

Catechesis and Doctrine in Liturgical Preaching Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B.

Introduction

The title of this presentation— assigned me by the organizers of this conference but agreed to by me— may perhaps seem overburdened. *Catechesis. Doctrine. Liturgical Preaching.* Those are big topics, and I am meant to fit them all together. But I actually believe that is achievable. I will suggest to you that placing these three important topics in relationship to each other is one of the distinctive contributions of *Preaching the Mystery of Faith (PMF)*. It is precisely in this that it builds on *Fulfilled in Your Hearing (FIYH)*.

Early critics of the new document complained that it was repudiating the precious gains achieved through *FIYH*, a document which unquestionably exercised an influence that shaped Catholic preachers in such a way that they felt required to speak in substantial ways about the scriptural texts assigned to the Mass of the day. It also offered effective means for preparing such homilies. There is no need to be nervous if thirty years later the bishops discern a need to build on these gains. Surely they are right to note the changed circumstances in which the Church in the United States finds itself some thirty years later. They note especially the need to engage in a New Evangelization called for insistently by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. The implications and requirements of the New Evangelization will naturally affect preaching in a significant way.

The bishops note as well that our country has grown increasingly more culturally diverse in the last thirty years. It is precisely here— New Evangelization in a culturally diverse context— that the bishops articulate the way they want to build on the gains of *FIYH*. And it is here, at the very outset of their document, that we hear them putting catechesis, doctrine and liturgy all together. They say, “The Church’s rich theological, doctrinal, and catechetical tradition must therefore properly inform the preaching task in its liturgical setting, for Jesus Christ must be proclaimed in a new way and with new urgency, and the Sunday liturgy remains the basic setting in which most adult Catholics encounter Christ and their Catholic faith.”¹

Note that they do not simply say “More catechesis and doctrine in homilies!” again as some early critics and nervous headlines in Catholic publications have complained.² In the passage just cited they say that these must

¹ *PMF*, p. 5.

² For an example of the early critics’ hypersensitive reaction and lack of nuance in reading the document, see the brief article by Thomas Baker in *Commonweal*, Jan 7, 2013. and the online discussion it launched.

<http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=22610>.

“inform” the task of preaching. They connect this to preaching’s liturgical context and express their desire to spell out some of the implications of this connection. Doing this well and with sufficient detail is, of course, a theological task bigger than a document of this sort can achieve, but the document offers clear directions for development. I present my own reading of it here as an indication of some of those directions, directions which I very much welcome. I want to follow the document’s suggestions on how catechesis and doctrine can “inform” the preaching task, and I want to take note of the document’s repeated attention to the liturgical context of which a good preacher must remain ever mindful. Indeed, insistence on attention to this liturgical context is one of the distinctive contributions of *PMF*. Nothing is lost here of the emphasis on scriptural preaching associated with *FIYH*. But much is gained, for the Scriptures themselves expand into the sacramental presence of the Lord himself when proclaimed in the liturgical context. Catechesis and doctrine “inform” the task of the one who must point to all this in preaching.

I will follow here the document’s discussion in two of its chapters, the first devoted to the Biblical Foundations and the second to Liturgical Preaching. I should say at the outset that I do not intend to offer here practical strategies for constructing particular homilies. Rather, I want to think with you about the deep structures that must undergird such strategies. I think that is what is being offered in the two chapters I will examine here.

Biblical Foundations

The document’s opening chapter on biblical foundations can serve to answer those who suggest that somehow the bishops are retreating from a biblically based preaching. This chapter is a sturdy, if brief, biblical-theological presentation of the mystery of a God who “reveals himself through his creative and powerful Word.”³ Other speakers in this conference have dealt at greater length with the material treated in this section. For our purposes now I want to draw attention to two important moments in this rich chapter.

First, after looking at a number of examples of the way “the Gospels consistently portray the divine power of Jesus’ words,”⁴ an important distinction is drawn. The bishops say, “Even so, there is a difference in kind between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of the Apostles. Jesus, though bearing testimony to the Father, also bears testimony to himself. The Apostles, for their part, bear testimony not to themselves but to Jesus. He indeed becomes the principal content of their preaching.”⁵ This distinction is of critical importance in conceiving the homilist’s task. Even if the homilist has much to gain from carefully observing Jesus’ own preaching — and the document offers many

³ *PMF*, p. 7.

⁴ *PMF*, p. 8.

