

Preaching

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focusing on church teachings and dogmas. "The problem was," Father McNamara remarked, "that approach neglected the Scriptures and the liturgy."

At the Second Vatican Council, Father McNamara noted, the Council Fathers declared that the homily "is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself" (Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, Article 52). In Article 35 of the same document, the council declared, "The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources."

As a result of such statements, Father McNamara said, the subject of homilies shifted from catechetics to the Scriptures.

"Theoretically, the Catholics addressed from the pulpit knew their faith," leaving preachers free to raise more complex spiritual and scriptural topics, the historian said.

But since the council, experience has taught that many Catholics know little about their faith, Father McNamara said. "You can't build on something that isn't there," he remarked.

Compounding the problem, Father McNamara said, is the fact that the church's new lectionary omits some readings that could lead to discussion of certain topics. Thus, various aspects of church doctrine might never be addressed by a priest who exclusively bases his homilies on the issues raised by the Sunday Scriptures.

Bolan suggested, however, that part of the problem with today's homilies stems from a misunderstanding of Vatican II pronouncements on preaching.

"I don't think (such pronouncements) changed that basic Catholic ideal that is a blend of Scripture and teachings," she said.

In too many cases, Bolan said, priests have "gone too far" with Vatican II edicts on preaching. "They want to make themselves relevant, but at the same time there's a tension between being relevant and diluting the message."

Father DeLillio likewise criticized trends toward diluted homilies.

"I think too often people come to church expecting to be nourished and go away with finger food," he said.

"You have to give them something to hold on to during the week," Father DeLillio observed. "If you can give them something that gives them strength and courage, that's all they need."

How to address that need through better homilies is, in fact, among the concerns being voiced by priests across the country, Bolan observed.

"There is a kind of quasi-uncomfortableness from priests," Bolan said. "There's a concern about people leaving for churches where there really is a focus on preaching."

Consequently, many priests are seeking out books, courses and speakers to help them improve their preaching, noted Judith Kollar, the Diocese of Rochester's director of continuing education.

Kollar said the diocese regularly offers continuing-education courses on preaching. Next April, the five dioceses of upstate New York, along with the Diocese of Erie, Pa., will offer a new-pastors program focusing on preaching, among other topics.

The focus was also on preaching during Rochester's 1988 Priests' Convocation, at which nationally known expert on preaching Walter Burkhardt, SJ, was among the speakers.

Rochester priests also frequently seek out help with preaching as part of their sabbatical programs, and take advantage of special courses and programs made available to them.

Kollar pointed out that all of these resources emphasize careful preparation. The priest must be aware that people want to hear homilies that touch their lives, she said.

"The priests are not always conscious of how much the people look forward to Sunday," Kollar suggested. "The people want to hear sincere preaching."

And priests want to provide it, emphasized Father Paul Schnacky, pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, Wayland, who traveled to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., in May of this year to participate in a preaching program.

"If people are not satisfied with preaching, they ought to know that priests are not satisfied with their preaching as well," Father Schnacky observed. His course also pointed out that setting aside time for preparation is critical to effective preaching.

Father DeLillio was even more emphatic about the need for thorough preparation.

"I'd make it a priority," Father DeLillio stated. "I'd find a way to fit it into my schedule, just the way I make appointments. I'd schedule in time for the readings."

Father DeLillio noted that such everyday activities as making phone calls, reading the paper and watching television can become part of the preparation process. The priest needs to preach out of the everyday experience of his life, he said, noting, "If the people can't see that you are a fellow pilgrim, they may have a hard time with your message."

Through his course, Father Schnacky also realized that effective preaching involves more than just the priest.

"The people are as much a part of the homily as the priest is," Father Schnacky said. "They ought to be praying during the week for the priest and the homily."

"Sometimes, you can feel the congregation drawing it out of you. They are responding," he continued. "Sometimes, you go out there and feel like everybody's waiting for you like at a rock concert, waiting for you to perform."

In fact, parishioners at some parishes are

invited to help participate in homily preparation.

Father Murphy, for one, has a team of parishioners who meet with him to discuss the Sunday readings about which he will be preaching.

