

THE HOMILY: COMMUNICATING THE WORD OF GOD TO TODAY'S WORLD

(Liturgical, Theological and Pastoral Aspects)

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Two disciples of Christ, walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, met the Risen Lord, listened to him announcing and explaining the Good News, and received him as their host during the breaking of the bread. At first they did not recognize him. But he was really present amongst them. Then, still not knowing who he was, their hearts were burning within them as he was explaining to them the Scripture. And finally, at the table, when he broke the bread, their eyes were opened. And they wanted to share their joy of meeting the Lord by relating this experience to the other disciples

This is an account of a liturgical assembly and celebration which took place on a Sunday evening in the first century.¹

This account described, primarily, the nature of our liturgical celebration. The liturgy is:

- (a) a meeting with Christ “on the way” when we meet together in his name;²

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1. Lk 24,13-35.
2. Lk 24,15; cf Mt 18,20.

- (b) a dialogue with him as we receive his word which enlightens us;³
- (c) an invitation for the breaking of the bread in which we sit at the table to receive him;⁴
- (d) and finally, the joy of spreading the Good News of his resurrection.⁵

Besides this, we have to notice here the relation between “the word” and “the Eucharist”, both being, in different ways, a “celebration” of Christ’s presence in the liturgical assembly.

And finally we observe in this biblical account that between “Word” and “Sacrament” there is a link, a sort of mediation between the Word of God proclaimed and God’s people assembled. This mediation is what we call “the Homily”. St. Luke says that Christ was explaining “to them (the disciples) the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself” (24,27).

Thus we may conclude that in the liturgical celebration there is a passage realized in a threefold action: the Written Word is *proclaimed*, – the Word is *explained* and *applied*, – the Word is *realized* in the Eucharist Meal.⁶

A. Relation between the Word and its interpretation — application, in the Gospel and the Acts

I refer here to three biblical accounts from the New Testament:

(a) Lk 4,16-22: Christ went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. “*He stood up to read*, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written ... He then rolled up the scroll ... Then *he began to speak* to them, “This text is being *fulfilled today even as you listen*’. And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips”.

We can easily say that here we encounter *a prototype of a homily*. Jesus reads the text from the Old Testament, interpreting it and applying it to himself.

(b) Lk 24,25-26: I have already referred above to this passage regarding the disciples of Emmaus. Here Christ explains the texts from the Old Testament

3. Lk 24,18-27.

4. Lk 24, 28-32.

5. Lk 24,33-35.

6. Cf A. BEA, “Valeur pastorale de la Parole de Dieu dans la liturgie,” *La Maison-Dieu (LMD)* 47-48(1956) 127-148, p.131. See also A.M. ROGUET, “Renouveau de la liturgie et renouveau de la prédication,” *Ibid.*, 149.

and interprets them, applying them to himself. So, here again, the Written Word is explained and applied 'hic et nunc'.

(c) Acts 13,14-16: Paul and his friends went to the Synagogue. "After the lessons from the Law and the Prophets had been read, the presidents of the Synagogue sent them a message: 'Brothers, if you would like to address some words of encouragement to the congregation, please do so'. Paul stood up, ... and began to speak: ..." Paul's sermon here was an interpretation of the Old Testament events applying them to the New Testament as they were fulfilled in Christ. Thus Paul's sermon was a homily in which he communicated the Word of God to that particular assembly. The result was that "many Jews and devout converts joined Paul and Barnabas" (13,42.43).

B. The Word proclaimed and interpreted, and its relation in the Eucharist, up to the 2nd Century

In a short period of 100 years a great development took place regarding the structure of the Eucharistic celebration and the relation: Word – Eucharist. We can distinguish four stages:

a) The Last Supper according to the Synoptics (Mt 26,26-29; Mk 14,22-25; Lk 22,15-20). Here we have a special assembly with Christ himself present. Christ delivers farewell discourses (cf Jn 13-17) and then institutes the Eucharistic meal.

b) The eucharist during the apostolic age (1Cor 11,23-25). Around the year 55-57 AD, the first Christians meet together for a fraternal meal (*agapé*) and then they celebrate the Lord's Supper. In this text there is no reference to readings or a sermon, but only to a meeting or an assembly of Christians who eat together a fraternal meal, as it was supposed to be, before celebrating the Eucharist.

