
CHAPTER 8

**Theology of Liturgical Homily: Priestly
Ministry and Challenges in
Contemporary Homiletics**

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Introduction

The use of the concept, Liturgical homily has its foundation on the liturgy and the spirit of the liturgy which has its profound meaning in the actual celebration. The word liturgy is from the Greek word “*Leitourgia*” and which is from two-component words *laos* – people and *ergon* – work. Thus, the liturgy was a concept used for the work carried out by the people. It means public work of any kind, particularly in the civil life of the people.¹ But as time went on, it became a concept used in the religious services in the temple. Following the etymological meaning of the word, liturgy, we can say that liturgy is the public and official worship of the Church.”² In the history of the Church, this has been a general understanding of the term liturgy as expressed in the worship and the rites.³

The use of this concept culminated in the papal encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*.⁴ The document states that: “the Sacred Liturgy is consequently, the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father, as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its founder, and through Him to the heavenly father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the mystical body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and

members.”⁵ This was the line followed by the constitution of the second Vatican council on the sacred liturgy, which consequently emphasized active and conscious participation of the faithful in the spirit of every liturgical celebration. We must note here that Christ is always present in the Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. Thus, he is present in his word since it is himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read and preached to us in liturgical celebrations.⁶ It is in the homily that the actual power of the Word is made manifest. The term ‘homily’ has a wide range of definitions. For some, it is a biblical sermon; for others, a doctrinal talk, some say its aim is to edify a congregation; others give as its purpose, moral instruction. Even among the Christian churches, there is a diversity of usage. Many protestant still prefer the word “sermon,” even when they refer to preaching that occurs within the liturgy. When they do use the word “homily” they describe it as walking through the text, step by step.”⁷ Roman Catholics on the other hand, now widely use “homily” for the renewed form of preaching ushered in by the liturgical reform of Vatican Council II; it is that form of preaching which flows from and immediately follows the scriptural readings of the liturgy and which lead to the celebration of the sacraments. In current Roman Catholic Parlance “homily” is distinguished from “sermon” where the latter is a form of preaching that is not necessarily connected to the biblical readings and is heard outside the context of the liturgy; homily, on the other hand, is a popular exposition and application of the scripture. A homily must have the following characteristics: biblical, liturgical, kerygmatic and must be familiar.⁸

The word “homily” from its etymology is derived from the Greek word “*homou*” (together) and “*homilos* (a crowd). The word connotes a familiar conversation with a group of people or a pastor conversing with a flock in words and images that they recognize. The crowd is not some haphazard mob of strangers but a gathering of friends, people familiar to the preacher. It is not a conversation of imposition or of persuasion.⁹

However, for the purpose of this work, the liturgical homily should be understood as an interpretation primarily from the scriptural and liturgical sources to show God’s wonderful action in the history of salvation, particularly as it is related to the specific community being addressed. Thus, it is a type of interpretation drawn from the

scripture to make practical application to the spiritual life of the worshipping assembly.¹⁰

This work attempts to discuss the theology of liturgical homily. It seeks first by establishing a clearer understanding of the concept; its nature and theological basis. It further attempts to examine the role of liturgical homily and subsequently to discuss some of the problems in the practice of liturgical homiletics. It highlights some of the common practices today. This paper concludes with some recommendations to advance faithful adherence and practice as a liturgical action in the spirit and mind of the Church.

The Nature Of Liturgical Homily

The word 'homily is not a conversation or persuasion but rather a discussion like the one the two disciples engaged in as they were on their way to Emmaus (cf. Luk. 24:14). In the discussion, one noticed that the Lord's interpretation of the things that went on in Jerusalem "these past days" is different from their own. In every liturgical homily, the preacher shed light on the word of God and makes the heart of the assembly burn. The preacher does not force his preaching upon listeners. The familiar conversation on the road to Emmaus shows that homily is more than information; it is the interpretation that leads to recognition of the good news.