"I think preachers always need some stimulation, new ideas, new points of view, to help them with preaching," Father Murphy said. "I find it a good experience for myself to hear other people's insights into the Scriptures."

But such preparation requires time. The typical parish priest has to worry not only about his Sunday homily, but also about homilies for daily Masses, funerals and weddings, and must take care of all the pastoral and administrative duties a parish requires.

"I think that's one of the difficulties," Father Murphy acknowledged. "We're torn in so many directions in terms of parochial ministry."

In the future, Father DeLillio suggested, the priest may not be the only or the best person to preach in parishes.

"With the appointment of (women religious) and lay people to be pastoral administrators, we may have people other than priests preaching," Father DeLillio said. These pastoral administrators, he noted, "provide the primary pastoral care. They know the people better than anyone else. They have the right to preach to the people."

Father DeLillio pointed out that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops is preparing a document setting forth norms for preaching by lay people. Until the hierarchy issues such a document, however, priests will remain the primary preachers in the U.S. church.

For the present, priests can take at least some comfort from the fact that their congregations do not expect them to match the oratory skills demonstrated by television evangelists, Kollar observed.

"I really think most of the people that you talk to don't want Billy Graham every Sunday," Kollar said. "They want something that inspires them that relates to their lives and can help them."

Father Alfred J. Horr, 76, pastor emeritus of St. Mary Magdalene's Parish in Wolcott

Father Alfred Horr, pastor emeritus of St. Mary Magdalene Parish, Wolcott, died Oct. 10, 1990, after a long history of heart disease.

Father Horr, who celebrated his golden anniversary of ordination to the priesthood in May of this year, was born in Mt. Morris on March 16, 1914. A graduate of St. Patrick's School and Mt. Morris High School, he attended St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries in Rochester. He was ordained May 18, 1940, by Bishop James E. Kearney.

Between 1940 and 1965, Father Horr served stints as an associate pastor of St. John, Spencerport; Holy Family, Auburn; St. Mary, Corning; and St. Mary, Elmira.

In 1965, Father Horr was appointed pastor of St. Mary Magdalene. He remained pastor until his retirement in 1984. He

continued to reside in Wolcott after his retirement, living in his own home.

Father John Hayes, a classmate of Father Horr's at St. Bernard's, recalled the former St. Mary Magdalene pastor as "a very quiet man, but he had a deep-seated sense of humor."

In addition, Father Horr was noted for his fine singing voice.

Mass of Christian Burial for Father Horr was celebrated Oct. 13 at St. Patrick's, Mt. Morris. Interment was in St. Patrick's Cemetery.

Father Horr is survived by his brother, Frederick Horr of Mt. Morris; brother and sister-in-law Robert and Maxine Horr of Williamson; sister-in-law, Frances Horr, of Mt. Morris; and several nieces and nephews.

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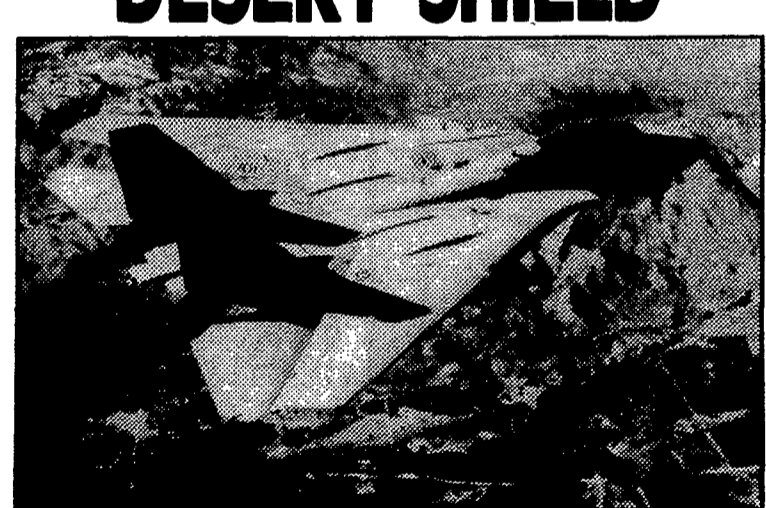
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