

SAMPLE ARTICLE 5

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN: TO PREACH JESUS CHRIST

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INTRODUCTION

Like it or not, if you are a baptized Christian, you are a preacher! Many Christians, perhaps Catholics in particular, have not been formed to think of themselves as preachers, nor have they been formed to think of preaching as crucial to the Church's identity. Unfortunately, in common parlance the word "preach" has tended to have been more defined by its adjectival form "preachy," or by its more archaic and negative than by its proper meaning, which is "to proclaim." Yet, the essential mission of the Church stated repeatedly at Vatican II and rehearsed again by Pope Paul VI in 1976, is the task of evangelizing all peoples^[1], that is to say, the preaching of the gospel. Accordingly, the first reason that the Church exists, the primary occupation of the Church, is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The preceding statement will undoubtedly surprise many readers. After all, those whose memories extend to the pre-Vatican II era will recall that in those days the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holydays was fulfilled, even if one had arrived after the entire liturgy of the Word had been completed. In that same era, the priest might sometimes cancel the preaching at Sunday Mass due to warm weather or even because exciting events which would distract from the preaching were planned for later in the day; preaching at weekday Masses was virtually non-existent. Those whose age does not extend as far back as the pre-conciliar era might also be surprised to hear how highly the Church ranks preaching among its duties today when they reflect upon the poor quality of much of the liturgical preaching they may have heard.

Accordingly, Vatican II's restoration of preaching to its ancient significance ranked as a tremendous surprise to many--and continues to surprise many--because it represents a great departure from the lived experience of many Catholics. Nonetheless, during and after Vatican II, the church named the primacy of its preaching mission so frequently that it became a refrain: "the primary importance of the bishop's role is seeing that the gospel is preached."^[2] "...the priests, as co-workers with their bishops, have as their primary duty the proclamation of the gospel of God to all,"^[3] "... church must preach the gospel."

A NEW DAY FOR CATHOLIC PREACHING

If the renewal of Catholic preaching initiated by Vatican II was one of the Council's most surprising promulgations, that same preaching renewal also ranks among the Council's most important and enduring liturgical accomplishments. The preaching renewal was necessary because Vatican II recognized the wisdom of placing a distinctly intentional focus upon the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers in order to uncover the understandings and the practices of the pristine church. Such studies revealed that in the early Church, worship was patterned faithfully after ancient Jewish worship structures that featured two indispensable ingredients in tandem: the proclamation of the scriptures (word) and the performance of the rite (action). Although explicit texts are not numerous, when New Testament texts, liturgical documents, and writings of the fathers include mention of liturgical structure, they corroborate in their identification of this two-part structure of word and rite as normative for worship in the early Church. At Vatican II, Catholics found themselves in agreement with most Protestants that since the partnership of word and rite at liturgy was normative for the primitive church, it must be so. Accordingly, the normative structure for the contemporary church Council restored preaching to the

prominent place it had occupied in the liturgy of the early Church (and intermittently throughout church history), by its liturgical worship.—reclaiming the word/action structure for all of the Church

The contemporary Church, however, has gone well beyond restoring preaching to its rightful role at worship; the Church also insists today that all members of the Church must actually participate in that all-important preaching mission! With the revision of canon law in 1983, the Church proclaimed: “In virtue of their baptism and confirmation lay members of the Christian faithful are witnesses to the gospel message by word and example of a Christian life; they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word.”^[4] The revised Code also included Lay persons can be admitted to preach in a church or oratory. The directive that if it is necessary in certain circumstances or if it is useful in particular cases according to the prescriptions of the conferences of bishops and with due regard for can. 767.1.^[5] These have been new words within Catholicism in the past two decades and they certainly require clarification. What is it that the Church has in mind in articulating these principles? How is the typical Catholic-in-the-pew expected to respond? What does it mean to assert that all members of the Church are called to be preachers of the gospel?

THE KINDS OF PREACHING

These questions can be better answered in our own understanding of preaching. Dominican Fathers John—in light of the Church’s—Burke and Thomas P. Doyle outline the classical approach to the Church’s Guide to Scripture, Theology, and—description of her preaching in *The Homilist Canon Law* (Pueblo, 1987). In this helpful work they describe the kinds of preaching as: evangelization, catechesis, didascalía (teaching), and the liturgical homily. They clarify that the liturgical homily is not, strictly speaking, a fourth category parallel to the other three, but rather, comprises the category of preaching that is delivered at the liturgy. (In this paper, the category of liturgical homily is broadened to include all liturgical preaching.) In addition to these categories, a fifth category of “witness of life” could be added. Preaching through the “witness of life,” is not necessarily—life distinct from the other forms of preaching identified here, but its salient characteristics require individual treatment to provide it with the emphasis it warrants. An understanding of these kinds of preaching will suggest the manner in which all members of the Church, the laity not excluded, are incorporated in our most pressing mission of preaching.—into the Church

