

Encounter

The two fold liturgical nature of the mass, the Liturgy of the Word & the Liturgy of the Eucharist, are threaded together by the notion of Encounter. The 'word' (sacred scripture) yields 'The Word made flesh' (Christ); both are making the *verbum* communicable and revelatory. This connection between the word and the Eucharist as a united form of Encounter goes back to immediately following the Resurrection. Shortly after the resurrection two of Jesus' disciples encounter Him on the road the Emmaus and they do not recognize who Jesus is. This encounter unfolds in a similar manner of the mass. First Jesus recalls their history beginning with Moses and interprets for them all that is referred to him in the scriptures. Following the explanation of the scriptures they asked Jesus to stay with them and immediately he sat a table, took bread, said the blessing, and broke it. This intimate encounter on the Road to Emmaus unfolded in the same manner as each mass. The Mass, although we may be prevented from recognizing it at first, is the most intimate form of encounter.

The Penitential Act & The Gloria

The penitential rite is a part of the Introductory Rites of the Mass that come before the Liturgy of the Word. It begins with an introduction by the priest, followed by an act of confession and penance by the people, and concluded by words of general absolution by the priest. The purpose of the penitential rite is to prepare us to celebrate the Mass by compelling us to call to mind our sins and by healing the wounds that divide us as sinners. It is fitting that the first things we do after greeting the priest is acknowledge how unworthy we are to be present and to beg our Lord for his mercy. The Penitential Rite consists of a minor form absolution given here forgives venial sins and is not equal to the absolution given in the sacrament of reconciliation. During the proper times of the year, the first thing we do after being declared forgiven of our venial sins and proclaim: "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST....." The Gloria in excelsis (Glory to God in the highest) is a most ancient and venerable hymn by which the Church, gathered in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb, who's forgiveness was just received.

Liturgy of the Word

The main part of the Liturgy of the Word is made up of the readings from Sacred Scripture together with the chants occurring between them. As for the Homily, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions, they develop and conclude it. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favor meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided. The reading of the Gospel constitutes the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. The scriptures are to be proclaimed, not simply read, to convey the eternal meaning of the "Word." Hearing the scriptures should enkindle in us a fire that can only be quenched by the reception of the Holy Eucharist. The 'word' and the "WORD" are deeply connected in that Christ is the Word made flesh and the Eucharist is directly connected and is a fulfillment of the word.

Homily

Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture God's word is addressed to all people of every era and is understandable to them, nevertheless, a fuller understanding and effective use of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the Homily, as part of the liturgical action. The Homily 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.

Homily v. Sermon

Prior to the reforms of the 1960s the preaching done at mass would be qualified as a sermon. A sermon refers to a talk on a religious subject, it can be reflective, instructional, and more open in nature. A homily

is different. A homily refers specifically to the explanation and application of the sacred texts of the mass, both scripture and the mass proper's. A homily has its roots in the early days of the Church and when reading the writings of the Church fathers the distinction between a sermon and a homily become more apparent. The modern iteration of the homily is relatively new, just over 50 years old, and the Church as a whole is still trying develop a method for preaching a genuine homily. The homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself. In fact, at those Masses which are celebrated on Sundays and holy days of obligation, with the people assisting, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason.

Preaching for Encounter

Encounter with God comes in many shapes and forms. It is no accident that many of the great saints were known as great preachers, confessors and spiritual directors. They knew how to lead people to God and backed it up by authentic witness of their own lives. Yet at the same time, it is difficult to communicate our experience with God. By virtue of our baptism we are all called to preach with the entirety of lives, both in words and actions, to allow others to have an encounter with Christ. But the priest is expected to preach in a different way. The priest is to allow himself to be taken by the beauty of Christ and gives permission to Christ to allow him to connect with others on a depth of one's heart; the place of encounter. The homily should create an environment for contemplation among the people, in that they can sense the priest's own fascination with Sacred Scripture and the Paschal Mystery. To encounter someone is to communicate with someone. Communicating words is called conversation. To preach the 'word' is to communicate 'The Word'. This forms the conversation of encounter. When the homily carries conversion, it reaches the hearts of those listening. The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Holy Spirit can fathom the human heart.

Contemplating on Christ

What a contemplative homily aims to accomplish is an awakening of the spiritual intellect. It is not meant to simply educate folks with abstract doctrinal truths or to entertain people with stories and jokes. The focus of preaching is the word, the Word made Flesh, that is the Christ. Christ is the focal point of our prayer and contemplation, and thus he is the focal point of the a priest's homily. The priest should never make himself the focus of contemplation, although if appropriate, personalizing the homily can act as bridge to contemplating the divine.

Preaching as Spiritual Leadership

The spirituality of preaching as leadership means for the priest to be deeply attuned to the needs of the people who he is preaching to. Simply put the priest must have credibility with the people in front of him so that they will trust him enough to allow him to lead them down the road of encounter. We cannot control how the Holy Spirit moves a human heart, but we can cultivate an attitude of expectation that the Holy Spirit is with us. Not every homily is always meant for every ear, but the priest must have a basic relationship with the people to act as a bridge to encounter Christ. Therefore, the priest must live, breath, eat, and work with the people who he is preaching to. A priest is assigned to particular group of people, at a particular place, at a particular point in time, with particular problems. It is there that he has the opportunity to learn their response styles, their dreams, their frustrations, and their hopes. The priest must listen for how God is work in the people's lives; *the priest must hold their lives to be sacred* and accompany them on their path. The preacher must show that he is on the same journey as the people listening to him, best by the same limitations, filled with the same longings, fired by the same love. When preaching for encounter the best response from a listener is "You know my struggles and you fed my soul."