

Insights in Liturgy

By Father Benedict A. Ehmann

Word Alive

If the word of God is to come alive in our liturgies and sound out with authority, priests and lectors must work to proclaim it with all the Spirit and Skill demanded by so high an office. They must be moved by the conviction, that what they are reading to the people is a matter of life and death. Already they must have found it to be so for themselves. In their hunger for God they must be continually "searching the Scriptures" and making them the staff of their own life. Then they will find themselves more and more growing in eagerness to share with God's people the precious word they have been learning to love.

This love for the Scripture is a primary, fundamental requirement in all priests and lectors who aspire to read the Bible before God's disciples. There is no other way to make the Word come alive off the printed page as God wants it to.

Our best model of this is Jesus himself, expounding the Scriptures to the two disciples whom he joined on their way home to Emmaus on Easter afternoon. In deep despair because their hope in the Messiah was dashed by his terrible death, they were returning home to pick up the pieces and remake their life. On the way a Stranger caught up with them. Gently he entered into their discussion, and they told him of their discouragement. He then unfolded the Scriptures for them, showing them from the books of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms, how it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer before he could enter into his glory.

Passing an inn along the way, they invited him inside to eat with them, for it was supertime. It was then, when he "breaks the bread," that they recognize the Stranger as their own Jesus, and immediately he vanishes from their sight. Now that they know who he is, they declare to each other, "Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scripture to us?" (Luke 24:32).

Priests and lectors, you should have as your ideal nothing less than this, that the people you are reading for may feel their "hearts burning inside them" when they hear the sacred words. They should sense that the Word is already burning in

Fr. O'Neill To Discuss Annulments

Father Robert O'Neill, official of the diocesan Marriage Tribunal, will explain the Church's annulment procedure at two evening meetings this week at St. Christopher's, North Chili. The sessions are scheduled for 8 tonight and Friday night, May 18, under the auspices of the St. Christopher Divorced Catholics Group. The church is at 3350 Union St., between Buffalo Road and Chili Avenue.

your own heart, that it lives now in your flesh and blood, vibrates in the tone of your voice, and resonates with the understanding and love you have for it.

This seems to be the reason the Lord wills his Word to be proclaimed in the congregation: that it may become flesh and blood in each proclaimer, and in the tones of a living voice enter the minds and hearts of the congregation.

It remains true, of course, that uncountable good

comes from the private reading of the Scriptures. We are all invited and encouraged to find what God is saying to each of us as we pore over the holy pages. It is equally true, however, that God speaks to us with a special urgency through those who proclaim the word in the sacred assemblies. It is then that the word flows out of the joys and sorrows, the aches and tears, the hopes and aspirations, of the brother or sister who is proclaiming it to us. The word has been made flesh in their life, and the glory and truth of God are manifested in their faith before the people.

Here then is the task all

lectors are called to. They are to be witnesses before the worshippers how "the word" is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrows, and discerning the thoughts and intention of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

They are to realize that "Jesus is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in church" (Vatican II, Const. on the Liturgy 7). In view of this, all mispronunciations and fumbblings of the text, all disregard of phrasing and emphasis, all singsong uninflected utterance, must

be seen, not as just an embarrassment, to make one blush, but far worse, a barrier which obstructs the word from entering people's hearts with its saving grace.

More and more around the country, parishes are insisting on training courses for their lectors. Most courses have about six lessons. They revolve around two basic S's - Spirit and Skill. They work to interiorize the word, and help make it one's very own, confidently and comfortably. They then teach how to exteriorize it effectively: how to pace the reading, when to make pauses, longer or shorter, where to place emphasis and

inflections, higher or lower. The learning lectors audit each other, and acquire ability to discern and avoid the pitfalls of public speaking. When the course is completed, the Bishop enrolls them into the ministry of Lector, with a "license" to proclaim the word and make it come alive for God's people.

Finally, in all this process of preparation and performance, let not the Spirit be forgotten, who is the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God breathed into all of Holy Writ. Without him, all the proclaiming of lectors and priests will be no more than "a noisy clangor of cymbals" (1 Cor. 13:1). All our utterance must be in him and through him.

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