With a backdrop from the Greek etymology of homily which means familiar conversation Chibuko sees the nature of liturgical homily as a familiar conversation on the very mysteries of Christ.¹¹ He notes that liturgical homily consists of the systematic exposition of the scripture readings or of some particular aspects of them, or of some other texts taken from the Ordo or proper of the Mass of the day, having regard for the mystery being celebrated or the special needs of those who hear it.¹² more so the character of the homily should be biblical. It must be on interpretation of the scriptural texts. This is thus a distinguishing mark of preaching liturgical homilies. The aim or paramount importance of every liturgical homily is the spiritual feeding of the faithful. This would justify why the liturgy of the word could rightly be called the "table of the word" this nourishment prepares the faithful for the nourishment that comes up

again at the second table at the liturgy of the Eucharist, which is the “table of the Body and Blood”.

In a distinct and expository fashion, Robert Waznark gave some of the characteristics of a homily which are: biblical, liturgical, kerygmatic and familiar.¹³ By biblical, he means an exposition and interpretation of some sacred texts and that the preaching should have a scriptural basis; by liturgical he meant that the word is made flesh again in the liturgy celebrated; Thus, this preaching is done within the liturgical celebration. ‘Kerymatic’ on the other hand connotes preaching that has a herald metaphor which is beyond the words of a mere human messenger but the word of God spoken through a messenger. “Familiar conversation” talks of a familiar style in the communication of this word, that is a familiar conversation with a group of people or a pastor conversing with a flock in words and images that they recognized.¹⁴ Despite the developing trends of the meaning of liturgical homily today, the above four characteristic marks still help to define and explore the nature of liturgical homily. However, they can be further nuanced in the light of liturgical praxis and cultural shifts. Be that as it may, every homily must be prophetic in nature. Meaning it should be able to move from an interpretation of scripture to life, to the interpretation of our daily life to scripture.¹⁵

By nature, every homily is first to proclaim the Word of God, not our personal irritations or convictions and then preaching about the signs of God in the lives of the people. The homilist should never be the focus of the homily; he should avoid personal references, mixed metaphors, and negative associations. Rather, it should be coherent and brief.¹⁶ Patrick Chibuko discussing the nature of liturgical homily says every homily “should be sufficiently biblical, theological in content and rooted in sound doctrine. It should have a tinge of newness to a familiar topic, should be in time with the liturgical season or occasion, be based on the eternal truth of the Gospel and the Paschal mystery of Christ.¹⁷ Furthermore, the nature of liturgical homily shows that it is not a time the preacher gives his personal views about current theological debates. However, these are useful in the liturgical homily in so far as they help the preacher to unfold the mystery of faith being celebrated and help the faithful to appreciate the faith that they are celebrating and to profess it stoutly in their lives. It should consist of only the exposition of the Word of God as contained in the scriptures in such a way as to bring home its

saving and liberating truth to the hearers, enabling them to understand that truth in relation to their daily lives in the world which Christ came to redeem and which those who are in Christ are called to serve. This ministry of preaching must be done articulately and effectively. It is not at such time the preacher learns oratory or exercises personality power, rather it is the holy spirit who uses the word of the minister to bring home to the hearers the truth of the scriptural message for them.¹⁸ This does not mean that the preacher need not spend hours of prayer and study in preparation of his homily; although it is God who gives the increase, the labour of planting and watering must be done by the human minister (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6). Hence, every liturgical homily must be a proclamation with special relevance to the existential situation of those who are addressed.

Homily by nature is not picking one or the other phrase or idea from a gospel or an epistle and using it as the basis of moralizing which has little or no relation to the rest of the word of God nor any connection with the sacred banquet into which the whole liturgy of the word is supposed to lead the people.¹⁹ Its character should be that of the proclamation of God's wonderful work in the history of salvation, the mystery of Christ ever made present and active within us. The object of every homily is to draw from the texts the message of salvation, which they contain and to confront the present congregation with it as if they were hearing it for the first time. In other words, no matter what the text may be, it is always the gospel that we preach, or more precisely, what we proclaim. Hence we must say that whatever we ourselves may feel about it, to turn aside from this proclamation and to substitute instruction or moral exhortation for the direct preaching of the word in the liturgy is foreign to the very idea of liturgical homily and indeed of preaching itself.²⁰

In a nutshell, the preacher does two things in every liturgical homily: to teach and move; to teach the virtues and vices: the virtues to make them loved, practised and cling to; the vices to have them detested fought and flown. You to have to give light to the reason and warmth to the will. Preachers are always to tie their liturgical homily to one of the four fundamentals: faith morals, sacraments and prayer that remain the foundations of the present Roman catechism.²¹

Theological Background Of Liturgical Homily

My attempt here in providing a theological background to liturgical homily will include a biblical foundation (Old and New Testaments), the patristic period, the magisterial and some contemporary theologians on liturgical homily.

