



PREACHING THE EUCHARISTIC REVIVAL

Not every homily needs to refer to the Eucharistic Revival, and a connection between the readings and liturgy to the Revival ought not to be forced. At the same time, preaching in the context of Mass is intimately connected to the celebration of the Eucharist, and should help move us from word to sacrament to life. That being said, not every homily ought to end with an explicit mention that the Liturgy of the Eucharist comes next! Eucharistic preaching can take many forms. What follows are some “hints” or “prompts” that can help connect the readings and the Eucharist we are called to believe in, celebrate, and live... as Pope Benedict XVI encouraged us to do in *Sacramentum caritatis*....

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html

- ❖ **A Mystery to be Believed**: We have a rich Eucharistic faith. At the same time, the homily is not to devolve into a theological lecture or simply a topical sermon. There may be some days – depending on the readings, the day being observed, or the prayers for that day – when a more explicit mention of Eucharistic teaching may be woven into the homily, as noted below.
- ❖ **A Mystery to be Celebrated**: The Eucharistic context of our preaching cannot be ignored, and part of what we are called to do in our homilies is to help our listeners move into and celebrate fully the Liturgy of the Eucharist that follows. If Eucharist is about thanksgiving, does the homilist help those at Mass name the grace in their lives and express their gratitude? In moving from word to sacrament, the preacher may want to make explicit mention of the words and actions of the Mass as part of the homily... or, on occasion, even make a text from the Mass (such as the Eucharistic Prayer) the text through which he preaches.

- ❖ **A Mystery to be Lived**: What are the implications of our having celebrated the Eucharist? How do we connect liturgy and life? Eucharistic preaching ought to help move us from the hearing of the word to the celebration of the sacrament, and then to living the “liturgy of the world” in our particular place and time. So, our preaching needs to be concrete, and specific.

An overall approach that is worth considering during the Revival is mystagogical preaching. According to Emily Besl and Jeffrey Kemper, mystagogical preaching “illuminates the deep meaning of the liturgical act by reflection upon: the mystery (specific salvific event; Paschal Mystery) of Jesus Christ, the story that reveals the mystery (Scripture), the ritual that renders the mystery present (Liturgy), and the lived situation of the people participating in the liturgy.” In order to attend to each of these components, Besl and Kemper ask a series of questions, such as: What is it that Christ has done for us? What are the implications for our lives? What is it about the saving act the Scripture passage is trying to bring to our attention? What is it that ritual is effecting and communicating? What is the experience of the people participating? How do they or might they understand or interpret what is happening in the ritual? What is it that the Church intends for us to understand?

Mystagogical preaching weaves these four components (saving event, story, ritual, lived situation) together; it is synthetic not analytical (it puts together rather than takes apart and studies). It is not so much about telling people how to live, as revealing the deep meaning of Christ’s saving work in history and liturgy—which leads people to see differently, and thus come to live differently. It is characterized by:

- Making concrete and specific references to the liturgical rite (its words, actions, and structures)
- Looking to the Scriptures for ways that God has acted in the past analogous to the ways that God acts in the liturgical rite.
- Connecting past, present, and future explicitly—so that the community’s liturgy and life are seen in the wider context of salvation history.
- Being reflective of the Church’s doctrine.

A Note on the Gospel of Matthew

In Year A, we hear mostly from the Gospel of Matthew. The preacher may want to keep some things in mind as this Liturgical Year unfolds. First, the “Jewishness” of this gospel affords the preacher the opportunity to honor the fact that Jesus, his family, and his early followers were faithful, first-century Jews. There are numerous resources that can help the preacher make these connections, and avoid falling into the trap of unintentional anti-Judaism. Please see our diocesan website for links to resources: <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/preaching-links#AvoidingAntiJudaism>.