EVANGELIZATION

Evangelization is the most fundamental of preaching ministries because evangelization is that ministry—of all the Church of the Word that occurs when someone proclaims the saving message of Jesus Christ to non-believers in such a way that it brings them into faith. Since one who has accepted the faith has accepted a new way of life, such a person is—and that word describes precisely what—convert, A—correctly called a—evangelization intends: to preach toward conversion. The preaching that is encountered over and over again in the Acts of the Apostles can serve as a template for evangelical preaching, for, as the concluding words of Acts 2—every day the—describe, the Church preached in varied ways, and resultantly—(2:47 NAB). All formal—Lord added to their number those who were being saved preaching is best delivered in such a way that it invites conversion from whatever sin may have a hold on the life of a hearer toward greater life in Christ.

An examination of Acts establishes, however, that the evangelical preaching of the primitive church was not always delivered orally. Many of the members of the first generation of the Church were brought into faith because they did hear the gospel proclaimed by word, but many others converted to the faith because they witnessed signs of the faith: acts of charity, care provided for the vulnerable, reconciliation effected, and healings administered. The very manner of behavior of the community and its members provided a wordless, evangelical preaching of the gospel

In obvious fidelity to the early’s opportunities for evangelical—s modes of evangelical preaching, today—Church preaching are diverse, and need be neither spoken nor formal liturgies. As a matter of fact,

perhaps there is a certain unlikelihood that many preaching events delivered within the context of Christian liturgical worship will bring nonbelievers into faith. One doesn't typically expect to find very many nonbelievers at the celebration of the Mass or the other liturgical events. To be sure, any preacher preparing a homily for a wedding, funeral, or any liturgy at which the presence of non-believers is predictable, will certainly want to preach in such a way that nonbelievers might be drawn in by the gospel invitation to life in Jesus Christ, but such events are not the normative context for evangelical preaching.

Very possibly, the normative context for evangelization is located within the lives of the Church's members. Typically, it is the witnessing to the faith that occurs between neighbors, colleagues at work, family members and friends--explicitly as well as implicitly--that draws others to the faith. Converts report numerous ways in which the life of the Church first attracted their attention. One convert reports having been first drawn to the faith through the witness of a group of Religious Sisters who operated a school for vulnerable children in an economically deprived neighborhood; another recalls being drawn to investigate the faith by witnessing the consistently just business practices of a Catholic co-worker; the peace and order that church membership lent to a young family attracted another, while someone else first thought of inquiring into the faith after having been touched by the gentle pastoral care administered to her and her family by her grandmother's pastor throughout the several days of the grandmother's dying. Some of these dynamics included words and some may even have involved explicit conversations about the faith, but all delivered the kind of witness to people that enticed them to step forward and investigate the possibility of conversion to Christ. This is evangelization, and evangelization is one form of the Church's preaching. Considered from this perspective, every person of faith is capable of drawing others to the faith by an authentic witness to it; therefore, every believer can be considered a preacher!

CATECHESIS

Catechesis provides a growth that is best seen as a continuation of the dynamic that was initiated through one's encounter with evangelization. Expressed simply, catechesis provides instruction in the faith for new and young believers. What one came to accept at the moment of conversion was the beginning of the journey in faith; catechesis serves to guide one carefully along that journey toward continued faith formation. Catechesis provides one with instruction on matters of faith and it draws one more deeply into the Church's life of worship. In some instances, it prepares one for the reception of other sacraments.

Knowledge of others is what enables people to grow in their love for one another. When an engaged couple first introduces each other to their family members, it is typical to expect that the event will feature the narration of old stories, and that new information will be obtained; a broader context for the partners' life will be established so that they can be better understood. All of these dynamics serve to provide the fiancés with more information about each other, but that information does not remain at the cognitive level. Rather, it becomes that out of which deeper intimacy is formed. Cognitive knowledge moves into the affective domain. So it is with faith formation: deeper knowledge about God and the life of faith to which God draws people through faith in Christ establishes the groundwork for greater intimacy between God and the neophyte Christian.

Catechesis involves the study of moral teachings, Church doctrine, spirituality, the Sacraments, the Church history, Sacred Scripture, and related disciplines, but it also represents the kind of fellowship that cultivates familiarity with the prayer customs and worship patterns of the faith community. Catechesis occurs as easily in a classroom as it does when a friend invites another to a shared visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the parish church, to a fervent recitation of the Rosary in a local oratory, or to a Scripture sharing in one's home

Obviously, catechesis has to do with participation in catechetical programs, religious formation experiences and the like, but when one participates at any level in transmitting knowledge about the faith or transmitting further immersion into the life of faith of another person, one has engaged in catechesis.

