

## Introductions

Imagine a front door blocked by flowerpots, a tricycle and two paint buckets. Stepping through that door would require agility and effort. So it is with welcoming your listeners into your homily. This article offers ten tips, each with an illustration, to help you craft inviting and effective introductions to your homilies.

For starters, forget the old advice about telling your listeners what you intend to tell them. If the topic doesn't appeal to them, they will tune out. So, rather than "present the topic," *establish a focus*. This provides a solid footing from which the listener feels compelled to join you in exploring the topic you intend to cover.

Along with *focus*, an effective introduction establishes *a relationship* between the listeners and the speaker. The second thing that function of an effective introduction is to establish a particular relationship with the audience.

The following tips show how the introduction to a homily reveal these qualities, *focus* and *relationship*, in a variety of ways.

### 1. Make it original

(From a Homily for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul)

*You'd thought they were brothers, the way they argued.*

*Peter and Paul.*

*Why, they squabbled over the Keys of Heaven like the keys to dad's car.*

Focus: Peter and Paul's disagreements

Speaker-Listener Relationship: Friendly, jocular guide

### 2. Cop an Attitude

(From a Homily on the First Sunday of Advent)

*Bolt the door!*

*God's coming!*

*Welcome to Advent, folks.  
God's coming to grab your wallet  
and haul off your flat-screen TV!!*

Focus: God's unpredictability

Speaker-Listener Relationship: Humorous; quick-witted commentator

3. Plant your feet, explore the space

*Ever been to Las Vegas?  
Did you run into God?  
Happen to catch a glimpse of the Holy Trinity at the Black Jack table?  
Maybe heard someone call the Lord's name between the ding  
of the slot machines?*

Focus: God is a gambler

Speaker-Listener Relationship: Energetic explorer of biblical texts

4. What's your angle? (Point-of-view)

(From the funeral homily of a young athlete)  
Football games. Gym floors. Locker rooms.  
That's where Brian longed to be...  
and where he belonged.  
On a playing field, not a hospital bed.

Focus: Tragic loss

Speaker-listener Relationship: A pastor who shares their anger

5. Create Energy through Action Words

(From a homily for a Penance Service)  
The kid grabs the bat,

walks to the plate,  
winds up to hit the ball and...misses.  
Misses again.  
And again.  
He throws the bat.  
Stomps off to the dugout.  
"I'm stupid!" he mutters. "I'm so stupid!"

Focus: The Futility of Self-recrimination

Speaker-Listener Relationship: Observant; compassionate confessor

## 6. Tell It Like It Is

*The bigger the problem,  
the less a man will talk about it.  
    Instead of talking, he kicks.  
    He kicks the dog.  
    He kicks the wall.  
    He kicks the sheets.  
        Then he stares at the clock  
        and tries,  
        one more time,  
        to fall asleep.  
Friends, let me introduce you to St. Joseph.*

Focus: St. Joseph's sleepless night and subsequent trust in God

Speaker-Listener Relationship: An honest, average, tell-it-like-it-is kind of guy

## 7. Welcome to the Neighborhood

*In Texas, the word Coke  
can mean 7-UP.  
In Texas, a Yankee isn't a person from New England.*

*A Yankee is anyone who is not from Texas!*

*Sometimes words have more than one meaning.*

*That might explain why,  
in the Gospel, if you are poor, you are rich.  
And if you are last, you are first.*

Focus: Insight through word-play

Speaker-Listener Relationship: A preacher who knows and identifies with his listeners

#### 8. Research In-depth then Re-tell with Images

*According the author of new book, A Brief History of Tomorrow,  
the average American is a thousand times more likely to die  
from binging at McDonalds  
than from being blown up by Al Qaeda.*

Focus: The Distortion of Too Much Bad News

Speaker-Listener Relationship: A well-read but down-to-earth instructor

#### 9. Communicate Confidence

(From a Homily on the Call of Nathaniel)

*Back in the first century,  
if you didn't own a fig tree  
you weren't a man!*

*You were like a teenager without a driver's license.*

*A car with three wheels.*

*A football player without helmet or shoulder pads.*

Focus: The connection between what one owns and who one is

Speaker-Listener Relationship: A keen observer of life

10. Communicate Compassion

*God does not hurl us into the deep end of the pool  
then yell:*

*“Good luck, kid! Sink or swim! You’re on your own!”*

*Rather, the Son of God  
walks to the edge of a dock  
and invites...  
he invites fishermen  
to leave their nets  
and follow him.*

*His goal: to save the world, not throw it away.*

Focus: Hope in place of Fear

Speaker-Listener Relationship: A trustworthy friend