Liturgical Homily in the Old Testament: The Old Testament contains a great deal of liturgical celebration and rites presided over by the elders of the people of Israel. The entire bible is borne out of the liturgical celebration of the people and presided over by elders.²² Therefore, the tradition of exposition of biblical readings is found in the Jewish synagogue. It was a tradition of interpreting and applying the scriptural message to the contemporary situation like other elements of Christian liturgy, this particular ecclesial form of preaching which saw an amazing development during the patristic era is rooted in Judaism, especially in the synagogue worship of Jesus's time. This consisted essentially of a liturgy of the word, which is composed of four parts: The reading of the Torah, reading from the Prophets, the Homily and prayer. The synagogue homily being a reflection of the entire biblical tradition is completely original with respect to the other cults. It is associated with the word and its special importance for these people, among whom it is constantly re-actualized in the face of new events and the demands of fidelity to the covenant.

However, two texts give us a very good idea of the function of the synagogue homily and sum up its history. Neh. 8:18 tells us how Ezra read from the book of the law of God interpreting and explaining its meaning so that everyone could understand the reading. Luke 4:21 recounts the words with which Jesus, in the synagogue at Nazareth, introduces his commentary on the reading of Isaiah 6:1-2 "today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."²³

New Testament: The Sabbath bible reading custom which had to be followed by clarifying explanation was for our Lord the main opportunity for preaching the Word of God to receptive hearers and to proclaim his kingdom.²⁴ In the New Testament, we find many elements that lead to the Christian homily.

On the way to Emmaus, the two disciples in their words express disappointment. Then Jesus appears and began to explain to

them the scripture beginning from the Old to the New Testament. At the end of the explanation, there was the breaking of bread and they recognized him. Through the explanation of the word, their hearts were burning with joy and the joy came to fullness in the breaking of bread.²⁵ This is a wonderful example of what happens at every liturgical celebration where a well prepared and delivered homily precedes the celebration of the sacraments. Jesus taught them the full meaning of the scripture. In the feeding of the five thousand people (5000), Jesus taught them before giving them something to eat. He, first of all, taught them and then fed them (Matt. 14:13-21). Also at the last supper, he taught them before the celebration.²⁶

On the same tradition with Jesus, the apostles, therefore, examine the Old Testament for words and events that are fulfilled in the mystery of Christ. The first Christian communities express their faith awareness that Christ is present among them through the word and sacraments of the church. The Acts of the Apostles constantly gives us a glimpse of Paul as he “converses” with his communities assembled in the name of the Lord. At Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas, in similar circumstances were ordered by the rulers of the synagogue to direct “a word of encouragement to the assembly (cf. Acts 13:15). One could be right to say that during the apostolic era as we have it in the New Testament; the homily was an effort by the apostles to proclaim the good news of Jesus through whom God has acted and continued to act in our lives.

Patristic Era: The exposition of scripture continued in the liturgical preaching of the early Christian churches. The witness of Justin to the preaching of the homily as an established liturgical practice would always remain a credible reference point for subsequent liturgical tradition. His description of a second century liturgy preaching contains one reliable information which is very old about the homily at Mass: “On the day called Sunday all gather in the same place, whether they live in the city or in the country: the memories of the apostles or the writing of the prophets are read for long as time allows. When the reader has finished, the president delivers a discourse (Logos) urging and exhorting us to imitate these good examples ...”²⁷ The basic characteristic of the patristic homily is that

in Christian homilies three methods are involved; Reading of the sacred text, detailed explanation of what has been read, and contemplation of the mysteries in their realization.²⁸ This was a show of strong desire to proclaim the things of God in human terms. This era was displayed in essence what liturgical homily ought to be, namely an informal conversation by a pastor of souls with his people during a liturgical action based on the biblical texts presented by the liturgy. There was an emphasis on the essential elements of a homily which is derived from the fact that it is given during a liturgical action.²⁹