c) St. Paul in Troas (Acts 20,7-12) around the year 58. This was a vigil celebrating the Lord's day; it began on the evening of Saturday and it was Sunday at daybreak that Paul and the first Christians broke the bread (the Eucharist). During this assembly there was a sermon preached by Paul and then the Breaking of the Bread.

d) The Eucharist around the year 150, and surely before, according to St. Justin.⁷ This is the text which describes the Sunday Eucharistic Assembly:

7. *Apologia I 67, 3-5*. English translation as published by ROBERT CABIÉ in *The Church at Prayer, Volume II: The Eucharist* (translated by MATTHEW J. O'CONNELL) (The Liturgical Press; Collegeville, Minnesota 1986) 14-16.

“On the day named after the sun, all who live in city or countryside assemble in the same place. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. When the lector has finished, the president addresses us and exhorts us to imitate the splendid things we have heard.

Then we all stand and pray.

As we said earlier, when we have finished praying, bread, wine, and water are brought up.

The president then prays and gives thanks according to his ability.

And the people give their assent with an ‘Amen!’

Next, the gifts, which have been ‘eucharistified’ are distributed, and everyone shares in them, while they are also sent via the deacons to the absent brethren.”

It is clear from this text that in the second century the celebration of the Eucharist already had a definite structure, as it is today. These are the main points:

- assembly of the Christians on Sunday morning;
- readings from the Bible (Old and New Testament);
- homily;
- prayers;
- offering of bread and wine;
- eucharistic prayer ending with an ‘Amen’;
- distribution of the Eucharist to those present;
- distribution, by the deacons, to the absent brethren.

It is important here to note the relation between: the Word of God *read*, the Word of God *Preached and communicated* to the brethren assembled, and the *celebration of the Eucharist*.

Comparing the four stages in the development of the eucharistic celebration: the Last Supper, Corinth (A.D. 55-57), Troas (A.D. 58), and St. Justin (A.D. 150), we can conclude that:

a) In the post-apostolic period, when the “living word” of Christ and the apostles was over, the “Written Word” read from the Sacred Books makes its regular appearance.

b) The Word of God, that is the readings from the Sacred Books, takes the place of the fraternal meal (the “Agapé”) and its role is double; it “forms” the assembly and it “nourishes” the faithful. Instead of a “material” meal, now we

have a “spiritual” meal. For, as Jesus says: “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”.⁸

c) From this development in the structure of the celebration, it results that the eucharist combines in one a double meal or two tables; the Table of the Word of God and the Table of the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ.⁹ They are so “closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship”.¹⁰ They are two different ways of Christ’s real presence in the liturgy: in the Word and in the Sacrament.¹¹

d) Word and Sacrament are so closely related to each other that:

(i) The Word is, in a way, realized and rendered active in the Sacrament. There is a parallelism between the mystery of the incarnation: “the Word becomes Flesh” and thus a Sacrament, and the mystery of the Eucharist: this Sacramental Word becomes a Sacramental Meal.

(ii) The Sacrament is the “action” which realizes the “Word”: in this sense: “do this” is followed by “we celebrate your order”.

e) Around the year AD 150, St. Justin, in the first description of the celebration of the Eucharist,¹² gives us for the first time the real definition of the homily when he says: “When the lector has finished (reading the Word of God from the Sacred Books), the president *addresses us and exhorts us to imitate the splendid things we have heard*”. Thus the homily is set clearly in connection with the Word of God read, and communicates the message contained therein to the faithful assembled.

8. Mt 4,4; cf *Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC)*, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, art. 51.

9. Cf *SC*, art. 48 and 56; see also the commentary by P. JOUNEL in *LMD* 77(1964) 127.

10. *SC*, art. 56.

11. Cf *SC*, art. 7.

12. Text quoted above, note 7; English translation, p.15.

*C. The Homily: A mediation between the Word of God and God's people in the early Church tradition*¹³

What is the homily? This Greek word *homilia* originally meant an interchange of thoughts by words (1Cor 15,33), a dialogue, a familiar conversation.¹⁴ In the biblical account of Lk 24, in vv. 14.15 we read that the disciples "were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they *talked this over*, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side..." The phrase "talked this over" in the Greek text is *homilein*, in the sense of a conversation. And in Acts 24,26, the word *hōmilei* means 'speaking with'.

