdraw the sense of the scriptures merely to make some doctrinal or moral point, although at times it may be necessary to do so.

9. The homily must flow from the personal reflection of the homilist on the Word of God, and it must also be faithfully grounded on an authentic and thorough understanding of the sacred scriptures and the interrelation of the Old and New Testaments.

When it is considered helpful, the homily may contain an explanation of the original context of the scriptural passages that have been proclaimed and show their relationship to other parts of the Bible. The homilist then has the difficult task of applying God's Word to life situations of the various members of the congregation.

The homily should not consist only of exhortation, although exhortation may at times be necessary. Rather, it should attempt to show that God is speaking to us here and now.

The homily is based on faith and proclaims the faith of the Church. It must lead those who listen to it to affirm and deepen their own faith.

The homilist might well recall the words addressed to him by the bishop at his ordination as a deacon:

Receive the Gospel of Christ
whose herald you are.
Believe what you read,
teach what you believe,
and practice what you teach.

(The Ordination of Deacons, no. 24)

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PREPARATION

10. It is essential that there be careful preparation of the homily well in advance of its delivery.

It is usually helpful for the homilist to write out a preliminary draft in order to assist in the clarification of ideas and to insure an orderly and concise presentation.

The homily is ordinarily preached, not read, although the text or an outline might be readily available to the minister for reference, if necessary.

11. The preacher should freely use biblical commentaries and commentaries on the Lectionary itself as invaluable adjuncts to his preparation for preaching God's Word.

There is one caution, however. Although prepared homilies ("instant", "canned" or otherwise) can be helpful to the homilist, he must not rely too heavily on them. He has the obligation of applying God's Word to this community in this particular place, at this particular time.

THE HOMILIST

12. "Among the principal duties of bishops, the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place" (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church*, no. 25). By virtue of their ordination, priests and deacons share in this primary ministry of the bishops, to preach the Word of God during the celebration of the eucharist and the other sacraments (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 [1971] 329-330).

13. The homily should ordinarily be given by the presider as it is part of his function of presiding over the celebration to explain God's Word to those who are present (*GIRM*, no. 42).

14. The homilist is responsible for the Word of God as it relates to the people. On special occasions the homilist has the freedom to ask others to share their thoughts and experiences as they relate to the Scriptures, but it remains the responsibility of the homilist to give direction to the flow of the homily. Great care must be taken on the part of the homilist to see that he assumes his responsibility for preaching on the Word of God. He must carefully select those whom he invites to share their thoughts with the community and assist them in the preparation of their remarks.

15. With the consent of the pastor or rector of the church, one of the lay adults may speak to the Children (at Masses for children) after the Gospel, especially if the priest finds it difficult to adapt himself to the mentality of the children (*Directory for Masses with Children*, no. 24).

16. "Since the Eucharist is a sign of unity of belief, members of other denominations may not be invited to give the homily during Mass (*Archdiocesan Ecumenical Guidelines*, section 28). However, after Mass or on other occasions, ministers may be invited to speak.

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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

17. The homily is not to be replaced for example, by a talk, a lecture, or some other presentation that is unrelated to the scriptures or the theme or the feast of season.

18. When it is requested or deemed advisable that appeals, even those on behalf of official Church agencies, be presented in the context of the homily, the utmost care should be taken to preserve the identity and integrity of the homily, with particular attention and emphasis given to relating the appeal presented to the scripture passages that have just been proclaimed.

Appeals, unable to be related to the scriptures, could be made either before Mass, following the homily, or during the time of announcements.

19. Tape recorded talks or "homilies" may not replace the homily given by the presider, another priest or deacon unless otherwise authorized by the Archbishop.

PASTORAL LETTERS

20. Pastoral letters from the Archbishop and other letters may not take the place of the homily. They are to be read following the "Prayer after Communion."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

21. The parish announcements are not to be made before or after the homily. Brief announcements may be made before Mass begins, or following the Prayer after Communion, before the final blessing and dismissal (*GIRM*, no. 123).

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