

# Homiletics

by  
**Deacon Tony**



# Deacons are Preachers

- Saint Stephen was a preaching deacon (Acts 7:1-53)
- In the Mass the deacon preaches depending on the circumstances and always with the permission of the celebrant
- Preaching is a demanding privilege



I offer you only  
my own  
experience

Believe what you  
read

Teach what you  
believe

Practice what you  
teach



# Stuff you should (probably) read

## Sources of contemporary teaching on homiletics

DV – *Dei Verbum*: 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Vatican Council  
Dogmatic Constitution  
on Divine Revelation

SSC - *Sacrosanctum  
Concilium*: 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican  
Council Constitution on  
Divine Liturgy

OLM – *Ordo Lectionem  
Missae* (Introduction to  
the Lectionary)

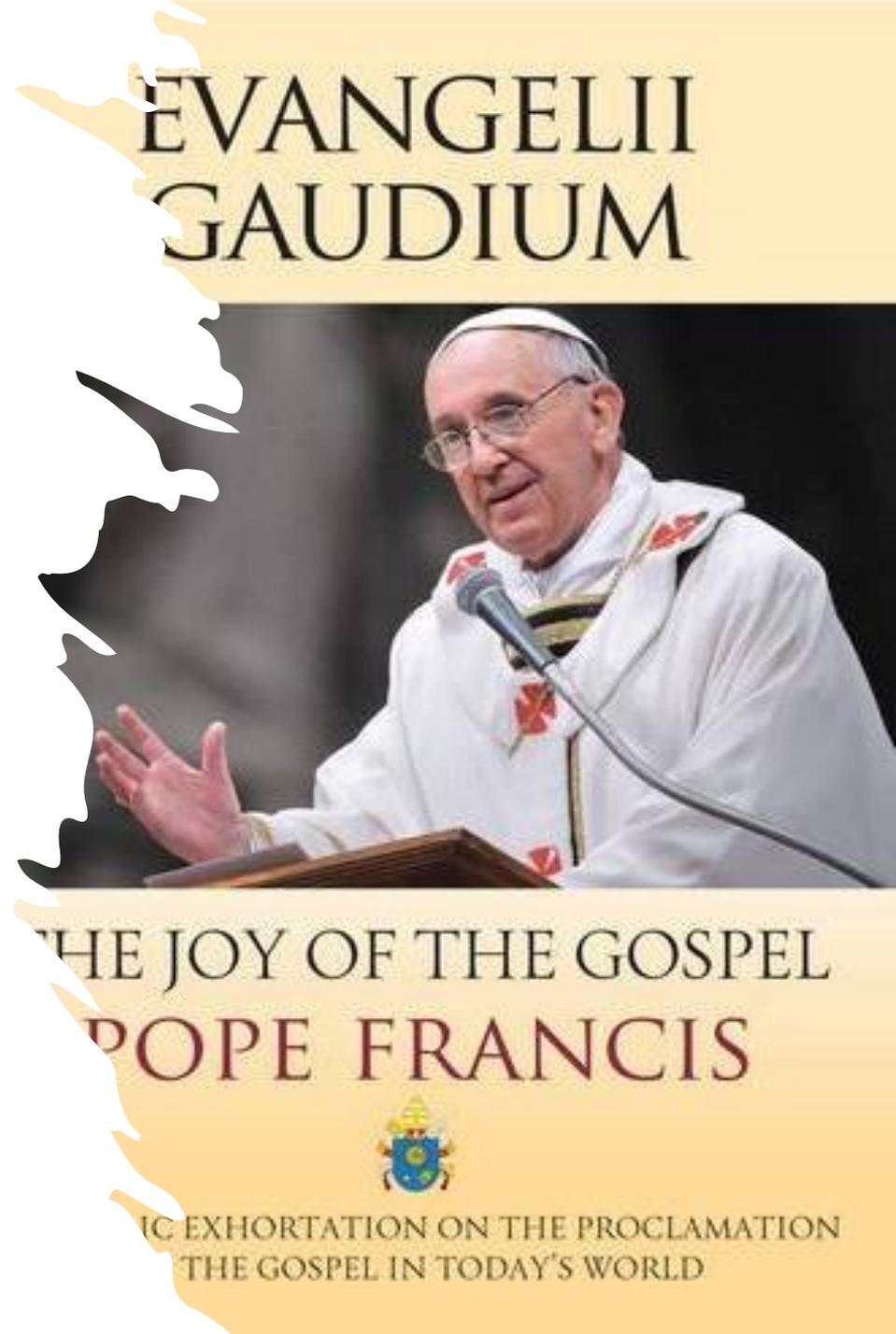
GIRM – General  
Instruction on the  
Roman Missal