Second, the Lectionary itself is intentional in how it arranges the pericopes from this Gospel, reflecting the gospel author's own use of five discourses—perhaps echoing the five Books of Moses—as a way to organize the text. The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* (<https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/Lectionary.pdf>) from the Liturgy Office of the Bishops of England and Wales provides a helpful outline of the readings for Year A. They state: “In order to do justice to the intention of the Lectionary, the five great ‘sermons’ in Matthew’s Gospel will of necessity be the focal points of preaching and instruction. The narrative sections, which are placed in between the sermons, are composed in such a way that there is a unity and coherence in the whole work. Discourse and narrative stand side by side, so that the narrative chapters prepare the way for what follows in the discourses. Recognising the way in which the Lectionary has reflected the structure of Matthew’s Gospel, will enable preachers and readers to see the context of the readings from one week to the next.”

Lent

Ash Wednesday (February 22) marks the beginning of **Lent**, described as a time of preparation for the Elect and the Faithful alike: Lent is ordered to preparing for the celebration of Easter, since the Lenten liturgy prepares for celebration of the Paschal Mystery both catechumens, by the various stages of Christian Initiation, and the faithful, who recall their own Baptism and do penance” (*Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 27). So, we might imagine Lent is as a journey to the font, to the Easter Sacraments. The baptized journey back to the font in order to renew their baptismal promises; we accompany and support the Elect on their initial journey to the font by our Lenten observances: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. The Elect do not journey alone, and neither do we. Conversion takes place in community. The *Homiletic Directory* (57) puts it this way:

If the Paschal Triduum and the Fifty Days are the radiant center of the liturgical year, Lent is the season that prepares the minds and hearts of the Christian people for a worthy celebration of these days. It is also the time for the final preparation of catechumens who will be baptized during the Easter Vigil. Their journey needs to be accompanied by the faith, prayer and witness of the entire ecclesial community. The scriptural readings of the Lenten season find their deepest sense in relation to the Paschal Mystery that they prepare us to celebrate. As such they provide clear occasions for putting into practice a fundamental principle that this Directory presents: to take the readings at Mass to their center in Jesus’ Paschal Mystery, into which Mystery we enter most deeply by the celebration of the paschal sacraments.

But the font isn’t an end in itself. It is the journey through the font that leads us to the Eucharistic Table; Baptism immerses us into the Paschal Mystery which is remembered and enacted each time we celebrate the Mass. Eucharist (not Confirmation) is the apex of Initiation. So, in addition to a journey to the font, Lent is a reminder that we also journey to the Table—our regular dip in the font, our regular immersion into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

ILM 97: The gospel accounts of the Temptation and Transfiguration of the Lord are read on the 1st and 2nd Sundays of Lent. In Year A (and when the Scrutinies are celebrated), the gospel accounts for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent are about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. On Palm Sunday, we hear of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem and the account of the Passion. "The Old Testament readings are about the history of salvation, which is one of the themes proper to the catechesis of Lent. The series of texts for each Year presents the main elements of salvation history from its beginning until the promise of the New Covenant. The readings from the Letters of the Apostles have been selected to fit the Gospel and the Old Testament readings and, to the extent possible, to provide a connection between them."

PNL: "Although Lent has traditionally been understood as a time of repentance and penance, the liturgical readings of the season focus our attention on the goodness of God and the blessings that flow from this into our lives rather than on human sinfulness and any attempt to make amends for it through Lenten practices" (p. 83). "The mosaic of readings shows that Lent is a time to consider the graciousness of God toward us despite our own sinfulness.... Without denying our infidelity we are invited to contemplate God. Only after we are seared by the fire of divine love will any kind of penance be seen in its proper light. Finally, the passion of Jesus is presented as the freely given gift of himself for the salvation of all" (p. 86). The graciousness of God... the self-gift of Christ... how Eucharistic!

Preaching Lent

The Sundays of Lent have their own rhythm, as noted above (and in the table below). The themes of the season, and the rites associated with it, take center stage. Therefore, tying the homily to the Eucharistic Revival is less about focusing on the Eucharist itself, but about helping the listener connect these overarching themes to the Eucharist. In doing so, a few issues ought to be kept in mind.