⁵ *PMF*, pp. 8-9.

examples⁶— it is Jesus himself, in all the mystery of his risen existence, that forms the basic content of the apostolic preaching, the very same preaching for which bishops, priests, and deacons are all ordained till this present day.

The document draws a connection between this apostolic preaching and Pentecost, showing the relationship between the Risen Lord and the Spirit that he pours out. Two key biblical texts that succinctly demonstrate what the Spirit achieves in us are cited. In 1 Corinthians 12: 3, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” In Galatians 4: 6, “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” On the basis of these texts and the developments that precede them, the document formulates a useful point of focus. It says, “This defines the preacher’s task: enabling the whole community and each individual believer to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit and to say with one’s whole being, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and to cry out to God, ‘Abba, Father!’”⁷

The document does not explicitly say so here, but it is useful for our purposes to observe that in this focused statement there are implications and indications for how *catechesis* and *doctrine* and *liturgy* relate to one another in preaching. “Jesus is Lord” is an enormously potent biblical condensation of what unfolds from the whole mystery of his death and resurrection. In it is contained his humanity (Jesus), his divinity (Lord), the Father who glorifies him and the Spirit who enables us to utter this phrase with understanding. “Abba, Father!” condenses the entire being of the divine Son into a name he utters from all eternity, a name he utters throughout his earthly life, a name he utters as he breathes his last on the cross, a name he utters as he gives unceasing thanks and glory to his Father for resurrection. This same name is placed on our lips from the depths of Jesus’ risen being by the Spirit he pours out on us. Nowhere does this happen more forcefully or more completely than when the Church is gathered for the liturgy.

Doctrine correctly unfolds these potent condensations and points us to manifold riches that might otherwise escape us. *Catechesis* explains them in ways that can be grasped by those not professionally trained in doctrine’s intricacies. It does so not all at once, but patiently, bit by bit, as occasion and context warrant. *Liturgy* is the context in which we experience that doctrines and the content of catechesis are not abstract ideas to be mastered but rather a description of the very event of liturgy itself. Liturgy is “the whole community and each individual believer” saying, “Jesus is Lord” and “Abba, Father!”

The insight of the document at this point can be thought of as a sort of template for the preacher. Obviously in different ways, according to the many different liturgical settings and the scriptural readings involved, one does not mechanically say in every homily “Jesus is Lord” and “Abba, Father!” But there is a way in which that ultimately is what is happening in the community’s

⁶ See especially pp. 9-14.

⁷ *PMF*, p. 9.

celebration of Eucharist, and the preacher is helped in conceiving his task by his awareness of this. We will see more of this in other parts of the document.

The second part of this chapter on biblical foundations to which I wish to draw attention is the use it makes of Luke's account of the risen Lord's encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It introduces its reflection by referring to the passage as providing "powerful insights into the ministry of liturgical preaching."⁸ Four points are developed, only one of which we will look at here, the one entitled "The Sunday Homily as Integral to the Eucharist." It says, "The Emmaus account illuminates the interpenetration of the two dimensions of the Eucharistic liturgy. Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures (the Liturgy of the Word) leads to an intense experience of communion with the Risen Christ (the Liturgy of the Eucharist), and the very vividness of the latter brings about a deeper appreciation of the former ('Were not our hearts burning within us?')."⁹

This point of the "interpenetration" of the two dimensions of the Eucharistic liturgy is very important for the homilist to consider, and it will be developed further in the next chapter on liturgical preaching. It is enough for us to note at present, as the document itself does, that this connection forms part of the biblical foundations of preaching. That is, it is not simply the bishops in a mood to add greater emphasis to the Eucharist rather than to the Scriptures.¹⁰ The Scriptures themselves attest to this interpenetration.

The document further reminds us of Vatican II's insistence in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that the homily is an integral part of the Eucharist itself.¹¹ The homily corresponds to Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures in the Emmaus account in reference to the mystery of his own death and resurrection. But the manner and content of his explanation prepare as well for his being recognized in the breaking of the bread, and this would correspond to the homilist doing the same. "This is why it is preferable," the bishops say, "that the celebrant of the Eucharistic liturgy also be the homilist."¹² The effective homilist holds these two parts of the liturgy together by being active in both. In his reflections that prepare for the homily, the homilist can anticipate, in order to suggest for the congregation, ways in which the Eucharist might shed its light backwards, as it were, onto the experience with the word itself – "Were not our hearts burning within us?" – even as he can point from the word ahead to the more intense encounter with the Lord in the breaking of the bread.