VD – *Verbum Domini*:  
Apostolic Exhortation of  
Pope Benedict XVI *The  
Word of the Lord*

HD – *The Homiletics  
Directory* from the  
Congregation for Divine  
Worship and Discipline  
of the Sacraments

# But definitely read this!

- Pope Francis' section on preaching in *Evangelii Gaudium* should be **required** reading.
- Chapter 3 'The Proclamation of the Gospel.'



Verbum  
Domini  
– Pope  
Benedict  
XVI

On the Homily

“The homily is a means of bringing the scriptural message to life in a way that helps the faithful to realise that God’s word is present and at work in their everyday lives. It should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as a summons to mission, and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy.”

# Evangelii Gaudium – Pope Francis

## On Preaching

Preparing to Preach:

“Preparation for preaching is so important a task that a long period of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it”...

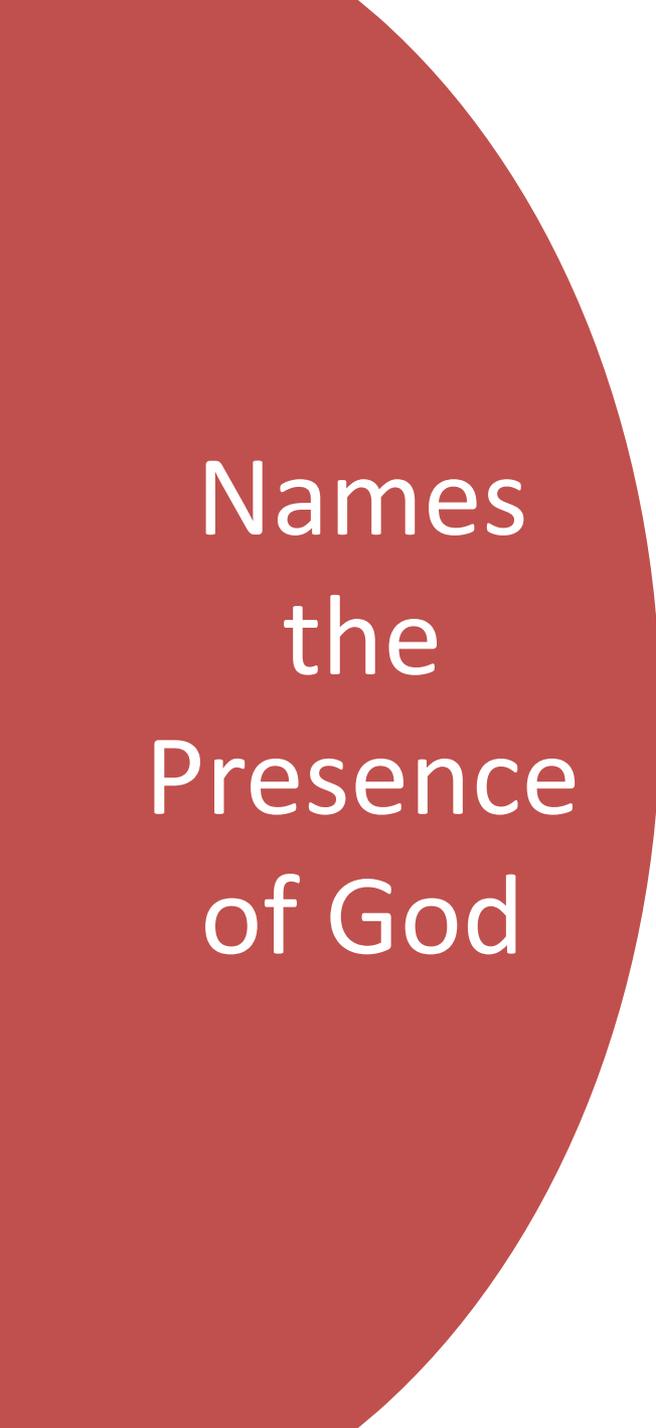
A preacher who does not prepare is not ‘spiritual’; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received” (EG 145)