Furthermore, this era through Origen strove through allegorical exegesis to adapt the scripture to all levels of the congregation through the homily, to describe the familiar style in which preaching is done. It was a style that is direct and free, a manifestation of mystical exegesis of scripture, practical application and final exhortation, but the tone set is one of familiar conversation.³⁰

Also, the systematic reflections in Christian preaching by two greatest homilists: St John Chrysostom and St. Augustine were proud and stimulating during this era.³¹ This, as it were, is not the place to offer an extended exposition of the Patristic Fathers' contribution to the theology of preaching or the relation of preaching to the sacraments. But it suffices to say that their sources and contributions on homiletics provide much valuable information and bedrock for a liturgical homily. The writings of the Fathers of the East and West supply much valuable insight in this regard.³² Therefore, in general, it can be confidently stated that the patristic Fathers of the Church commonly teach that God is actively present in the reading of the scripture and the preaching of the Word of God in every liturgical celebration.

The Magisterium: In the Church's magisterium, the ground for the renewed vigour towards the abundant use of the scriptures in the life of Christians was softened especially by Pope Leo XII in his encyclical letter, *Providentissimus Deus* (1833), by Pope Benedict XI in his letter *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), and by Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943). Indeed sacred scriptures are of paramount importance in the celebration of the liturgy, especially in the Eucharistic Celebration,³³ for it inspires the other prayers and songs of

the Eucharistic celebration, all the action and signs of liturgy derive their meaning from the scripture.³⁴

With this, it becomes the good wish of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that easy access to the sacred scripture should be provided for all the Christian Faithful not only by merely reading the Word of the sacred scriptures but above all through exposure to a biblical-based homily. Hence, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) states that the Sacred Scriptures is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. From it are drawn the lessons which are read and which are explained in the homily.³⁵ Furthermore, it says that “by means of the homily, the mystery of faith and the guiding principle of the Christian life are expounded from sacred texts during the course of the liturgical year.”³⁶

The Code of Canon law in canon 767 paragraphs three and four went further to recommend that “if a sufficient number of people are present, there should be a homily at weekday Masses, also especially during advent and lent or on a feast day or an occasion of grief. It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest or the Rector of a church to ensure that these provisions are carefully observed.”³⁷ In the second typical edition of the 1972 Roman Missal, Paul VI added that homily should ordinarily be given by the Priest celebrant.³⁸

The 1981 typical edition of the order of readings of the Mass recalls the most important teaching concerning the homily, describing it more briefly as part of the liturgy of the word.³⁹ But it adds some important direction thus: whether the homily explains the biblical word of God proclaimed in the readings or some other texts of the liturgy, it must always lead the community of the faithful to celebrate the Eucharist wholeheartedly, so that they may hold fast in their faith. From this living explanation, the Word of God proclaimed in the reading and the Church’s celebration of the day’s liturgy would have a greater impact. But these demands that the homily is truly the fruit of meditation, carefully, prepared neither too long nor too short and suited to all those present even children and the uneducated.⁴⁰

Contemporary Theologians: In order to correct obvious anomalies in the liturgical celebration, many contemporary theologians have taken pains to educate both the clergy and the laity on the proper

nature of liturgical homily and how it can be best actualized in our liturgical celebrations.

According to Robert P. Waznak, “every homilist represents its community voicing its concerns, by naming its demons and thus enabling it to gain some understanding and control of the evil which afflicts it. He represents the Lord by offering the community another word, a word of healing and pardon, of acceptance of love.⁴¹ The primary task of the homilist, therefore, is not to explain but to interpret. He seeks to attend to the present moment as revelatory of God’s past events and future possibilities are seen in the light of present theophanies. Waznak concludes by saying that every homily should lead God’s people to recognize a living word of meaning in the Eucharist and in the concrete circumstances of their lives.⁴²