This first chapter on the biblical foundations for the Church's preaching ministry ends on this extended development of the Emmaus account, only one of

⁸ *PMF*, p. 13. For the whole development of the Emmaus account, see pp. 13-18.

⁹ *PMF*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Pace* the critics mentioned in n. 2 who suggest this.

¹¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 52 as noted in *PMF*, p. 17.

¹² *PMF*, p. 17.

which dimensions we have considered here. It could be described as offering a strong paschal focus on all that is said about these biblical foundations. This opens naturally then onto the next chapter, “The Ministry of Liturgical Preaching,” a reading of which forms the second major part of this presentation.

The Ministry of Liturgical Preaching

It is not enough to say – as some exaggerated defenses of *FIYH* do – that a homily *must* be about the scriptural readings of the day. That is certainly true, but these readings have a context: the Liturgy. The next chapter of our document wants to unfold and explore this context. I will try to summarize here some of that exploration and say why I think it is significant.

The Christological Foundation of the Homily. The chapter opens with what, from a theological point of view, could be described as a very strong beginning in a section titled “The Christological Foundation of the Homily.” It is worth being sure that we secure all that is being said here. The opening sentence cuts to the chase: “The Death and Resurrection of Jesus – the culmination and heart of Jesus’ mission of revealing God’s love for the world – is the central act of our salvation.”¹³ The bishops immediately connect this forceful and clear statement to St. Paul’s foundational text in 1 Cor 15: 3-4, where Paul delivers to the Corinthian community what he considers to be the heart of the tradition that he himself had received. Paul is cited here as saying, “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures,” and “he rose again on the third day, according to the Scriptures.” And so the bishops affirm, “The homilist, then, must again and again put into relief this ‘according to the Scriptures’ of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus and its meaning for our lives.”¹⁴

In fact, the Bible is a huge and vast book, and now with the beautiful Lectionary that is the fruit of the liturgical reform in our times, Catholic communities, precisely by celebrating Sunday and weekday Eucharist, are exposed over time to every major genre of this rich literature and to all of its key passages. The homilist is in principle responsible for speaking about them all. And, in effect, what the bishops are offering here is a clear sense of where the center of this vast book lies. Their claim is a theological one, full of consequences for preaching. They say, “Every scriptural text on which he [the homilist] preaches leads to that center and sheds light on the mystery of that principal deed of God [Death and Resurrection] from different biblical perspectives.” Those perspectives fall into different categories, categories that correspond to the three scriptural passages read at a Sunday Eucharist. These are Israel’s history (the first reading), an apostle’s theological reflection (the second reading), and the perspective of a particular Evangelist (the Gospel reading). The Gospel, of course, is the center of the Scriptures; and the liturgy makes this clear by the

¹³ *PMF*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *PMF*, p. 19.

manner in which it is read, the place, the gestures and symbols that accompany it, and the ordained minister that proclaims it. And the bishops describe an Evangelist as one “who speaks of the life of Jesus in such a way as to show its climax in his Death and Resurrection.”¹⁵

In the several sentences of the document I have cited here, we should note that the bishops are expressing, in concise form, momentous and complex decisions that the Christian community achieved in the first several centuries of its existence as it brought the Scriptures together into the canonical form in which we have known and read them ever since. The Christian community reads Israel’s Scriptures as her own precisely because – and only because – her risen Lord showed in them “what referred to him in all the Scriptures”; precisely because – and only because – he showed through these Scriptures that “it was necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory.” (Luke 24: 26-27) The Christian community reads in the apostolic letters (generally the second reading) the fundamental theological moves that show how to read the Scriptures in this way and show this clear center. Typical of this is Paul’s clear creedal statement cited at the beginning of this development. And finally, the Christian community reads in the Gospels not simply edifying stories about Jesus in his earthly life, but she follows the different paths that four different Gospels take us to one same clear climax in his death and resurrection. So the bishops stand on very solid theological ground when they conclude this first part of the chapter by claiming, “Thus the person and mission of Jesus, culminating in his Death and Resurrection, is ultimately the central content of all the Scriptures.”¹⁶ So yes, indeed, the homilist must speak about the scriptural readings of the day – but in such a way as to show how they lead to this central content.