Catechesis is one of the forms of preaching recognized by the Church, and preaching is the primary work of the Church. Therefore, anyone who has helped to share knowledge about the faith with s first work: preaching the gospel!=another has participated in the Church

DIDASCALIA (TEACHING)

Whereas catechesis provides instruction in the faith for the young or new Christian, didascalia provides further instruction in the faith for those who are already believers, but more than merely providing more sophisticated instruction, didascalia draws the believer into more intimate union with God. This kind of preaching, which nourishes the soul already used to being fed at the table of the Word as well as at the table of the Sacrifice, should occur at parish liturgies, at conventual worship events for Religious and the like. Perhaps more typically, however, this is the kind of preaching one encounters on retreats, days of recollection, parish prayer days, Eucharistic vigils, and other specially designated times for s regular liturgical=worship and preaching that extend beyond the parish schedule and which are attracting the faithful in ever-greater numbers at this time.

Lumen Gentium, Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the church, describes the vocation of the Christian as one of s universal invitation to holiness. The constitution explains=response to God s=that the call to holiness is two-fold: holiness is attentiveness to one intimate relationship with God (through prayer, meditation and the like) and it is the living out of the consequences of that intimacy with God through acts of charity, justice and mercy. Both dimensions are indispensable to the authentic Christian.

Didascalical preaching, then, is preaching that enlightens the grounded believer with that deeper kind of knowledge that results in deeper friendship with God, which results in a stronger commitment to carrying out the work of God in the world. Such preaching occurs in formal liturgical settings as well as in the less structured preaching contexts that occur frequently outside liturgy (retreat conferences, special prayer events, meditation events, etc.). Didascalical preaching, however, also occurs in incalculable informal ways among Christian people, when two or more gather to support one another's growth in the faith. Spiritual direction can be regarded as didascalia, and Bible sharing between parishioners, the study of theology and Scripture, and even spontaneous conversations between people of faith directed toward a deeper union with Christ or a more authentic response to his Spirit within can all be regarded as experiences of didascalia.

Didascalia is recognized as one of the s most critical duty--the preaching of the=ways in which the Church Gospel--occurs. Therefore, one who fosters a deeper faith relationship and a stronger commitment to witnessing to that faith within others is one who ranks among the preachers of the Church!

LITURGICAL PREACHING

Whereas the previous three forms of preaching occur within formal liturgy as easily as they occur in less formal and even in spontaneous circumstances, liturgical preaching is that preaching which occurs specifically in the formal context of worship. Nonetheless, even at liturgical preaching, at least in a wide variety of liturgical situations, the laity is now called upon in new ways by the Church to join the efforts of the clergy in the work of preaching. A recent Vatican document asserts:

The non-ordained faithful, according to their proper character, participate in the prophetic function of Christ, are constituted as his witnesses and afforded the "sensus fidei" (the sense of the faith) and the grace of the Word. All are called to grow even more as "heralds of faith in things to be hoped for" (cf. Heb 11,1). Today much depends on their commitment and generous service to the Church, especially in the work of catechesis. Therefore, the faithful...can be invited, in lawful ways, in the exercise of the ministry of the Word.[6]

s mind on this issue, it=To understand the Church is necessary to refine the terminology employed

The basic term for a preaching event is the “sermon.” The term “homily” is most commonly used in ecumenical situations to describe the kind of sermon that is based upon Scripture, as opposed to preaching that might be based upon a certain topic or theme. Before Vatican II, Catholic bishops sometimes directed their clergy to center their preaching for an entire specific year on the Church’s moral teachings, or on the Sacraments, or perhaps on Mary, regardless of the scriptural texts that were proclaimed at those liturgies. Such preaching events were sermons, and not homilies, because these preaching events were not built upon the scriptural readings for their respective liturgies.

The term homily also has a technical usage that is particular to Roman Catholicism. In that technical to define the kind of≡homilyAsense, the Church has appropriated the term sermon that contains all of the following ingredients: the preaching is scriptural; it is delivered at Mass; it is delivered at Mass immediately after the Gospel has been proclaimed; it is delivered by an ordained person. It is in the instance of the homily at the Mass, and only at Mass, that Church law has been clarified recently in its unambiguous identification of the ordained ministers of the Church as the only appropriate homiletic preachers.[7] However, even in this instance, the Church is attentive to pastoral needs to which this discipline might not respond adequately, and so Church law allows that when greater understanding can be promoted, through the use of “dialogue,” the non-ordained may collaborate with the ordained preacher by adding testimony or providing an explication of the clerical homily.[8] This means parishioners should not be surprised if they discover their pastor calling upon a lay member of the professional parish staff or an otherwise prepared lay member of the parish to dialogue with his own homily at Mass by complementing it with their contribution to the homiletic conversation.