# What is a Homily?

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The distinction between a sermon and a homily is important. A sermon can be any kind of spiritual or moral lecture not necessarily tied to the Scriptures. **A homily is centred on the Word of God.**



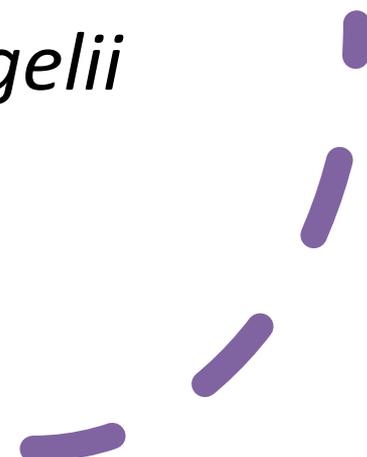
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Names  
the  
Presence  
of God

“Today too, people prefer to listen to witnesses: they “thirst for authenticity” and “call for evangelizers **to speak of a God whom they themselves know** and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him”

(quoting Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975)

(EG 150)

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# Proclaims Christ the Saviour

“Through the readings and homily, Christ’s  
Paschal Mystery is proclaimed” (HD 12)

The community shares [through the word]  
in the mystery of Christ’s Death and  
Resurrection...

(HD 13)

...transformed by the Eucharist to carry the  
Gospel into the world in our daily lives...

(HD 14)

“To help his people read and experience the  
Scriptures in the light of the Paschal  
Mystery”

(HD 18)



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# The Gospel as 'Good News'

“Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. “

(Evangelii Gaudium 167)

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Consider  
word and  
sacrament  
on the  
road to  
Emmaus

# The 'Now' of this homily

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These four dimensions present the 'now' of this homily. This homily needs to reach into this 'now'.

Christ speaks in this liturgy since he is present in His word.

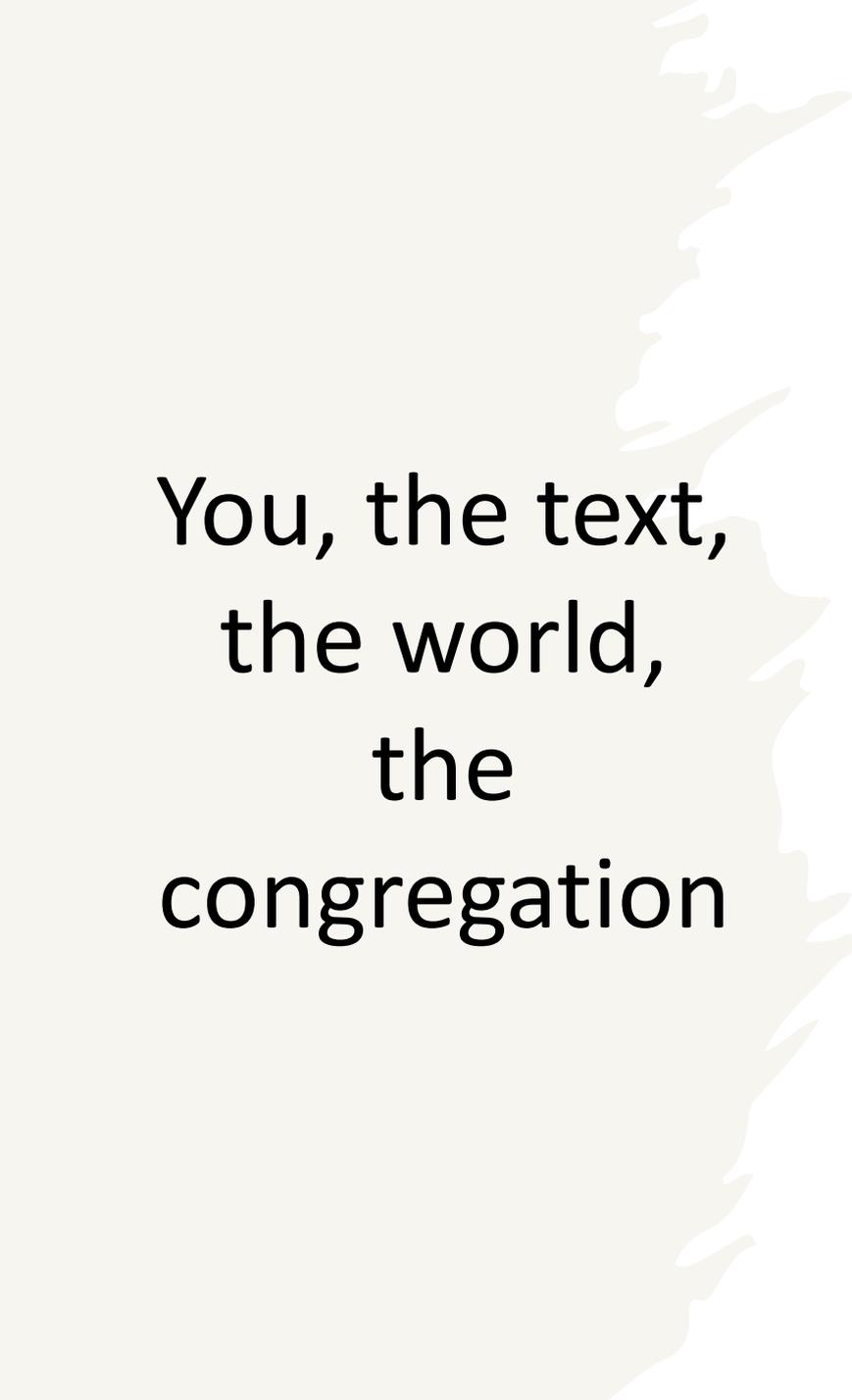
The homilist is involved as a messenger and tool of the Word.