For A.G. Martimort, a homily is a pastoral act because it consists in breaking the bread of the Word; it is a truly liturgical act because it continues the effective action of the readings and forms a single whole with these. Whether delivered by the chief celebrant himself or by another Priest or by a deacon, care must be taken not to weaken the connection of homily with the liturgical action.⁴³ He sees the homily as the most important way of bringing out the “today” of God’s Word in the life of Christian assembly who had gathered for ecclesial prayers and celebration and will soon scatter again and return to the world. A good homily must be first of all a proclamation of joy for what God has done for us and then it should enlighten the concrete life situations of present-day people, revealing where and how this salvation can be achieved and fulfilled.⁴⁴

A very well proclaimed word of God and well prepared and delivered homily nourishes the faith of the people in a great deal. It keeps the celebration alive. They are usually very challenging and never boring. Therefore, the readings and homily are to be celebrated in the same manner as the words of consecration. Just as the word of consecration cannot be altered anyhow, the same applies to the readings and homily.⁴⁵ Hence Chibuko says that “every homily must speak of life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ, namely the paschal mystery. Cross of Christ must not be found missing in homilies especially in a materialistic society that seems to be deviating from the cross and going after a cross-less Christ. The centrality of the paschal mystery of Christ must be sufficiently

emphasized.⁴⁶ He furthermore brought out the power behind the word of God in the liturgy when he says:

Anywhere the Word of God is powerfully proclaimed and preached, (behind a powerful microphone or public address system), enriched with nourishing fruits of deep prayerful reflections, local idiomatic expressions, poetic forms, proverbs and wisdom tidbits, with good liturgical and cultural music to help in digesting the word and signs, the situation is quite different. Attendance at such ceremonies are usually full and the Christian life and culture boom. Then in response, the people are prepared to take up responsibilities to solve social problems because they are now fully armed with Christ and all these, of course, lead to reverence to the Word of God and the sacrament being celebrated.⁴⁷

Thus, the homily heightens the awareness of who we are now as well as who God is calling us to become. Through it, the people receive in their heart a word of encouragement, correction, wisdom, guidance, hope or deeper insight into their selfish claim on their own lives. Consequently whatever we need must be in the homily for those who are expecting to hear it. A liturgical homily must always have a deep personal meaning for those who await it openly.⁴⁸

Homily As A Liturgical Action

The designation of a homily from other forms of preaching implies the fact of one given at a liturgical celebration on a biblical text and by an ordinary minister of homily and by a presiding cleric (cf. sc. 52). Since the liturgical reform of the second Vatican council, the homily is seen to be an integral part of the liturgy of the word. It may be based not only upon the scriptures proclaimed but also upon any of the liturgical texts and upon the mystery being celebrated. This distinguishes the homily from a sermon, which is a religious, but not a strictly liturgical form of oratory and may have no relation to readings or other liturgical elements of the celebration in which it is delivered. The liturgy of the word is prescribed in all the revised liturgical rites, even in the private celebration of the sacrament of penance. The

liturgical rites themselves proclaim that the Christian community is based on God's written word and only in the context of hearing the word can we celebrate the various sacramental mysteries. Thus whether at Mass or during the celebration of one of the liturgical rites, it is always assumed that a proclamation of the word may be followed but at least a brief homily.⁴⁹ The liturgical homily has achieved its esteemed place in all liturgies. The homily has a place and must not be neglected in the celebration of all the sacraments, at Para-liturgies, and in assemblies of the faithful. It will in every case, be a privileged moment for preaching the Word of the Lord: the homily as a liturgical action leads the assembly to celebrate the liturgy more deeply and more fully, more faithfully and be formed for Christian witness in the world. The homily enables the people to respond in faith through liturgical word and gesture. It is in such sense we see the homily as liturgical action.