Much concern has been raised over the pastoral inadequacy in some situations where a highly taxed priest, assigned to providing sacramental ministry to a number of parish communities without having the ability to become acquainted with all of the faithful under his care, is expected to preach, especially in certain sensitive situations (e.g. funerals). Predictably and understandably, the non-ordained pastoral worker in one of these parishes is quite often much more intimate with the circumstances surrounding the persons or the events involved. Through its acceptance of the homiletic dialogue between the priest and the lay preacher, the Church reveals its attentiveness to such pastoral circumstances. One model for this homiletic form s=s preaching is followed by the lay preacher= is that the ordained preacher dialogic contribution. In this structure, canon law is obeyed and the delivery s preaching is safeguarded =of responsible pastoral care through the parish

Lay liturgical preaching, however, extends well beyond this unique structure that has been created for the Mass. The Church gathers for all manner of prayer and worship, and for these events, summons forth a widely inclusive cohort of preachers to break open the Word for those who have assembled. Vespers, wake services, burials, Communion services, and the service for Sunday worship without a priest, are just some of the many situations in which the community is gathered for worship and the non-ordained preacher is needed.

Given the Church’s desire to provide preaching for as many situations as possible, it is not surprising that within recent years a number of serious initiatives have emerged aimed at preparing non-ordained members of the Church to become preachers. Various dioceses have implemented programs for identifying and training lay preachers; in some instances schools of theology and seminaries have created lay preaching programs or have opened their seminary homiletics curricula to the laity; interested non-clerical Religious communities, particularly congregations of Sisters, have fostered the preaching formation of their own non-ordained members as well as the preaching of others; at least one program specifically designed to foster lay preaching functions quite successfully today in the United States. Each of these entities represents people who have responded to their recognition of the s commitment at the level of=Church’s hunger for the Word of God and the Church leadership to respond to that hunger.

It is clear that the Church takes its reclamation of the word/rite structure for all of its—seriously Vatican II liturgical worship and is therefore determined to provide preaching as a constitutive element of all such occasions. Furthermore, a Catholic preference for including scripture reading and preaching upon those texts at non-liturgical prayer services is also well established today. Accordingly, the contemporary generation of lay Catholics is hearing a summons that the Church has issued neither in recent centuries nor frequently throughout history: step forward to preach; it is your duty!

THE WITNESS OF LIFE

In 1975, ten years after the conclusion of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI introduced the expression “witness of life” in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In this much-celebrated document, “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness.” Paul wrote, [9] This expression rehearses for contemporary Catholics the concept, and is the most far-reaching and typical—witness of life—of preaching as a mode for all preaching, clerical and lay. The witness of life reflects much of what was written earlier about the wordless witness that leads to evangelization, but it extends well beyond the arena of seeking converts. The witness of life about which Pope Paul wrote is that preaching of the gospel that occurs when one behaves the way one does precisely because Christ mandated such behavior. One is generous because Christ calls his followers to be generous. One forgives or one exercises patience, magnanimity, humility, or fidelity because Christ taught such values with his life and in his teachings. And whenever one conforms one’s behavior to the teachings of Christ, one is engaged in the very act of proclaiming that Christ is Lord.

It has been claimed here that the Church regards participation in its preaching mission as an obligation incumbent upon every Christian. If that is true, then the witness of life is the form of preaching that every Church member is most called upon to render. Even priests who are retreat preachers or full-time preachers of parish renewals and whose primary ministry therefore is liturgical preaching, rarely spend more than two or three hours in the pulpit, if that, on any given day. Even such ministers spend far more time preaching with their lives and example than they do formally by homiletic preaching. For many Christians, participation in the witness of life is not only their primary vehicle for preaching, but it could also be their—preaching is not—exclusive vehicle for preaching. This dimension of the Church to be overlooked or minimized in importance

Regarded from this perspective, one comes to understand that every moment of every day presents the believer with the choice to behave as Christ taught, or not. Put in other words, the Christian comes to realize that every moment of every day conveys the opportunity to preach the gospel, or not!

AN EXAMPLE: A LIVING HOMILY

A priest who preaches retreats gives an awesome example of wordless preaching. As part of his duties on a new assignment, Father Clement was asked to provide occasional pastoral care for a small motherhouse in the area. This convent featured an infirmary for its sick and elderly members, and in fact, the vast majority of the Sisters living in the convent had reached retirement age.