It was Origen (AD 185-254) who first gave to the word *homiliai* its proper meaning. These "homilies" were the "talks on select chapters or passages of the Bible" which he delivered in liturgical assemblies. The nature of these homilies "is that of a familiar talk to impart spiritual edification".¹⁵ And, as we have already seen from Justin's *Apologia*, these homilies were from the very start intimately connected with the Bible readings.

So we can already conclude that two points characterize the homily in the early Church tradition, namely: its intimate connection with the Word of God just read and its reference to the people of God assembled.

Let us take a few examples from the early writers-preachers of the Church. Origen himself who, though a layman preached the homilies in the eucharistic assembly,¹⁶ composed 200 homilies on the Sacred Scriptures.

St. John Chrysostom (c. 344-407) gave innumerable talks on biblical texts read in the assembly, in which his main intention was to actualize the Word of God and apply it to the particular situation of the christian community.¹⁷

13. I suggest two studies on this particular topic, regarding the nature of the homily in the Church of the Fathers: DOM JEAN LECLERCQ, "Le Sermon, Acte Liturgique" in *LMD* 8(1946) 27-46; (I - "La Période des Pères", p.29; II - "Le Moyen Âge", p.37). And ALEXANDRE OLIVAR, "Quelques remarques historiques sur la prédication comme action liturgique dans l'Église Ancienne" in *Mélanges liturgiques offerts au R.P. Dom Boue O.S.B.* (Abbaye de Mont César; Louvain 1972) 429-443.
14. J. GELINEAU, "L'Homèlie, forme plenièrre de la prédication", *LMD* 82(1965) 29-42, p.35.
15. J. LUPI, *The Homily*, *Melita Theologica*, Vol. XVII/2 (1956) 35-48, p.35. See also M. RIGHETTI, *Storia Liturgica*, Vol. III, *L'Eucaristia*, (ed. Ancora; Milano 1956) 200-244, especially p.234.
16. J.A. JUNGSMANN, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Tome 2 (Aubier; Paris 1952) 227.
17. OLIVAR, "Quelques remarques", 432.

St. Augustine (AD 354-430) in his Sermon 95,1, states clearly that the preacher is the messenger of God's Word: he is the one who hears the Word no less than his hearers themselves. These are his words: "What I give you is not mine. I eat what you eat, live on what you live. We have a common store in Heaven; from there, in fact, comes the Word of God".¹⁸

St. Gregory the Great, Pope (AD 590-604), in his homilies, used a method of exposition which applies the revealed Word of God to the various categories of persons in a way similar to an individual conversation.¹⁹

According to Egeria's *Peregrinatio* (c. AD 400), referring to the homilies preached in Jerusalem on Sundays, these sermons had as their aim "to instruct the people on the Scriptures and in the love of God".²⁰

As a general conclusion on this period of patristic writings we may say that "The homily was certainly the most important way of bringing out the "today" of God's word. Biblical exegesis, historical commentary, doctrinal and moral instruction all of which were aspects of the preaching of the Fathers played their part in the intention of actualizing the Scriptures in the life of the Christians who had gathered for ecclesial prayer and were soon to scatter again and return to the world".²¹

D. From the homily to the "thematic" sermon after the tenth century

After the 10th century we notice a great lack in the use of the Bible and much less variety in the selection of readings from the Scriptures. Instead of the lectionary, the plenary Missal came into use with a smaller number of biblical pericopes.

During that same period the homily had degenerated and there was even a time when hardly any preaching was done at all.²² Towards the end of the Middle Ages, preaching is separated, more and more, from the Mass.²³

18. L. DELLA TORRE, "Omelia", in *Nuovo Dizionario di Liturgia* (DOMENICO SARTORE/ACHILLE M. TRIACCA eds.) (Ed. Paoline; Roma 1984) 923-943; see also p.928. See also R. CABIE, *Church at Prayer*, 68.

19. LECLERCQ, "Sermon, Acte Liturgique", 35.

20. *Peregrinatio Egeriae* n.25; cf DELLA TORRE, "Omelia", 942, note 24.