The Homily and the Eucharist. As you will have noticed, the extended meditation on the risen Lord’s appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus that ended the first chapter of our document has been carried over into the chapter we are considering now. Together with 1 Cor 15: 3-4 it forms the biblical foundation for the claim about central content.¹⁷ In the next section of this chapter, by following the natural development of the same Emmaus account, “the essential connection between Scripture, the homily, and the Eucharist” is developed. The bishops rightly note that it was only in “the breaking of the bread” that the disciples ultimately recognized their Risen Lord and likewise only then that they realized that their hearts were burning within them while he explained the Scriptures. That is to say, there is a sense in which the experience

¹⁵ *PMF*, p. 19.

¹⁶ *PMF*, p. 19.

¹⁷ These, of course, are not the only biblical texts on which such a claim could be made. They simply are two strong texts that the bishops selected for this short document.

of Eucharist casts its force backwards to the Liturgy of the Word revealing only now, in Eucharist, how much was already present in the Scriptures. Wanting to secure this wonderful connection, the bishops offer a very explicit directive and in doing so are certainly wanting to push preaching in a new direction by this document. They say, “This is why virtually every homily preached during the liturgy should make some connection between the Scriptures just heard and the Eucharist about to be celebrated.”¹⁸

I welcomed this statement, but to my surprise, the string of conversation that I followed on the early and critical blog, took some cynical snipes at it.¹⁹ It is enough just to read the next sentence of the document to realize that this does not intend that all homilies will always have Eucharist as their central subject. It says, “Depending on what opportunities the texts in question provide, such a connection might be very brief or even only implicitly indicated, but at other times a firm connection should be established and drawn out.”²⁰

The way in which the bishops explain this point further can be considered another template for structuring a homily.²¹ They connect the center of the Scriptures (which they have just clearly articulated as being the Death and Resurrection of Jesus) with what the Eucharist is; namely, “the memorial of the Lord’s Death, during the course of which we recognize that ‘the Lord has truly been raised’ (Lk 24:34)...”²² I call this a template because it can serve as a deep structure to any homily preached during the Eucharist, a deep structure whose details allow any number of variations. In commenting on the readings, the center of death and resurrection can be indicated in the terms that the texts provide; and, with those images and images from other parts of the liturgy, that same center can be indicated in the Eucharist about to be celebrated. As the bishops say, this can be briefly done, or at times only implicitly suggested; but at other times, a firm connection should be developed, especially when the texts and the celebration in question provide the opportunity. The point is not to burden a single homily with an explicit expression of all these perspectives. It is rather to provide a pattern – or a template – for homilies preached over time. The directive they are providing here expresses the bishops’ hope for their churches. They say, “When this connection is consistently made clear to the Christian people, they will understand the Scriptures and the mystery of the Eucharist ever more deeply.”²³

¹⁸ *PMF*, p. 20.

¹⁹ See the references in n. 2 above.

²⁰ *PMF*, p. 20.

²¹ I used the word *template* above to describe the way in which “Jesus is Lord” and “Abba, Father!” can be used to describe the deep structure of a homily.

²² *PMF*, p. 20.

²³ *PMF*, p. 20.

At the end of this development on the homily's relation to Eucharist, the bishops admit that they are describing a challenging project for homilists. And so, in encouragement, they draw attention to two things on which homilists should rely: the grace of ordination and the great tradition of preaching that belongs to the whole Church. This is not a throwaway remark. Attention to ordination is attention drawn to the Holy Spirit poured out on the one ordained. The Spirit, as ultimate author of the Scriptures "who spoke through the prophets," (as the Creed has it), helps the mind of the preacher to perceive how the thousands of strands of the Scriptures lead to one same center and then helps him to articulate this with clarity, force and conviction. This is the same Spirit whom the preacher's same lips will implore the Father to send down for the transformation of the gifts that the people will bring to his hands immediately following his preaching.

Neither is attention drawn to the tradition of preaching a throwaway phrase. The bishops are not articulating a new pattern of preaching here. There are great models of the pattern of preaching that they describe, especially in the patristic tradition and here especially in the patristic mystagogical catechesis. But— and here is something we seldom think about in these terms— never so much as in our times, in the entire history of the Church, has such a rich Lectionary of readings been available to such a large number of believers. If the tradition provides a pattern or template, our times provide more texts than ever before and a vast variety of circumstances in which to employ and exercise the pattern. The call to New Evangelization here is now opening the door to an immense field of possibility. Taking seriously the patterns and templates that the bishops offer, we could create a new moment in the history of preaching in the Church. We should trust that the Holy Spirit, who inspires the New Evangelization, will also create in hearts open to the Spirit's "continual pondering of the deep things of God" (cf 1 Cor 2: 16) something great and new in our times from out of our own widely varying and changing circumstances.

