

PREACHING FROM THE TEXTS OF THE MASS

“The homily is part of the liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from 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.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #65)

What texts does the GIRM include here?

All of them, and “texts” in the broadest sense! These include:

- the prayer texts themselves (e.g., the collect, the Eucharistic Prayer, etc.)
- the ritual actions (e.g., a procession, greeting of peace, breaking of bread, etc.)
- the ritual objects and environment (e.g., altar, bread/wine, processional cross, etc.)
- the gathered assembly itself

Remember: You are preaching from the texts, not teaching about the texts.

- our task is still to proclaim the gospel, opening up the mysteries of faith (mystagogy), so people today can interpret and understand their lives in light of these texts
- “[The homily’s] primary purpose is to be found in the fact that it is, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, ‘a part of the liturgy itself.’ The very meaning and function of the homily is determined by its relation to the liturgical action of which it is a part.” (*Fulfilled In Your Hearing*, #42)

How do I prepare a homily based on the texts of the Ordinary or Proper of the Mass?

The pattern is the same one that you would normally use when preaching from the scriptural texts:

- exegesis: **what are the meanings of the texts in themselves?** What differs here are the sources you may use: the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, studies and commentaries on the parts of the Mass, commentaries on the biblical texts related to the prayers, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Church fathers, and so on
- connection with human life today: **where do these meanings touch in the lives of people today?**
- dialogue: **where do the meanings of the text, human life, and the grace of God intersect?**

Three Ways of Preaching from the Texts of the Mass

- 1) the liturgical text is the primary source of the homily
- 2) some aspect of the liturgy connects with the scripture reading(s) of the day
- 3) the liturgical texts serve as illustrations or an elaboration of a scripture-centered homily

PREACHING ON HOLY TRINITY SUNDAY

Diocese of Rochester

June 19, 2011

“The celebration of the Mass, as the action of Christ and the People of God arrayed hierarchically, is the center of the whole Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. In it is found the high point both of the action by which God sanctifies the world in Christ and of the worship that the human race offers to the Father, adoring him through Christ, the Son of God, in the Holy Spirit.” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #16)

There are at least three ways into preaching on **the mystery of the Trinity and the liturgy**:

- 1) the Sign of the Cross / Final Blessing
- 2) the Trinitarian structure of the liturgical prayers
- 3) preaching from prayer texts referencing the Trinity

Sign of the Cross / Final Blessing: The liturgical pioneer of the mid-twentieth century, Pius Parsch, offered this proposal for meditation:

Try to realize how your whole life begins and ends by virtue of the Holy Trinity. Recall how the sacraments or how the blessings are administered in the name of the Father, son, and Holy Spirit. Take, for instance, the sacrament of baptism, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Or the sacrament of penance, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” At your deathbed the priest will say: “Go forth from this world, O Christian soul, in the name of God the Father almighty who created you; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for you; in the name of the Holy Spirit who has been poured forth upon you. The life of a Christian begins and ends in the name of the Blessed Trinity. Therefore, begin and close each day, each week, each prayer with the words: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (*The Church’s Year of Grace, Volume 4*)

Trinitarian Structure of Liturgical Prayer: The doxology of the Eucharistic Prayers offers the clearest example of the structure and dynamic of all liturgical prayer: “Through him [Christ the Lord], with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is your, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” The same dynamic is also present in the full doxology of the Opening Prayer / Collect.

The Church is always in the same relationship with the God that Jesus Christ was, but this is especially true in our prayer together. Christ is in us, and so we pray, as his brothers and sisters and dear children of God, through Christ, and with him and in him. We cannot be in Christ, however, without the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul writes, “For in one

Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and we were all given to drink from one Spirit” (2 Corinthians 12:13). In fact, some of the early Eucharistic Prayers and some of the Eucharistic Prayers of the East include in their doxologies the phrase “Holy-Spirit-in-the-Church.” Indeed, beyond our words, the Holy Spirit groans within us as we cry out “Abba! Father!” (See Romans 8:22-27). The text of Opening Prayer A may be an appropriate example of this structure, dynamic, and Trinitarian content.

[**Note:** the *Roman Missal, Third Edition* translation is: “Through him, and with him, and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever. Amen.”]

Other Trinitarian References: The Preface for Holy Trinity Sunday (P43) is another appropriate text for a homily on this solemnity. Also the lines of Eucharistic Prayer III which immediately follow the “Holy” could also serve as a basis for the homily: “Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, by the working of the Holy Spirit.”

PREACHING ON CORPUS CHRISTI

Diocese of Rochester

June 26, 2011

Preaching Suggestion #1: The Names for the Sacrament of the Eucharist

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares: “The inexhaustible richness of [the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood] is expressed in the different names we give it. Each name evokes certain aspects of it.” (#1328-1332)

The names the Catechism lists are: Eucharist, The Lord’s Supper, The Breaking of Bread, The Eucharistic Assembly, The Memorial of the Lord’s Passion and Death, The Holy Sacrifice, The Holy and Divine Liturgy, The Sacred Mysteries, The Most Blessed Sacrament, Holy Communion, The Holy Things, The Bread of Angels, Bread from Heaven, Medicine of Immortality, Viaticum, Holy Mass.

The ecumenical statement of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (1983), which enjoyed the participation of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, names the following meanings of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Obviously this statement follows the structure of the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion Rite: the Eucharist as Thanksgiving to the Father, Memorial of Christ, Invocation of the Holy Spirit, Communion of the Faithful, and Meal of the Kingdom.

Kevin Irwin, in his *Models of the Eucharist* (Paulist Press), describes ten models for opening up and understanding the meaning and celebration of this sacrament under these titles: Cosmic Mass, The Church’s Eucharist, The Effective Word of God, Memorial of

the Paschal Mystery, Covenant Renewal, The Lord's Supper, Food for the Journey, Sacramental Sacrifice, Active Presence and Work of the Holy Spirit.

No one can preach on all these names and descriptions of the mystery of the Eucharist in one homily (or even 100 homilies). But the many names and models indicate the richness of the Lord's gift of himself to us. Select one or two or three of the above for development in a homily today, while indicating that much more could be said.

Preaching Suggestion #2

Following the example of Saint Augustine (Sermon 272), develop a homily based on the communion dialogue "The Body of Christ. Amen." This can open up a reflection on both the sacramental presence of Christ with us and on our identity as the Body of Christ the Church by our wholehearted participation in Holy Communion.

Preaching Suggestion #3

The texts of the Opening Prayer (either option A or B) or the Prefaces of the Holy Eucharist I and II ("The Sacrifice and Sacrament of Christ" and "The Effects of the Holy Eucharist," P47-48) could serve as a basis for a homily on this day.