As Father Clement gradually became more and more familiar with the community he acknowledged a developing awareness that the Sisters in this convent possessed a passion for mission and pastoral activity despite the physical inability of many of them to leave their rooms, let alone the convent. He also became aware that he was hearing one name over and over again: Sister Anastasia. He had not yet met Sister Anastasia himself, but it had become clear that the Religious in that house loved her dearly. Numerous stories about this woman reached his ears. They all followed a similar theme: Anastasia loved everyone and her love had supported them more than once during critical times.

One convent elder recounted the time in her novitiate year, which had preceded Vatican II by decades, when her mother’s legislation at that time left her unable to—was dying and the congregation’s deathbed. During the—leave the novitiate to join her family at her mother’s dying process, the then young

novice experienced several days of her mother's great suffering. She told Father Clement that one day in the midst of this ordeal she encountered Sister Anastasia. She explained that although Anastasia could not, of course, remove the suffering from her life, she helped her to realize that every Sister in that convent knew what she was enduring and they loved her for the sacrifice she was making to become one of them and to prepare for joining them in mission. Furthermore, Sister Anastasia helped her to see her sufferings as a way of growing in intimacy with the Crucified One. Sister related that although she continued to experience great pain during and after her death, Sister Anastasia had helped her to survive the experience her mother and to grow from it. For that, she loved Anastasia. Countless other stories of conversations the same genre flowed through the first weeks of Father Clement with the members of that community. Eventually, he found his way to the nursing section of the convent and realized he was about to experience something profound when, within his line of vision appeared a name card on one of the infirmary doors. It read simply

This is myA Clement said to himself He knocked on the door and was greeted with opportunity to meet a great woman. Upon entering the room, he was actually momentarily come in, please. A feeble frightened by the scene before him. There was a very frail, emaciated woman lying in bed. Her body had been afflicted by one of those dreaded diseases that had terribly twisted and deformed her limbs and made of her body more of a prison than the vehicle it had been intended to be. Anastasia immediately recognized that her visitor must be Father Clement, the recently arrived priest whom a number of her fellow Sisters had already grown to appreciate, so she welcomed him warmly. After exchanging pleasantries for several minutes, Father Sister Anastasia, it is very AClement finally edged closer to the bed and said, clear to me that you are the heart of this religious community. More Sisters than I can count have told me about how significant you have been to them and how profoundly interested you are in their various lives and ministries. It must be terribly difficult for you now in this sickness to be so removed from the community and its activity. Tell me, how long have you been in bed and in this Forty-seven years, Father. IAs brief reply was, = Sister Anastasia condition? =t been able to be out of bed for forty-seven years.=haven

Forty-seven years! For nearly half a century, there were countless days, perhaps even weeks at a time when the only activity Sister Anastasia could manage was to be gracious to those who came into her room to change her bed linens, and yet she had consistently behaved in such a way that an entire convent of ardent apostles felt inspired and sustained by her love and wisdom. This is living witness; this is the preaching of the gospel; this is participation in the most important work of the Church: proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord. And this is the mission to which all of the baptized are called

SO, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO SPEAK!

Christian preaching then, is a renewed vocation rather than a function. An important aspect of the Church's commitment to preaching involves identifying more occasions for formal preaching and the calling forth of a greater number of preachers emerging from more varied preoccupations with proclaiming walks of life. But reflection upon the Church's saving news of Jesus Christ far and wide makes it obvious that every believer has heard the gospel and is therefore responsible for witnessing in word and deed to the lessons learned through that hearing. For many people, this is a new way of thinking about the responsibilities of the Christian vocation, but participation in this mission not only spreads the news about Jesus Christ far and wide, it also helps each believer/preacher to claim more authentically his or her own relationship with Christ, for nothing helps a person to learn a lesson as well as the responsibility to pass that lesson on to the next hearer! Christian life, then, is one of obedience to Christ, who addressed Paul with Do not be afraid. Go on speaking, and do not be silent, for I am these words: (Acts 18:9-10a NAB). The Church believes that Christ addresses those with you same words to every believer today.

NOTES

[1]. Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #14.

- [2]. Lumen Gentium, 25.
- [3]. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 4.
- [4]. Code of Canon Law, canon 759.
- [5]. Code of Canon Law, canon 766.
- [6]. Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests, art. 2, no. 2.
- [7] Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests.article 3 United States Catholic Conference, Publication no. 5-268.
- [8]. Ibid., art. 3.
- [9]. Evangelii Nuntiandi, 21.

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