This is why mention of theological studies here is also not a throwaway phrase. The bishops explain, "Their [homilists'] theological studies were geared toward helping them move knowledgeably among the Scriptures and to understand deeply the sacraments, which are so intimately joined to the Scriptures."²⁴ This may be a sleeper sentence. If the style of the document were less formal, they might have written next, "Hint! Hint!" The bishops are expressing an expectation here and a measure for how we study Scripture and theology in our seminaries in preparation for ordination and how we continue those studies afterwards. It is not enough to study the Bible in the purely academic approach that today divides biblical studies into many fields of specialization. The Church's Bible, the Lectionary, must also be studied for the theological positions that are expressed in its structure, its combination of

²⁴ *PMF*, pp. 20-21.

readings, and its presupposition of the context of the celebration of Eucharist that will follow upon these texts proclaimed and preached.

Doctrine and the Church's Catechesis. It is time now to turn to the other big words stuffed into the title of this presentation: *doctrine* and *catechesis*. These words form part of the title of the next section in this chapter's discussion of the ministry of liturgical preaching. That title is "The Sunday Homily, Doctrine, and the Church's Catechesis." Still sticking close to biblical texts for the development of the ideas they want to put forward, the bishops begin here with a passage from St. Paul in which they discern what they call the "intrinsic relationship between preaching, doctrine, and catechesis."²⁵ They cite Rom 10: 13-16 as the basis for this development. You will recognize the text as soon as I begin to read it, but as I do so, I will interrupt my reading, indicating the points at which doctrine, catechesis and preaching each are at issue is what is said.

St. Paul begins by himself citing Scripture for the point he wants to make about Jesus. As such, we have once again a legitimization of the pattern of christological interpretation that the bishops are building up here. In any case, Paul says, "For *anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" This actually is a "doctrinal" question – not doctrine as abstract ideas about God floated at random, but a position taken on where salvation can actually be had. The verse quoted in the document builds on Paul's previous remark a few verses earlier and not actually quoted here; namely, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10: 9) Doctrine here means the line of thought that understands this divine arrangement, that protects it from any backsliding interpretations, that precludes understandings that would contradict it. Catechesis would be delivering this content in such a way that people can put their belief in it. Thus the citation of Paul is continued with, "And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Obviously, the hearing spoken of here is more than the sound of words knocking against the eardrums. It is the kind of hearing that enables belief in a precise content. Enabling belief in a precise content that saves – that is not a bad description of the catechetical task. But let us hear now the next sentence of the citation that makes an explicit connection of all this with preaching. St. Paul continues, "And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent."

After this opening and noting that "Paul's letters were most likely read in the liturgical assemblies of the early Christian communities,"²⁶ this section offers a number of examples from the letters of Paul that illustrate what sort of questions the bishops have in mind when they speak of doctrine here. Once again the point of the center is driven home. "For Paul," they say, "the heart of his apostolic preaching is the mystery of Christ, especially the central mystery of

²⁵ *PMF*, p. 21.

²⁶ *PMF*, p. 21.

the Death and Resurrection of Christ.” They go on to point out that “Paul’s purpose is to draw his hearers into full awareness of the depth of that mystery in which they have already been plunged through Baptism.”²⁷ We can hold on to the phrase “full awareness of the depth of the mystery” as indicating part of what the bishops are concerned about when they speak of doctrine and catechesis entering into preaching.

Another phrase that gives a sense of what is at issue is “an impact on the totality of Christian life.” Listen to that phrase in this sentence: “But Paul also spends considerable time in his letters illustrating how faith in Christ and participation in the life of the Church have an impact on the totality of Christian life, offering, as it were, an extended catechetical presentation for his communities.” It is a question of “spelling out what kind of behavior life in Christ demands.”²⁸