You now, the world now, the liturgical season now, the people now

# What are you reading?

“A deeper understanding of the **sacramentality of God’s word** can...lead us to a more unified understanding of the **mystery of revelation** which takes place through deeds and words...[This] can only benefit the spiritual life of the faithful and the Church’s pastoral activity” (VD 56)





You, the text,  
the world,  
the  
congregation

- Carefully and spiritually read the texts (not only the Gospel)
- Pay close attention to the literary form of the parts of the Bible we are reading as we prepare to preach
- What is the rhetorical function of the genre
- While it might be a truism to say preachers should proclaim the Gospel, it is a helpful check on our practice
- Get back to our theological texts if we don't understand what we are reading

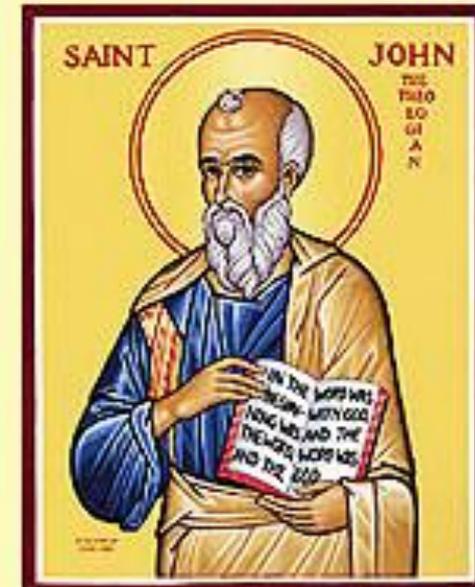
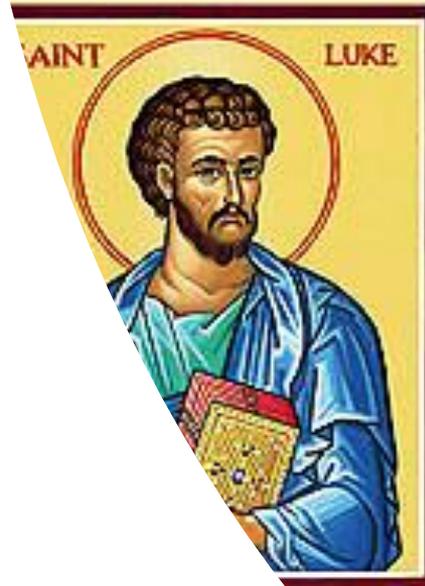
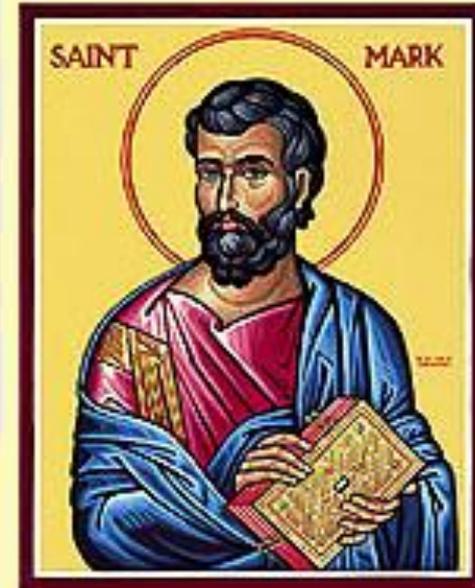
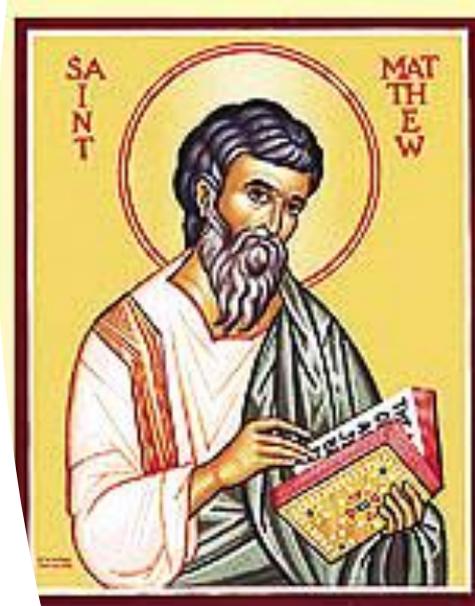
# God's Word in human language

- We are not biblical literalists
- We often have to explain the genre or type of writing the human writer employed to communicate God's Word.
- Its often necessary to explain the historical, cultural, political and theological limitations of the human authors of these inspired texts to find the theological insight God is communicating
- It's often helpful to give the textual situation or context of the readings. If it's a narrative, what happened before /after ?

# Attend to the particular Gospel

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- We have FOUR distinctive Gospel writers
- We should meet and know them one by one
- While it's valid to draw on parallel Gospel texts or the typological meaning of OT texts, try and bring something from the text itself
- Avoid blending the different Gospel versions of the same narrative or preaching on a more familiar version than the one in the lectionary