21. CABIE, *Church at Prayer*, 67.

22. LUPI, "Homily, 38.

23. JUNGSMANN, *Sollemnia*, 227 note 5.

The thirteenth century brought a revival of preaching thanks to the mendicant orders, but the preaching tended to be unrelated to the liturgy. Generally the discourse was not a homily but an explication of dogma or moral principles.²⁴

The Council of Trent insisted on the duty of pastors to preach to the faithful on the readings of the Mass often, but especially on Sundays and feast days:

“...the holy Council, in order that the sheep of Christ may not go unfed, lest ‘the children beg for food but no one gives to them’ (Lam 4,4), orders that pastors and all who have the care of souls must frequently, either by themselves or through others, explain during the celebration of Masses some of the readings of the Mass, and among other things give some instruction about the mystery of this most holy sacrifice, especially on Sundays and feast days”.²⁵

However, even after the decrees of the Council of Trent, and in spite of Can. 1344-1345 of the Code of Canon Law,²⁶ preaching in modern times was still separated from liturgical actions and mostly thematic.²⁷ Benedict XV, in his Encyclical *Humani Generis Redemptoris* on preaching of the Word of God²⁸ condemns the fact that many preachers put aside and ignore the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the arguments from Sacred Theology, and speak almost exclusively the language of reason!

E. The homily: a liturgical act: Vatican Council II and after

The Conciliar Constitution “Sacrosanctum Concilium” of Vatican II, in arts. 24, 35, 51 and 52, underlines the importance of the Word of God, its application through the homily, and its relation to the Sacrament itself. The homily is a “liturgical act”. These are the texts:

Art. 24: “Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from it that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung. It is from the scriptures that the

24. CABIÉ, *Church at Prayer*, 154.

25. 22nd Session: *Doctrine on the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass* (1952). Text translated and published in *The Christian Faith*, (J. NEUNER/J. DUPUIS eds) (Collins; London 1986) 427, n.1554.

26. See also Can. 1347 of CIC (1917).

27. DELLA TORRE, “Omelia”, 930.

28. Published on the 15th of June 1917; cf DELLA TORRE, “Omelia”, 931.

prayers, collects, and hymns draw their inspiration and their force, and that actions and signs derive their meaning.”

Art. 35: “That the intimate connection between rite and words may be apparent in the liturgy:

(1) In sacred celebrations a more ample, more varied, and more suitable reading from sacred scriptures should be restored.

(2) The most suitable place for a sermon ought to be indicated in the rubrics, for a sermon is part of the liturgical action whenever the rite involves one. The ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled most faithfully and carefully. The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources, for it is the proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation, which is the mystery of Christ ever made present and active in us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy”.

Art. 51: “The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word. In this way a more representative part of the sacred scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years”.

Art. 52: “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year. 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 holidays of obligation, with the people assisting, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason”.

From these texts we can draw the following conclusions:

1. There is an intimate link between the Word and the Sacrament, as I have already stated above.
2. The importance of the Word of God lies in the fact that it is a continuation of Christ’s real presence among his people in an efficacious way, as a spiritual meal.
3. The homily is “part of the liturgy itself” and should be based on scriptural and liturgical sources. It is the proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation. By means of it the mysteries of the faith and

the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year.

What do we mean when we say that the homily is "part of the liturgy itself" and a "liturgical act"?

First of all the homily is an integral part of the liturgy itself (*SC*, art. 52) in the sense that one of the aims of the liturgy is to instruct the faithful (*SC*, art. 33). It distributes the Word to man, the Word of God incarnate. One can understand the profound sense which lies in the link between preaching and the celebration of the sacrifice as it is set in the ceremonial of bishops.²⁹

Secondly, according to *SC*, art. 7, "The liturgy ... is ... an exercise of the priestly function of Jesus Christ". This means that Christ, as the supreme and only priest of the New Testament, offered himself to the Father and was the only mediator between God and man. Thus his self offering had a twofold aim: the glorification of God and the sanctification of man. So the homily, being a liturgical act, is in an analogous way the act of Christ himself and has a sacramental value. In fact the homily aims to be an efficacious means to bring out God's glorification and man's sanctification.