If in this document the bishops are urging homilists to work on building up in their congregations a “full awareness of the depth of the mystery,” and if they want preaching to indicate how faith in Christ must have “an impact on the totality of Christian life,” and if they use the words *doctrine* and *catechesis* to designate these dimensions, then surely what is urged in this section must be taken to heart by homilists. The bishops are careful to preclude misunderstandings or even caricatures of the type of preaching they are calling for. They clarify, “Certainly, doctrine is not meant to be propounded in a homily in the way that it might unfold in a theology classroom or a lecture for an academic audience or even a catechism lesson. The homily is integral to the liturgical act of the Eucharist, and the language and spirit of the homily should fit that context.”²⁹ Again, the point is not to burden every single homily with all these dimensions, but rather to include them as dimensions that regularly appear. Thus, “Over time the homilist, while respecting the unique form and spirit of the Sunday homily, should communicate the full scope of this rich catechetical teaching to his congregation.”³⁰

There is in fact already in place the structure for achieving this full scope of teaching “over time.” It is the liturgical year. This is a deep structure and is integral to the meaning of every particular celebration of the Eucharist. The bishops see that awareness of this is how a homilist can bring together into a coherent whole a number of strands: Scripture passages, the relation of these to the context of Eucharist, and bringing to light the requirements of Christian belief and life based on these. All this “should be keyed to the seasons of the liturgical year...”³¹ they say.

²⁷PMF, pp. 21-22.

²⁸ PMF, p. 22.

²⁹ PMF, p. 23.

³⁰ PMF, p. 23.

³¹ PMF, p. 24.

I would have made more of this point than the document does. In any case, enough is said here to indicate what would definitely be a fruitful direction for development. If the goal is to communicate over time the full scope of the depth of the mystery and its impact on the totality of Christian life, we are not in need of somebody drawing up a program of how this might be achieved in an orderly and systematic plan of preaching. The liturgical year *is* this plan – the liturgical year with the meaning of its seasons and feasts, with the Scriptures that are already in place for these, with the prayers that are proper to the different feasts. At the center of the liturgical years stands the same center that this document has insisted on as the central content of Scripture; namely, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Around this center – around the Paschal Triduum – radiate all the other mysteries of Christ, just as weeks and months of the Church at prayer lead up to that celebration and just as weeks and months of prayer flow from it. This is the “over time” in which the bishops hope the full scope of the mystery will be exposed to the Christian people.

The development here on doctrine is quite ample and as such indicates a new thrust that the bishops wish to give to preaching by this document. They have already made clear that they do not have in mind learned academic presentations of doctrines. Rather, doctrines play a role in guiding and shaping how the homilist approaches his task. They say, “The doctrines of the Church should direct the homilist and ensure that he arrives at and preaches about what is in fact the deepest meaning of Scripture and sacrament for Christian life.”³² Note that in this formulation the bishops are refusing to let a wedge be driven between Scripture and doctrine. They continue, “For doctrines simply formulate with accuracy what the Church, prompted by the gift of the Spirit, has come to know through the Scriptures proclaimed in the believing assembly and through the sacraments that are celebrated on the foundations of these Scriptures.”³³

Without saying so here, the bishops are relying on the well known dynamic of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Doctrines (*lex credendi*) are formulated on the basis of the Church’s encounter with Christ, especially in the Eucharist (*lex orandi*) – the Eucharist, that is, Scripture and Sacrament bound up in a single celebration and hopefully preached about as such. What doctrines do the bishops have in mind? They say, “The most central mysteries of our faith – the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the redemption that Christ reveals in his Paschal Sacrifice – were attested in the Scriptures and are proclaimed and celebrated in the Eucharist.”³⁴ Such doctrines, it is explained, were formulated to keep Christian communities that were scattered across the world in a same communion about understanding rightly the Scriptures read and the Eucharist celebrated. “For that same reason,” the bishops urge, “these doctrines ought to

³² *PMF*, p. 25.

³³ *PMF*, p. 25.

³⁴ *PMF*, p. 25.

be seamlessly introduced and articulated still today in the course of our liturgical celebrations in order to ensure that by reading the Scriptures and celebrating the Eucharist we understand ever more deeply the essential beliefs of the Church.”³⁵

