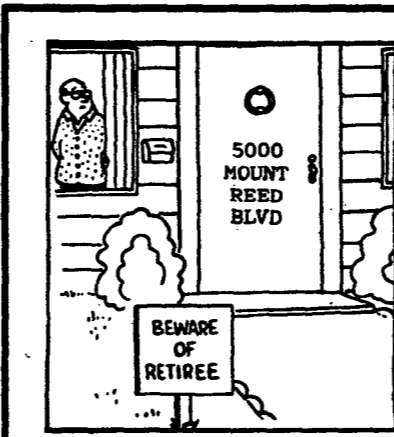


CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester Thursday, October 18, 1990 50¢ 24 pages



Priestly programs

This month's Insight package focuses on two often misunderstood programs: priests' retirement and sabbaticals. Pages 12 and 13.



Good preaching stresses content over style

By Leonard Long

When they have attained the rhetorical lows of the high epistles of Paul.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, once while St. Paul was preaching, a young man named Eutychus fell out of a second-story window and was killed.

But for Eutychus, the apostle to the Gentiles was able to preach so long that he had to stop.

They do not need to work miracles as a condition of preaching. At one time or another, most have been in the congregation, members falling asleep.

They have given little attention to the

need, the state of preaching in the Catholic church has been for many years a subject of discussion and comment.

And the discussion is often negative.

The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study (Clarion Press) since Vatican II revealed that "core Catholics" were leaving their parishes. The research — considered a landmark in preaching and interpreting — found them unimpressed and not helpful to the church.

The focus of such criticisms is on the speaking ability of the priests, but the content of their homilies. Among the chief criticisms is that contemporary homilies fail to teach Catholic doctrine and teachings.

Yet those who offer such criticisms are missing an important point, noted Father Richard DeLillio, a Catholic University professor who specializes in teaching about preaching.

"The homily is not the place to teach doctrine about dogma," Father DeLillio said. "That's why you don't see it in the (homilies)." Those who are interested in preaching retreats, Father DeLillio suggested.

retreats, Father DeLillio suggested.

Father Kevin Murphy, co-pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish on Rochester's Humboldt Street, echoed the professor's contentions.

"We need to make a distinction between education and inspiration," Father Murphy said. "I think we all have a responsibility to read, to continue to learn, but I don't think eight minutes on a Sunday morning is going to do it."

The heyday of strictly catechetical homilies, Father Murphy said, "is a thing of the past."

Nevertheless, the need exists for more content in homilies, observed Mary Bolan, assistant editor of the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*.

"People are hungry for the kind of clear preaching that they are not hearing in many pulpits today," Bolan said. "A lot of times the homilies are unsatisfactory mainly because they are unchallenging."

One source of contemporary debate about homilies can be traced back to a change in emphasis brought about by Vatican II, observed Father Robert E. McNamara, the Diocese of Rochester's archivist.

Father McNamara, who in 1975 published a monograph entitled *Catholic Sunday Preaching: The American Guidelines 1791-1975*, noted that prior to Vatican II, the focus of homilies was catechetical content. This thinking produced programmed homilies

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