In a further development, while the homily provides a bold and existential proclamation to the stability of the liturgy, the liturgical ritual gives the homily its rooted-ness in the Gospel and the church's tradition of prayer. More so, the stability of the liturgical context safeguards the homily from becoming an instruction, a non-gospel speech, and an appeal for personal piety over against the needs of the community. The fact of the homily being structured in a liturgical context prevents it from any frivolity preaching can ever degenerate to. Thus, the homilist must know that the exhortation he gives is not any kind but one that should be markedly biblical arousing the faith of the people and based on the particular liturgy being celebrated. We can see a kind of mutual association between the liturgy and homily. While the homily gives the liturgy a structure, the liturgy protects the homily from an aberration. The homily is the meeting point between the word proclaimed and Christ's signs, which converge to accomplish among the faithful the mystery of faith.⁵⁰ The homily in this sense could be said to be interpretative, interpreting the particular liturgy being celebrated. Thus as a liturgical action, homily takes on the features of an actual celebration and draws inspiration from particular rites and ritual. The homily, therefore, as a liturgical action should blend with the overall rhythm of the liturgy celebrated.

Today's Problems with Liturgical Homily:

The homily is where there is one of the major liturgical problems in today's liturgy. The grassroots problem of a liturgical homily is in its preparation and delivery. This problem touches on the purpose of the homily and it is deeply rooted in the question of interpretation. A homily must be able to take the word in its original meaning and translate it into ever-new expressions, courageously using it to confront the most dramatic aspects of our constantly changing culture and crisis in which people find themselves today.⁵¹

Nowadays, insufficient time and lack of adequate preparation characterize the delivery of liturgical homilies. In most cases, the celebrant (homilist) gives only a few minutes to the homily on Sunday or other major liturgical celebrations because of other various parish activities that are taking place within the liturgical celebrations. Due to lack of adequate preparation, the problem of showing off in the process of delivering is very common among homilists. This comes in various ways. Some take the occasion as an opportunity to show off their oratory. In some great liturgical occasions the homily time is now the time for one of those rhetorical exercise with appropriate gestures and vocal inflection which have always delighted the crowd and which like some works of art, exist for the art's sake, that is, in this case for the pleasure that good people take, as they say, in listening to a "man who can speak well."⁵² For some, anything could be spoken of as well and besides the gospel and no allusion is ever made, ordinarily, to the other scriptural texts of the liturgy. Moral exhortation, political comments, financial appeals, and sometimes, but less frequently, a sort of catechism lesson for adult had long since taken the place of the homily

For others, it is the time to speak about social problems in order to win the peoples approval, and for some still, it is a time to entertain the congregation. The situation becomes more problematic when the homilist because of lack of preparation uses the time for delivering a homily for singing, clapping, dancing and even using funny expressions calculated to invoke laughter and applause.⁵³ Furthermore, the practice is now gaining ground in our local churches whereby after the gospel, the choir or the homilist himself intones a chorus, sometimes as long as five minutes or longer in some extreme

cases, before the homily. The homily as an integral part of the liturgy of the word comes immediately after the gospel reading. Thus, it is an unnecessary prolongation of the liturgy to begin a hymn after the gospel which takes a considerable length of time during which many in the congregation do not know whether to keep standing up or to sit down.

Another practical problem facing liturgical homily in today's liturgical celebrations is the lack of effective public address system in our Parish churches. The use of a public address system is to facilitate communication, but this is not always the case; rather, most of the public address systems in our churches are not functioning well. When they are used, the congregation hardly hears the preacher clearly and distinctly, it irritates and alienates the congregation as well as frustrating the genuine effort of the preacher. Hence, the obvious presence of poor public address system in most of our churches militates against the actualization of a good liturgical homily. The consequence of all the identified problems is that the faithful go home after each liturgical celebration with little or nothing to inspire and nourish their Christian living.

Present and Common Practices today:

In a liturgical celebration, the people of God who gather to celebrate await eagerly to hear God speak to them through the mouth of the Priest when he preaches. Even though we can't deny the fact that some priests still take this part of the celebration seriously by the way and manner they preach the Word of God, some others however, have long lost the sense of the mysteries they celebrate in the way they deliver their homily in the liturgical celebration. This point becomes very true, when we consider the singing, clapping, and dancing we often experience during homily time which often results to sweating and losing concentration and end up not getting any spiritual nourishment from the word of God in such liturgical celebration. The only explanation to this in my own view is a desire by the priest to be acclaimed rather than pass across the Good News of Christ. Also, playing to the gallery, that is attempting to impress the people because of poor knowledge of the scripture.