First, it is good to recall which prayer texts and readings are to be used when the Scrutinies are celebrated and when they aren't. Because we are in Year A, we will hear those readings whether the Scrutinies are celebrated at a particular Mass or not. We will also hear the Preface which matches the gospel text. The other prayers of the Mass, however, will differ:

IF SCRUTINIES ARE CELEBRATED	IF SCRUTINIES ARE NOT CELEBRATED: Year A
Readings Cycle A	Readings Cycle A
Preface for the 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th Sundays of Lent (match gospel)	Preface for the 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th Sundays of Lent (match gospel)
Prayers for the 1 st , 2 nd , and 3 rd Scrutinies (Ritual Masses)	Prayers for the 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th Sundays of Lent (Proper of Seasons)
Final blessing includes the Prayer over the People proper for that Sunday	Final blessing includes the Prayer over the People proper for that Sunday

Second, it is good to keep in mind that the Lenten lectionary contains passages that raise questions about the Church's teaching regarding Judaism and the Jewish people. The Church has been intentional about addressing these questions, and there are numerous documents from both the Vatican and the USCCB that provide important information for preachers to keep in mind in order to prevent from falling into inadvertent anti-Judaism.

Our diocesan website (<http://www.davenportdiocese.org/preaching-links#AvoidingAntiJudaism>) contains numerous resources. A few are mentioned here in particular:

*A 2014 newsletter from the BCDW provides helpful background (<http://www.davenportdiocese.org/documents/2016/6/litRespecting%20JudaismJewishTraditions-LentTriduum-1.pdf>).

*Regarding Preaching: Excerpted from *God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching* (Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, September, 1988); full document at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/God-s-Mercy-Endures-Forever-Guidelines-on-the-Presentation-of-Jews-and-Judaism-in-Catholic-Preaching-1988.pdf>).

16. The Lenten lectionary presents just as many challenges. Prophetic texts such as Joel (Ash Wednesday), Jeremiah's "new covenant" (cycle B, Fifth Sunday), and Isaiah (cycle C, Fifth Sunday) call the assembly to proclaim Jesus as the Christ while avoiding negativism toward Judaism.
17. In addition, many of the New Testament texts, such as Matthew's references to "hypocrites in the synagogue" (Ash Wednesday), John's depiction of Jesus in the Temple (cycle B, Third Sunday), and Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees (e.g., Lk, cycle C, Fourth Sunday) can give the impression that the Judaism of Jesus' day was devoid of spiritual depth and essentially at odds with Jesus' teaching. References to earlier divine punishments of the Jews (e.g., 1 Cor, cycle C, Third Sunday) can further intensify a false image of Jews and Judaism as a people rejected by God.
18. In fact, however, as the 1985 Notes are at pains to clarify (sec. III and IV), Jesus was observant of the Torah (e.g., in the details of his circumcision and purification given in Lk 2:21-24), he extolled respect for it (see Mt 5:17-20), and he invited obedience to it (see Mt 8:4). Jesus taught in the synagogues (see Mt 4:23 and 9:35; Lk 4:15-18; Jn 18:20) and in the Temple, which he frequented, as did the disciples even after the Resurrection (see Acts 2:46; 3:1ff). While Jesus showed uniqueness and authority in his interpretation of God's word in the Torah--in a manner that scandalized some Jews and impressed others---he did not oppose it, nor did he wish to abrogate it.
19. Jesus was perhaps closer to the Pharisees in his religious vision than to any other group of his time. The 1985 Notes suggest that this affinity with Pharisaism may be a reason for many of his apparent controversies with them (see no. 27 of this document). Jesus

shared with the Pharisees a number of distinctive doctrines: the resurrection of the body; forms of piety such as almsgiving, daily prayer, and fasting; the liturgical practice of addressing God as Father; and the priority of the love commandment (see no. 25). Many scholars are of the view that Jesus was not so much arguing against "the Pharisees" as a group, as he was condemning excesses of some Pharisees, excesses of a sort that can be found among some Christians as well. In some cases, Jesus appears to have been participating in internal Pharisaic debates on various points of interpretation of God's law. In the case of divorce (see Mk 10:2-12), an issue that was debated hotly between the Pharisaic schools of Hillel and Shammai, Jesus goes beyond even the more stringent position of the House of Shammai. In other cases, such as the rejection of a literal interpretation of the *lex talionis* ("An eye for an eye"), Jesus' interpretation of biblical law is similar to that found in some of the prophets and ultimately adopted by rabbinic tradition as can be seen in the Talmud.