As regards God's glorification we can observe, with A. Olivar,³⁰ that many ancient sermons or homilies ended with a conclusion which had the nature of a doxology. In this way the homily expresses the wish that God be praised and glorified in the Christian's way of life.

Regarding the "sanctification of man" we may conclude that the homily has a sacramental value. C. Vagaggini³¹ stresses this point when he asserts: "preaching is a *mysterium*, a *sacramentum*; *mysterium* and *sacramentum*, of course, in the general sense of ancient tradition, which we already know, involves a sensible sign, efficacious in its own way, significant of supersensible realities in relation to God's economy of salvation in Christ". The sensible sign is the Word of the preacher. The supersensible reality is salvation in Christ or man's sanctification.

Finally, the homily is a continuation of Christ's presence in the word, as we read in the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, n. 11,³² and is intimately related to the

29. LECLERCQ, "Sermon, Acte Liturgique", 32.

30. OLIVAR, "Quelque remarques", 438.

31. *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, (Trans. L.J. DOYLE) (The Liturgical Press; Collegeville, Minnesota 1976) 861.

32. Published on the 3rd September 1965. See the text in *Enchiridion Documentorum*

sacraments. In all sacramental celebrations, the Word of God, read and preached, announces the salvation and sanctification which are realized in the sacraments.

This means that it is a mistake to insist only on the cultural value of the sacramental celebration, and it is incorrect to create a parallelism between word-homily and cult as if these were two separate actions. On the contrary, we have to insist on the unity of the liturgical act and the integrity of the liturgical assembly. Here the priest is the minister of the “word” and the “sacrament” at the same time.³³

*F. Pastoral aspects regarding the homily*³⁴

We are fully aware of the difficulties one has to encounter when one wants to preach a good homily in the sense of “communicating the word of God to today’s world”.

- a) There is a great variety of biblical texts read during the liturgical celebration, at times very difficult, at other times nearly identical, especially certain selections from the Gospel.
- b) On Sundays during the year how can we preach on the second lesson of the lectionary?
- c) Can we find a particular theme for particular Sundays during the year?³⁵

Instaurationis Liturgicae, I-(1963-1973) (REINER KACZYNSKI ed) (Marietti; Roma 1975) 147 n.434: “... Praesens adest Ecclesiae suae praedicanti, cum Evangelium, quod annuntiatur, verbum Dei sit, et nonnisi nomine et auctoritate Christi, Verbi Dei incarnati, ipsoque adsistente, praedicetur...”

33. Regarding the sacramental value of the homily, see GÓRG FRENDO, “L-Omelija Sagrumentali”, *Pastor* 71(June 1974) 22-28.
34. See BEA “Valeur pastorale de la Parole de Dieu dans la liturgique” (note 6) and J. ARTAUD, “L’Homélie” *LMD* 84(1965) 134-139.
35. See on this point A.M. ROGUET, “Lectures Bibliques et Mystère de salut”, in *LMD* 99(1969) 7-27, p.18.

1. What the homily "is not"

From what we have already stated above, we can make a whole list of qualities which do not fit a "liturgical homily". Being a liturgical act, the homily is not:

- a "didascalía" pronounced by a catechist; it is not an exegesis of the biblical texts; it is not a course of theological lectures;
- it cannot be just an instruction which appeals to the intellect;
- it should not be too moralistic. The homily is distinct from, for example, lenten sermons;
- it should not be sentimental, though it has also to touch man's sentiments;
- it has to avoid abstract and difficult terms, hard for the hearers to understand;
- it has to refer to the person without being too personal, but neither impersonal.

2. What the homily ought to be

- It should be a familiar conversation, a dialogue with the hearers, or at least provoking a response.
- It has to be an application of the message contained in the word of God to today's world.
- As a liturgical act it must aim towards the glorification of God and the sanctification of man.
- According to C. Vagaggini,³⁶ these are the modern desires with regard to the homily: it has to be concrete, take a unified view of revelation, that is, to be liturgical, biblical, theological and Christocentric.
- During the eucharistic celebration, it would be desirable that, sometimes, the homily be oriented towards the Eucharist. In this way it is presented as part of the mystery.

36. *Theological Dimensions*, 876-879.

