



Archdiocese of New York + 2011

THE HOMILY

Some Background: The Synagogue Service of the Jews at the time of Our Lord included a commentary by a Rabbi on the Scriptures that were read that day. Saint Luke's account of Jesus in the Synagogue, reading a passage from the bible, then explaining it to those assembled, is an example of this practice (Luke 4:14-22a). And from the earliest days of Christian liturgy, after the Christian community separated itself from the Synagogue and joined its Service of the Word to the Eucharistic Meal, the homily was an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word.

What is the homily? The preaching of the homily follows the reading of the Scriptures at Mass. The purpose of the homily is to extend the proclamation of the word, helping those assembled to bring what they have heard in the readings into the present, to apply it to their own daily lives and their relationship to the world around them. A homily differs from a sermon in that the homily draws on the liturgy of the day: the readings, or, on occasion, prayers which are part of the Mass being celebrated, while a sermon is based on any Scripture text the preacher chooses. Although sermons at Mass were common prior to the Second Vatican Council, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* calls for the homily to be based on the Mass of the day, desiring that the assembled people should be helped to assimilate and put into practice the texts they hear at Mass.

The Homily and the Eucharist: In the celebration of Mass the priest is the one who presides, in the person of Christ, over the

Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These are not two separate actions, but rather *are so closely interconnected that they form one single act of worship*. [GIRM n. 28]. The Church often refers to the "table of the Word", indicating that when the word of God is read and explained, God's people are nourished in faith and understanding; just as at the table of the Eucharist they are nourished spiritually by the body and blood of the Lord. The homily is, therefore, the pinnacle of all forms of preaching, for it is part of the Eucharistic celebration which is the highpoint of our worship of God. Preaching the Homily at the Eucharist is the proper work of the ordained because, through the sacrament of ordination, these individuals have been empowered by Christ to preach and teach, receiving a special charism, as well as the grave responsibility, to make Christ better known and understood. The homily at Mass is usually given by the one who presides, the bishop or priest (or in some instances a deacon) and under certain circumstances another priest or bishop may be invited to preach.

Homilies on the Prayers of the Mass: At times the subject of the homily may be drawn from the text of one of the prayers of the Mass of the day, for example, the Opening Prayer or the Preface or from one of the prayers of the Ordinary of the Mass, for example, the Eucharistic Prayer or the Nicene Creed. This option is provided so that those who participate in the Mass may better understand this most sacred of all celebrations and learn to participate in it with full understanding.