20. After the Church had distanced itself from Judaism (cf. no. 5 of this document), it tended to telescope the long historical process whereby the gospels were set down some generations after Jesus' death. Thus, certain controversies that may actually have taken place between church leaders and rabbis toward the end of the first century were "read back" into the life of Jesus: Some [New Testament] references hostile or less than favorable to Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain gospel texts for the Christians of today. All this should be taken into account when preparing catechesis and homilies for the weeks of Lent and Holy Week (1985 Notes, no. 29; see no. 26 of this document).

*The following resources, also posted on our website, provide helpful background for the preacher:

- Regarding the Pharisees

Catholic Biblical Association (CBA) Fact Sheet: On the Pharisees

(<https://www.davenportdiocese.org/documents/2022/10/CBA%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20the%20Pharisees.pdf>)

Pontifical Biblical Commission: Jesus and the Pharisees Conference

(<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVRuDjwVc6M17MYEScJo65g0Tmx9olany>)

- Regarding the Passion

CBA Fact Sheet: On Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus

(<https://www.davenportdiocese.org/documents/2022/10/CBA%20Fact%20Sheet%20on%20Jewish%20Responsibility%20for%20the%20Death%20of%20Jesus.pdf>)

Video Series: Presenting the Passion... without blaming "the Jews"

(<https://www.iccj.org/resources/passion-video-series.html>)

- Judas and Betrayal ("Do you betray me with a kiss?") with Ruth Langer and Jesper Svartvik
- The Jewish Leaders and Conspiracy ("Looking for a way to arrest Jesus...and kill him.") with Katharina von Kellenbach and Peter A. Pettit
- The Jewish Crowd, Pilate, and Guilt ("His blood be on us and our children.") with Victoria Barnett, Philip Cunningham, and Adam Gregerman
- The Crucifixion and Accountability ("And they took him away and crucified him.") with Mary Boys, John Pawlikowski, and Elena Procario-Foley

1st Sunday of Lent

- Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7
- Ps 51
- Rm 5:12-19
- Mt 4:1-11

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion;*

MB: We are finite, fragile creatures (PNL, p. 90); we come from the earth and to the earth we return (as we are reminded of in the first reading – and on Ash Wednesday). “[O]ur spirit is not sufficiently subject to God’s rule.... [While we] are already citizens of heaven... [this time of waiting for Christ’s return] is also a time of trial and temptation. [While] Jesus in the wilderness shows us how we should conduct ourselves in the struggle” (LY2, p. 66), we often fail to resist those same temptations to “appetite, pride, and vainglory” (AA, p. 59). We sin: we break the fragile bonds of relationship that bind us to one another, to God, and even to the rest of creation. But preaching a “fire and brimstone” sermon (AA, p. 61) is not what the start of Lent calls for.

We are not helpless or hopeless: God’s compassion (*rahamim*, lit. womb-love; Ps 51:3) and merciful love (*hesed*; Ps 51:3) are stronger: “God’s graciousness far exceeds the effects of human transgression. On this First Sunday we are not allowed to linger over thoughts of human frailty and sinfulness. In fact, they seem to be placed before us only to enable us to reflect on the mercy of God” (PNL, p. 91), a mercy that takes center stage in the second reading. “Where sin abounded, grace abounded still more—that is the optimistic vision St. Paul gives us in this reading from Romans. Our optimism is thus based on Christ’s victory, which has become ours [via Baptism]. It is not enough that the victory of Christ be real; it must also become our own victory. What the victory means as we enter upon the Christian life, is that we are unconditionally able, by the grace of God give to us [for example, through the Eucharist], to regain the balance God intended for us. Victory does not mean that our life on earth will not be a life of conflict” (LY2, p. 65). It’s not about our work but Christ’s (AA, pp. 59-60).

MC: At Mass, we begin by acknowledging that we do sin, we give in to temptation, and are in need of healing and mercy (Penitential Act; PNL, 90-91). Later, we pray the Lord’s Prayer as part of our preparation for Communion. According to the CCC (2846), what has been translated as “lead” in English might better be rendered “do not allow us to enter into temptation” and “do not let us yield to temptation.” God does not tempt. We, however, have the responsibility to cooperate with God’s grace in resisting temptation, which includes being attentive to our spiritual life: prayer, fasting, service. And, among the ways we are strengthened to resist temptation are the sacraments—especially the Eucharist.

