



In your first Q+A sheet on Anglican liturgy you said that the homily is “to be ‘an act of worship:’ an integral and completely integrated element of the liturgy, making the Readings and prescribed theme ‘come alive.’ It is not to be an occasion for individual emotional inspiration or intellectual doctrinal/Biblical instruction except occasionally in very special circumstances, nor may it be a central ‘show piece’ which dominates the liturgy and overshadows the celebration of the Eucharist.”

What then is the homily in Catholic liturgy to be?

In the classical Protestant tradition sermons are the centerpiece of worship services and are intended to inspire individual submission to the Person of Jesus Christ (in the fundamentalist tradition), individual obedience to the teaching of Christ (in the mainline tradition), or personal fulfillment and social ministry (in the liberal tradition).

In the Catholic tradition the homily is to be liturgical (except in extraordinary situations such as a time of crisis). That is, it is to be an integral element of the liturgy which does not dominate or overshadow the Sacrament of the Eucharist and which relates to the lives of God’s people the biblical Readings of that liturgy in the context of the liturgical observance (i.e. the Mass of the Day, or a nuptial, requiem, votive Mass, etc.).

Dr Robert Webber, an Episcopalian who was for many years professor of Theology at Wheaton College, has written in his book *Worship Old & New*:

The real meaning of preaching is set forth by the apostle Paul in the first chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. ...Paul’s theology of preaching sees the *kerygma* [the proclamation of the work of Christ—Creation, Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, Consummation—and its application to the lives of God’s people] as basic to preaching.

But Paul also speaks about *didache* [teaching] in preaching, especially in the Pastoral Epistles. ...In this it may be seen that *didache* belongs to *kerygma* and ought not to be separated from it. The preaching of the gospel always contains teaching, and teaching always contains the preaching of the gospel.

In the Catholic Churches—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental—the purpose of the Eucharistic liturgy is:

- *Anamnesis*—“making present again” Jesus Christ in the fullness of His being: body and blood, soul and divinity; His life, death, resurrection, and ascension

- Sacrifice—giving to God bread and wine and “our selves, our souls and bodies” which the Father receives, transforms and makes holy, and then gives back to us in order that we may be made holy

Thus a liturgical homily is to be an integral part of this *Anamnesis* and Sacrifice. Although its rhetorical style has varied through the ages, the homily should always:

- make Christ present again for the hearers
- call Christ’s people to share in the Sacrifice of the Mass by offering themselves and their lives

to God as the Priest re-presents Jesus Christ's once-for-all offering of His life to the Father on Calvary

The Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminds us that in the Sacrament of the Eucharist Christ is actually and really present not only in the Eucharistic Species under the appearance of Bread and Wine but also:

- in the Readings "since it is He himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church"
- in the person of the Priest ordained in the Apostolic succession
- in the Church gathered, "for He has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.'"

The Rt Rev. Paul Marshall, Bishop of Bethlehem (Pa.) and formerly a seminary professor of homiletics, has written in *Preaching for the Church Today* that homiletics needs a renewal equivalent to the Liturgical Movement of the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's. Bishop Marshall calls for a "parish sermon" which has four elements:

1. *The parish sermon is a pastoral application of a relevant Christian truth to the worship and lives of the hearers.* Worship and life are one piece here. For those who are re-created (i.e. Baptised) in Christ, all of life is an act of worship, a living sacrifice, a truth which is given pointed expression and particular direction and impetus in the Sunday Eucharist.
2. *The parish sermon has one clearly defined objective. One Main Point.*
3. *The sermon does not violate the Christian message in its method.* To speak of behavioral objectives is to invite temptation to coercion and manipulation. If we imagine ourselves, as St Paul did, as those through whom God is making an appeal, our words and tactics need to be consistent with what we know about God in Christ, and how in act God makes change possible in our lives.
4. *The sermon is a part of a pastoral relationship.* While a sermon is almost always a monologue by any obvious definition, it is enhanced when the preacher understands it as part of a continuing relationship.

The purpose of the Christian Life as the Early Christian Church and Anglicanism understand it is to grow into union with the Triune God. The homily is to draw the connections between the Readings and our growth into the fullness of the Divine Life.