Indeed the present situation of some liturgical homilies today show lack of adequate preparation, failure to use simple language, failure to go straight to the point and inability to relate the Word of

God to the lives of the people on the part of the priests. Priests should be confident of what they say and preach it with authority, power and conviction and without fear or favour or just merely reading abstract ideals that elicit sleep and distraction on the congregation.

The situation now shows that some priests no longer follow the Catholic methodology of delivering a homily. Rather, the Pentecostal influence seems to be more evident in our preaching. Hence, one wonders the effect of the courses of homiletics and liturgy taught during the seminary's formative years. Some priests now use the ambo during the time of homily in our liturgical celebration as an opportunity to preach politics, talk about themselves, reel insults on personalities and attack those whom they feel hinders their progress in the parish. In some instances, there is no single reference to the readings of the day, rather it will be a talk from one political issue to another or talk about fundraising in different forms all in the name of church projects. Though priests should be current on the issues affecting the society in the pages of national dailies and see how they can use the scriptural readings of the day to address the situation, does not mean that priests should be preaching false miracles and healing as we are currently observing in our celebrations now. This practical application is lacking in our liturgical homily today because some homilies are void of adequate preparation, skilful presentation and many often it is not done behind a good public address system. This is very true when you consider the fact that some of the liturgical homilies we listen to today don't have a particular topic or theme for the day. Hence no precise message but repetitions and thus fail to address the people's fears and worries, rather what we see is an overly emotional style of shouting and dancing as well as preaching Christ without the cross.

In some occasions the priests rush their Masses; hence they give little time to preaching the Word of God because they are rushing to meet up another Mass in the other stations or in the same Church. The consequence of this is that parishioners of such parish after Sunday Mass go to other churches where more time is given to the preaching of the Word of God. In some of our celebrations, the liturgy of the word is generally poorly celebrated. The lectors are not properly trained to read effectively. Taking of photographs, video

coverage and other movements which are now practices of the day contribute immensely to the poor celebration of the liturgy of the word. For a proper celebration of the word and for the actual nourishment of the people, such actions and movements should be discouraged in our liturgy. Nobody can give what he does not have. Some priests today are carried away with material things and so are easily distracted. Some are always and only concerned with the structural development of the parish. Thus, they have little or no time to study the scripture, meditate and reflect on the Word of God using the bible and other Church documents and commentaries to prepare their homily. Proper preparations, it is said, prevents poor performance.

However, the obvious truth in the present and common practices in liturgical homily is that some of the liturgical homilies have been pastorally enriching and helpful to the spiritual nourishment of the clergy and lay faithful. On the contrary, some of the liturgical homilies both in content and in style of delivery have been poorly done, and cannot properly elicit faith and inspirations in the spiritual life of the people.

Recommendations:

Based on this in-depth study, it is obvious that a thorough and critical view of the subject matter has been dealt with by showing that the Church is not only to read the word of God but also to see to it that through the homily the Christian life is nurtured, by taking into account the mystery being celebrated and the needs proper to the people of God. Hence some recommendations offered here are to serve as a working tool to improve the content and style of preaching the homily in liturgical celebrations. They are meant first and foremost to promote evangelization and also to help both the clergy and the lay faithful in the actualization of every word of God celebrated in the liturgy. From the foregoing, one could notice that the homily within liturgical celebration poses a very vital challenge to both the preacher and listeners. Thus, these recommendations will in no small measure help the clergy and the assembly to have a better knowledge of the nature of liturgical homily and how it can nourish their spiritual life, and also help in the appreciation of the celebration of the entire paschal mystery of Christ.