# Where are you in time?

- Trust the shape of the Liturgical Year
- Let it hold you, carry you, and move you on
- Preach for the Season
- Each Lectionary Year presents a different Synoptic Gospel
- Let this influence and inform your preaching



# The Liturgical Cycle

The mysteries of faith and the guiding principles of Christian life are **expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year**. The homily is...to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself...on Sundays and Holy Days ..it should not be omitted. (SSC 52)

# What do you see?

- We need to build bridges between the Gospel and the world
- To be called to preach is to be called to 'see' the world as clearly and honestly as we can
- We can only preach the world we see
- Our prayer as preachers is "Open our eyes, Lord."
- If struggling with a text, ask "what are we **not** seeing about the world in which we are reading it?"



# Who do you see?

- Preaching for **these** people
- We are responsible for our words, and they carry over into our relationships with those we preach to
- This requires knowing something about who they are - “an ear to the people.”
- Authenticity in knowing ourselves and presenting ourselves truthfully



# Who are you, now?

- The first work of a preacher is to show up
- Learning to preach is learning to engage, to 'talk human'
- Compassion and empathy are basic to homiletics
- To show up is to invite people's attention and gaze
- People watch and listen
- There is something exposing about preaching
- We risk ourselves in preaching



Preaching comes from  
and goes to embodied  
living people

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“Dialogue is so much  
more than the  
communication of truth.  
It...is an enrichment which  
does not consist in objects  
but in **persons** who share  
themselves in dialogue”.  
(EG 142)