As they come to the end of this extended development on doctrine and catechesis in preaching, the bishops offer yet another template (my word for it) for structuring a homily, a pattern that would allow for multiple variation. They suggest connecting some point of the homily to a phrase or key idea of the Creed since, at Sunday Eucharist, the Creed will be professed immediately after the homily. There need be nothing artificial about doing this, for, as the bishops note, “The Creed has the same center that the Scriptures and Eucharist have.” Then they offer an example of this pattern, a pattern that could be built upon in any number of ways depending on the Scriptures of the day and, also perhaps, the feast in question. The center of the Creed – and of Scripture and Eucharist – is “...that the ‘one Lord Jesus Christ... suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.’ But this Jesus is ‘true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.’ The homilist proclaims and teaches that this is the one ‘who came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.’ This is the one whom we see moving about, speaking and acting in the Gospels. This is the one who ‘suffered death and was buried and rose again.’” To great effect the bishops conclude this suggestion about the Creed by citing St. Cyril of Jerusalem: “The most important doctrines were collected from the whole of Scripture to make a single exposition of the faith.”³⁶

This development is concluded by posing and answering a question. The bishops ask, “So, when all is said and done, why should the homilist preach doctrinally and catechetically? Because, as Paul and the Evangelists knew, the people are drawn to Jesus and his Gospel by the beauty and truth of the mysteries of our faith.”³⁷ *Beauty and Truth* – those need to be realities that are first experienced by the one entrusted with the responsibility of preaching. That point is the last word in this section. “Of course, what is essential for speaking about the mysteries of our faith with passion and conviction is that the preacher himself grasps the doctrinal significance of their truth and so loves these mysteries himself that he can communicate that love and truth to his listeners.”³⁸ It is clear that these words are an appeal. Taken with the seriousness they deserve, they become a real call for renewal in the hearts and minds of those who preach. Again, here is where the New Evangelization directly affects preaching: a preacher in love with the mysteries, a preacher who tells of his love with passion and conviction.

³⁵ *PMF*, pp. 25-26.

³⁶ *PMF*, p.26.

³⁷ *PMF*, p. 26.

³⁸ *PMF*, p. 27.

Conclusion

I hope I have dealt extensively, even if not exhaustively, with what is said in *PMF* about *doctrine* and *catechesis* in *liturgical* preaching. I bring my reading of the document to an end now, not with the end of the document itself; for it still will treat “The One Ordained to Preach” and practical questions about “Interpreting the Scriptures and Preparing the Homily.” Instead, I can conclude here the topic assigned to me by noting the well-worded reminder with which this longest chapter of the document on the ministry of liturgical preaching ends. Its last section is titled “The Homily as an Ecclesial Act.” Precisely because a homily occurs in the context of the Church’s liturgy, “it is by definition a profound ecclesial act...”³⁹ It is directed *from* faith *to* faith— from the faith of the Church and the one ordained to preach to “the faith of the Christian community gathered in a spirit of prayer and praise in the presence of the Risen Christ.” The movement *from* faith *to* faith is what the bishops have wanted to strengthen in this document. They have expressed in a fresh way and with the emphases they deem important what the faith of the Church is concerning the Scriptures when read in the context of the Sunday Eucharist and what the implications are for the one who preaches in this context. They have likewise expressed how they hope the faith will grow in the Christian people who hear such preaching. Preaching, they say, “is a sacred ecclesial act meant to lead from the biblical word to the Eucharistic action and thereby to nourish faith and build up the Body of Christ gathered in prayer.”⁴⁰

I have suggested at several key points in this talk that what the bishops are suggesting in this document, if taken to heart, could open a new phase in the history of preaching in our time. Something new and great can happen which would answer to the changed circumstances that were noted at the outset of the document; namely, the call to a New Evangelization in a culturally diverse context. I am well aware that this document can be criticized for sounding like it was written by a committee; and, in fact, it was. Or, a more theological name for that would be to call it a collegial effort that tries to draw together the concerns of several hundred bishops in our beautiful, complicated, and richly blessed nation. Of course, there are some bumps and thuds in the presentation of the whole. But it would be wrong to use occasional infelicities in the presentation of the whole as an excuse to ignore what I judge to be a significant effort on the part of our bishops. They are calling for a much deeper, a much more vital kind of preaching. They want preaching to trace and tell how the Scriptural words become flesh in the sacraments that the Christian community celebrates in their hearing and how the divine life of these sacraments becomes the very life of the community itself. They want this movement unfolded in all its truth and beauty

³⁹ *PMF*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ *PMF*, p. 30.

so that the community will be drawn to live by its consequences. They want that “we who are ordained to preach the Sunday homily, like Mary who brought the Incarnate Word into the world, [may] conform our lives to her Son and proclaim effectively the word of salvation to all.”⁴¹

⁴¹*PMF*, p. 48, the last words of the document.