- (1) **Liturgical Commission:** The Second Vatican Council recommends a functional liturgical commission for promoting liturgical apostolate. The role of such commission in the liturgical life of any given local Church is indispensable. It will help to regularly assist in the formation and implementation of liturgical guidelines. Such guidelines and implementation will help a great deal in controlling some of the ugly situations we observe in the practice of liturgical homily today.
- (2) **On-going Liturgical Formation of Priest:** Since the homily is a type of preaching generally reserved for the clergy and it is seen as part of the Church's teaching office, there is an urgent need for on-going formation among the clergy which was recommended by the document of the Second Vatican Council on the ministry and life of priests. The ministry of priests involves sanctity and knowledge. Just as priests have monthly recollections and annual retreats of at most a week duration for their spiritual growth, something comparable ought to be put in place to address their needs for on-going theological formation.
- (3) **Proper Liturgical Formation for Major Seminarian:** The seminarians of today are priests of tomorrow who will be given the responsibility of preaching homilies. According to a popular adage: "The morning shows the day". The scripture says "train up a child the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:5). There is a need for proper formation of major seminarians. Since the training of future priests starts from the seminary, there is the need for their curriculum to be updated especially in the area of homiletics. The Church insists that in carrying out various ministries in the Church, the minister must be properly trained. Hence, those to be ordained priests require appropriate formation for the role they are called to play in the Church. In homiletics curriculum, the formation can be general and specific. The general formation will take the form of doctrinal and liturgical formation. They should be equipped with more than a passing knowledge of the Scripture, Sacred

Doctrines, the teachings of the magisterium, liturgical norms and practices etc. Specifically, they should be formed liturgically, this formation will give them some basic understanding of the meaning and structure of liturgical celebration in general and also the relationship between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. This formation should also involve technical training of the seminarian on how to prepare, and deliver a liturgical homily.

- (4) **Faithfulness to the Church's form of worship:** There is a need to put some order and uniformity in the liturgical celebration especially in the liturgy of the word. This should be consistently followed in the celebration of all the sacraments. Thus, any attempt by the priest to imitate some of the Pentecostal churches in their emotional style of shouting and dancing as well as preaching Christ without the cross should be discouraged. The essence of liturgical celebration is total transformation expressed in the sanctification of the people, the edification of the Church, the glorification of God and witnessing in Christian living.
- (5) **Proper Preparation:** There should be proper preparation by the priest before every homily. In the liturgy, there is no room for improvisation. The homilist should and must not go to the ambo just to say something; rather he should go to the ambo with something to say. A very well prepared and delivered homily will nourish the faith of the assembly a great deal. It will also keep the entire celebration alive and will be appreciated by the assembly. All prepared and delivered homily will be very challenging and never boring. As part of the preparation, the homilist should endeavour to guide against too long or too short homilies. He should be able to strike a balance. A good homilist is one who through his proper preparation sees to it that no more than proportionate time is given to each of the integral parts of the celebration so much so that the actions are kept flowing and performed with dignifying grace. The preacher with proper preparation must approach the ministry of preaching with all seriousness, zeal and utter dependence on the Holy Spirit.
- (6) **A Theme for Every Homily:** In every homily delivered, there should be a theme. A particular topic with a reflection

on the readings or mystery being celebrated should be delivered with depth, precision and especially with contextual relevance. To go through an entire gospel topic can bear fewer fruits because the preacher, who can dwell only very little on every element, cannot develop them or explain to the congregation what he wants to say. Bearing in mind, that the assembly is present and disposed to hear sacred ideas that will influence their lives, the preacher, through his theme and content of his message should be able to present commentary of the readings and an application of same to the concrete situations that make meaning to his listeners. From the theme also, the assembly should be able to draw a connection between the content of the homily and their daily life as Christians.

Conclusion:

This study has evaluated in-depth the nature and actual application of liturgical homily in the life of the Church. It was able to create the awareness that there is a need for improvement in the style and content of liturgical homily today. From the presentation, it was established that lack of preparation by priests hampers proper liturgical homilies in the liturgical life of the Church. From the findings of the study, it is also clear that the Church has everything to gain if the clergy understands the nature and importance of homily in our liturgical celebrations. By so doing, they will be acting in full conformity with the Bible, the theology of the Church, liturgical provisions and the teaching of the magisterium. It is a general call for all to recognize and appreciate the nourishment that every well prepared and delivered homily can bring to the Church and her mission of evangelization.

It is the belief that this work will to a great extent be able to remove any misunderstanding that some might have heard about the nature of liturgical homily before now. Thus, we wish to state that although this work does not claim to be exhaustive of all there is to explore and discuss about the liturgical homily, it still has convincingly spelt out the dynamics and challenges of the clergy in

the preaching of a liturgical homily. However, it can serve as a springboard for further researches in the future.

Endnotes

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