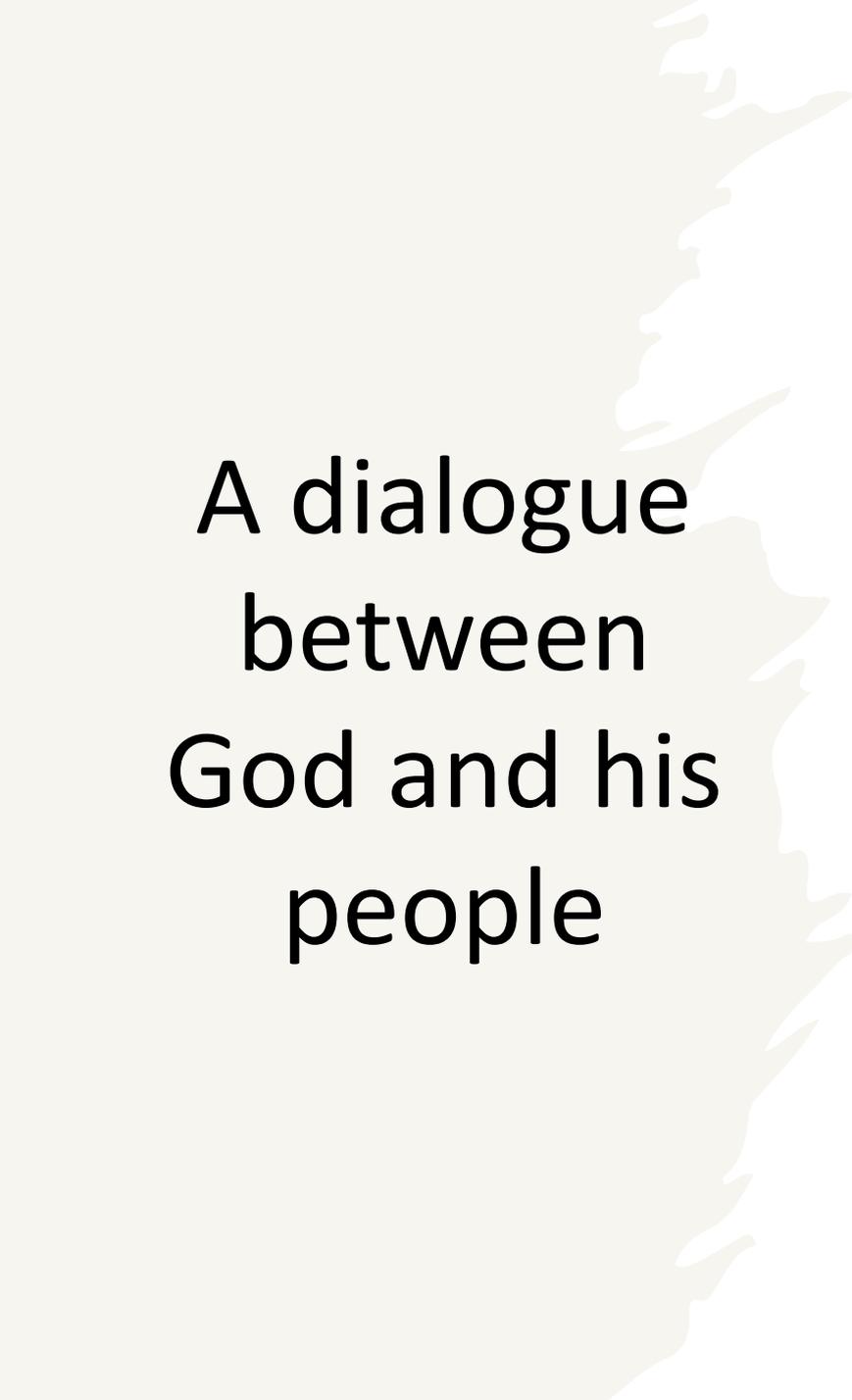


# What is your homily about?

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- Biblical texts say and do things
- The homily is to say and do those things to
- Identify the central and unifying theme
- This is what the homily will be 'about'?
- Make sure the homily is Christian and Catholic





# A dialogue between God and his people

“ the liturgical proclamation  
of the word of God in the  
Eucharistic Assembly is not  
so much a time for  
meditation and catechesis  
as **a dialogue between  
God and his people**”  
(EG137)