ML: The first temptation (involving bread) offers another way to connect the Eucharist to today’s readings. The *Homiletic Directory* (63) offers this meditation:

“Jesus resisted the devil’s temptation to turn stones into bread, but in the end and in ways the human mind could never have imagined, in his resurrection Jesus turns the “stone” of death into “bread” for us. Through his death he becomes the bread of the

Eucharist. The congregation that feeds on this heavenly bread might well be reminded by a homilist that the victory of Jesus over temptation and death in which they share through the sacraments turns their “hearts of stone into hearts of flesh,” as the Lord promised through his prophet, hearts that strive to make God’s merciful love tangible in their daily lives. Then Christian faith can act as a leaven in a world hungry for God, and stones are truly turned into the nourishment that fulfills the longing of the human heart.”

Like the soon-to-be-Elect, we are invited to (once again) choose Christ. “The God we are called to serve is the God who serves us by showing us compassion and by giving us Jesus as a model for our own journey to new life.” (PNL, p. 92)

Rite of Sending

If the parish is celebrating the Rite of Sending the catechumens to the Rite of Election, mention could be made that this is their next step on the path to the font and table. The prayer over the catechumens reads, in part, “it is your will to establish everything in Christ and to draw us into his all-embracing love” (RCIA 115) – a love they will know with particular intensity in the Eucharist.

2nd Sunday of Lent

- Gn 12:1-4a
- Ps 33
- 2 Tm 1:3b-10
- Mt 17:1-9

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion;*

“The Gospel on the second Sunday of Lent is always the account of the Transfiguration. It is striking that the glorious and unexpected transfiguration of Jesus’ body in the presence of three chosen disciples should take place immediately after his first prediction of his Passion” (HD, 64) The Transfiguration holds an essential position in the season of Lent because the entire Lenten Lectionary is a lesson book that prepares the elect among the catechumens to receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil, just as it prepares all the faithful to renew themselves in the new life into which they have been reborn. If the first Sunday of Lent is an especially striking reminder of Jesus’ solidarity with us in temptation, the second Sunday is meant to remind us that the glory that bursts forth from Jesus’ body is a glory that he means to share with all who are baptized into his death and resurrection.” (HD, 67)

MB: The paschal mystery, which we recall, celebrate, and is made present at every Eucharist, is succinctly presented in today's Preface. As the *Homiletic Directory* puts it: "Clearly, cross and glory belong together.... The homilist must speak of these things and explain them. Perhaps no better summary could be found of what the mystery means than the beautiful words of the Preface assigned to that day" (HD, 65). To enter the baptismal font is to embrace this way of life: to love is to die (for the sake of others); to die is to live, to be glorified (see LY2, p. 70).

One might wish to make the connection that just as the Transfiguration reveals Jesus' true identity, hidden, the truth of who Eucharist is is hidden under appearance of bread and wine. But, as mentioned in the Advent and Christmas resources, we need to be careful: Jesus was both 100% human and 100% divine, not 100% divine just appearing to be human. The latter is the docetic heresy.

MC: A number of connections might be made to Christ's Presence at the liturgy using today's texts.

First, in the Collect, we are called to listen to God's beloved Son (AA, p. 64) – a reminder that Christ is also present in the proclamation of the word, a word that nourishes.

Second, the Mystery of Faith – "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again" – connects suffering and glory. For that is what we do every time we gather for Eucharist: "We have a chance to glimpse the resurrection and glory even now in the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy.... That Eucharist is transfiguration, an absorbing and taking up of the baptized assembly by faith in Christ, a foretaste of future glory" (AA, p. 65). "What the chosen three disciples heard and beheld at the transfiguration exactly converges now with the event of this liturgy in which the faithful receive the Body and Blood of the Lord" (HD 68).