3. Who preaches the homily?

As a rule it is the right and duty of the president of the assembly, bishop, presbyter or deacon, to preach the homily. However there is a possibility of “participated homilies”³⁷ especially in small communities, where lay people can participate by bringing forward their experiences in christian life.

And there is a particular possibility in the case of children’s masses in which only a few adults participate. In fact, in the *Directory on Children’s Masses*³⁸ in n. 24 we read: “There is no reason why one of the adults should not preach a homily to the children after the Gospel, especially if the priest has difficulty in adapting himself to the mentality of the children ...”

4. The object or content of the homily

The homily has to expound the “main theme” contained in the biblical readings, not the most intellectual idea but the most vital one. There may be also a secondary theme so as to make reference to a larger and more diverse assembly.

On Sundays during the year, this theme is found in the Gospel with reference to the first reading. This Old Testament text might launch the main theme of the Gospel.

On certain occasions one may preach the homily on a particular verse or text from the biblical readings, such as the responsorial psalm.³⁹ In this case one has to refer to the whole context.

The contents of the homily, Sunday after Sunday, has to include in its totality, the whole divine revelation.

5. Systems or style of the homily

The homily has to express a certain connection and horizontal unity between the biblical and liturgical texts as much as possible. A vertical unity, that is between the texts from different Sundays, is not always possible.

37. DELLA TORRE, “Omelia”, 942 note 36.

38. Text published in English in A. FLANNERY (ed), *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Dublin 1975) 254-270 especially p.262.

39. See B. FISCHER, “Peut-on prêcher sur un verset ou une phrase de la Bible?” *LMD* 99(1969) 88-93.

In its quality as a “communication of God’s word to modern man”, the homily may be delivered according to a particular style called A - B - A, or 1 - 2 - 1. This means that it may take as a point of departure a concrete fact from daily life; then expound the biblical message, and finally apply the message to the Christian living today.

As regards this system or style of the homily, G.Wainwright⁴⁰ says: “it matters little whether the preacher begins with the scriptures and moves to the present or begins with the present human context and seeks to illuminate it from the scriptures. The two approaches may be combined to produce a constant oscillation between the scriptural text and the situation of the preacher and hearers”.

Another system or style of the homily, expounded by C.Traullè,⁴¹ is expressed in a 4-point method:

- departure from a fact of actuality;
- reference to the main biblical message;
- application to actual life;
- final reference to the message from the word of God.

The homily may be concluded with a final reference to the Eucharist, but this need not be taken as a general rule. In many other cases it has to end just with a “full stop”, as it forms in actual fact, part of an ongoing activity of the Word Sacrament.

Conclusion

In his discourse on the “bread of life”, in John 6, particularly in vv. 35-51a, 51b-58, Christ refers to two forms of this “supernatural bread”.⁴² When Christ declares: “I am the bread of life” he is asserting a vital truth, realized on two complementary levels:⁴³

40. *Doxology, A Systematic Theology* (Epworth Press; London 1982) 178.
41. “Propos et Questions sur la prédication”, *LMD* 126(1976) 83-107, p.92.
42. See on this point YVES CONGAR, *Priest and Layman* (trans. P.J. Hepburne-Scott) (Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd; London 1967) 103-138.
43. See DOM RALPH RUSSELL, “Commentary on St. John”, in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Nelson; London 1969) 1051 (808k).

(a) Christ is the Word which came down from heaven to be the living bread to the world (v. 33). He is the Word made flesh and his Word is the bread of life. He himself declares: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4,4).

(b) Christ is the Word made flesh which in turn becomes the living bread in the sacrament of his Body and Blood (v. 51).

In the liturgy, the Word of God is to be delivered to man in a way that it really becomes "the Bread of life". How is this realized? I feel that this supernatural power of the "Word of God - bread of life" becomes the more effective through the mediation of the priest who delivers the homily. He is to be the dispensator of this spiritual meal, which is the Word of God, by means of his sermon.

The homily ought to convey to God's people in today's world the vitality and efficacy contained in the Word of God. In this sense, the homily is not just a continuation of God's message and its application to man, but also, and above all, the communication of God's salvific plan of salvation to those who are honestly and sincerely disposed to accept it with a clean heart and mind. In this way it becomes effective in their daily christian life.

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