# Time and Prayer

- Anxious reading misses things and moves too fast
- Take the readings into the week ahead and be open to 'cues'
- Stop to pray over the texts in the context of your lived experiences
- The readings 'continue' inside us as we walk the dog, swim or do the cleaning up
- The process of finding the 'cue' is the hinge between reading, writing and then speaking
- Head – Heart - Hand

# ETHOS

*Credibility*



# PATHOS

*Emotion*



# LOGOS

*Logic*



## Logos

- I am reading this text in order to preach and to some extent I am reading it 'on behalf of' those to whom I will preach
- In reading towards a homily, we must read the text in the light of our theological knowledge of God
- We need to develop our biblical literacy

# Logos and Pathos

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- Christianity is not primarily an intellectual pursuit but a pursuit of the heart
- We come to know and love God
- We need to engage the heart as well as the head
- What is unfelt is unpreached

**PATHOS**  
*Emotion*



# Ethos matters

- We are preaching as unworthy servants
- We are not Saints in the pulpit
- Our ethos is 'read' from our homilies, by our themes, what we emphasise and leave out
- We know we have to 'walk the walk' if we are going to 'talk the talk'
- To walk humbly with our God

**ETHOS**

*Credibility*



# Take them to the Table

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- The homily is part of the liturgy ... build a bridge to what happens next
- First we read and hear...Christ walks through the congregation as the Word
- Then what we have heard is 'opened' through the prayerful reflection of the homilist.
- Both the words of scripture and the words heard in the homily will be taken home and will 'nourish' our love of God and of neighbour



# Preparing a homily is a serious responsibility

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- Signs of insufficient care:
  - Easy, obvious, 'thin' content;
  - It doesn't sound like you!
  - It doesn't relate to the lives of the people;
  - It's rambling, poor structure, no planned ending
  - God is not in it



# Beginnings, middle and Endings

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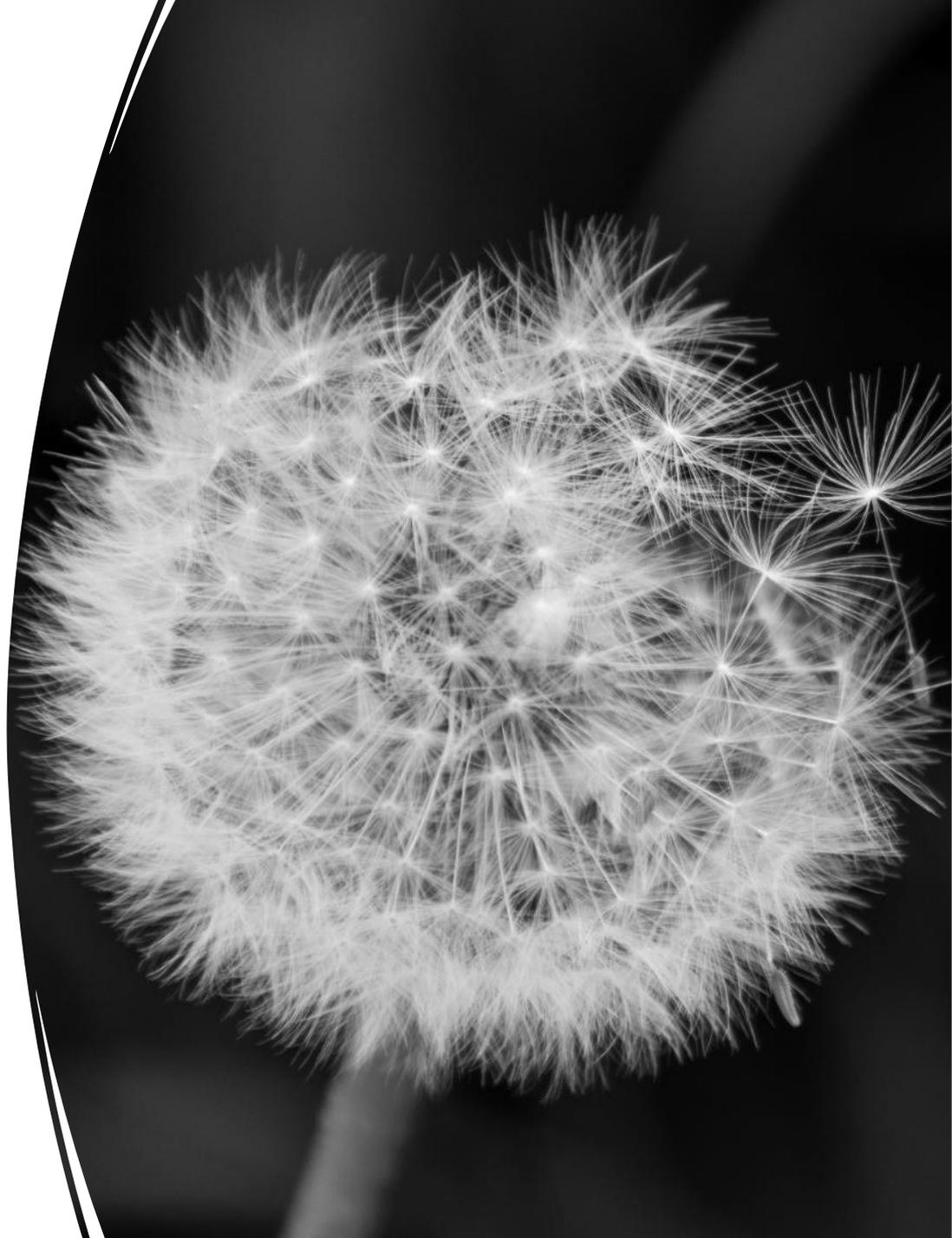
## Beginnings:

- Get to the point! Brief intro only.

## Middle:

Avoid 'too many thoughts' or unfocussed meandering towards the point;

- "Unless you pray, you have nothing to say!"
- Your core theme is your 'jewel'. Don't clutter it but set it where it can shine.



# Endings

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- Know where you are going to land
- Plan it, keep it brief, it should underscore your key message;
- Beware of fresh starts or late new points;
- Do not repeat yourself.
- End in a positive tone aimed to help good and grace-filled listeners.



# Avoiding accidental heresy

- *Diakonos* to the ancient Greeks meant a trusted messenger who faithfully carried word from his master
- We speak God's Word not our own. We carry the Word into Mass.
- I've heard many a homily along the lines of "The gospel doesn't say but I'm sure Jesus would have ..." Don't.
- Check if your not sure!

# Preaching on Hard Topics

- Our vocation as Prophets speaking God's truth and our duty as pastoral minister's of God's love
- To preach is to risk becoming a stumbling block
- No put downs, no loaded language, no games, no dogmatic monologues, no condemnation
- an invitation to a dialogue between the believer and God, rather than a command or proposition
- Jesus began a compassionate dialogue ... "What is written in the Law", "What do you read there...", "Whose head and inscription do you see".

# Preaching with a script

- A script allows the preacher to offer a considered, crafted, chosen word
- It permits you to say what you want to say in the chosen time
- Pre-craft the style and language for oral delivery, it will be heard not read
- Write for the ear

# Edit, edit, edit! Why?

- To find and remove:
  - Wasted words;
  - Sloppy, flabby, padding words
  - Waffle – words or sentences off the point;
  - Length – Know your length. Is it all needed?
  - Unhelpful words, illustrations, examples;
  - Repetition (unless carefully planned)

# Preaching without a script

- This is not the same as preaching without preparation, and probably involves more
- Script-less preachers still write it down, summarise, practice, and have notes
- Those who find scripts inhibit or weigh them down should take the time and practice to see if their approach is better to work without one
- Afterall, if you can't remember your homily how do you expect others to do so!

# Now Rehearse

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- Write for the ear and practice the oral delivery
- Make sure the homily is cohesive and flows
- Check you are not script reading, and you can be present to those present with you
- Do the parts add up to the theme
- Does the ending/landing work when spoken
- What is your tone like given the theme
- Are you happy and enthusiastic about the theme

# Our life is an act of witness

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- “Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become.”
- People don’t only watch and listen in Mass during the homily
- Attend to the message communicated by our life and character



# Our life as an act of service

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- Word must sit alongside Altar and Charity
- Entering into a new and more intimate relationship with Christ the Servant will open deacons and deacon candidates to their true identity, and their mission, as heralds of the Gospel of Christ.