Finally, "[i]n the Prayer after Communion we thank God for allowing us while 'still on earth' to be partakers of the things of heaven. While still on earth, the disciples saw the divine glory shining in the body of Jesus. While still on earth, the faithful receive his Body and Blood and hear the Father's voice speaking to them in the depths of their hearts: 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' [see the Communion Antiphon]" (HD 68).

ML: The readings this day, as the entire season of Lent, speak of new beginnings—new beginnings that have "their origin in the abundant blessings of God" (PNL, p. 96). For example, the call of Abraham (first reading) reveals "God's faithfulness and initiative" – and, like Abraham, our task is to respond in "faith, hope, and obedience" (DL2, p. 73). Our "Amen" at Communion is one such response—signaling not only belief in Christ's Real Presence, but that through the reception of this great Gift we are called and graced to live eucharistic, sacrificial lives. God loves first, making us heirs to the promise and children of the kingdom. "But being a child and an heir presupposes, on the Christian's part, an unremitting effort to respond to the love that God pours out (LY2, p. 76).... This basic law of Christianity allows no loopholes: we must love God and neighbor (p. 77)."

Note that new beginnings are God's gift – not our doing (see the second reading). Realizing this truth is key to preaching Lent, especially in a "DIY" culture like ours, that promotes the myth that we pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, that "we survive by our works alone" (AA, p. 66). Our call to discipleship, as well as our ability to live out that discipleship, are God's gift. Such is manifested in the lives of the Elect, to whom the homilist could point to as examples of the working of God's grace. Though, make sure to ask permission before sharing the particulars of anyone's story (AA, pp. 66-67).

3rd Sunday of Lent

- Ex 17:3-7
- Ps 95
- Rm 5:1-2, 5-8
- Jn 4:5-42

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion*

"The lectionary readings for the first two Sundays of Lent were arranged in such a way as to call our attention to the relationship between sin and grace. Now the readings begin to exhort us to make a choice" (PNL p. 101). That is, the scrutinies apply to all of us. As we see over these next three Sundays, the scope of the Church's focus moves from the personal to the communal (ecclesial) to the universal (p. 102). The Homiletic Directory offers these observations relevant to these next three Sundays of Lent:

The catechetical power of the Lenten season is especially highlighted by the readings and prayers for the Sundays in Cycle A. The association of the themes of water, light, and life with baptism are quite evident; by means of these biblical passages and the prayers of the liturgy, the Church is leading her elect toward sacramental initiation at Easter. Their final preparation is a fundamental concern, as the prayer texts used when the Scrutinies are celebrated make clear. What of the rest of us? It may be helpful for the homilist to invite his listeners to view the Lenten season as a time for the reactivation of the graces of baptism and a purification of the faith that had been received. (69)

The relationship between those preparing for baptism and the rest of the faithful enhances the dynamism of the Lenten season, and the homilist should make an effort to associate the wider community with the preparation of the elect. When the Scrutinies are celebrated, provision is made for a prayer for the godparents during the Eucharistic Prayer; this can serve as a reminder that each member of the congregation has a role to play in "sponsoring" the elect and bringing others to Christ. (70)

MB: The point of the account of the Samaritan woman is that she "thirsts" (longs) – the focus is not on any supposed sexual sins that we read into the story. We all thirst (PNL, p. 102): for belonging, for meaning, for wholeness. For God, though we may not always recognize that as our deepest longing, or name it that way. That thirsting has brought the Elect to this point in their journey, and the thirst for the

sacraments to come. Do we? Do we long for Eucharist as they do? And Jesus, God-with-us, is the one who seeks us out (AA, p. 69) to slake those thirsts. Jesus thirsts (longs) for us—we hear this in today's preface, we hear this in Pope Francis' *Desiderio desideravi*.

God's presence figures prominently in the first reading; the story of the miracle of water coming from the rock intends to show that God was, indeed, in the midst of the People (PNL, p. 97). Like the Hebrews, we, too, doubt God's presence; we, too, are a people of ingratitude and rebellion. We grumble and murmur; we are hard-hearted (psalm). Yet God does not abandon us either. Whether in word (see the psalm response) or sacrament, God shows "God's boundless and compassionate love for sinners" (PNL, p. 98). "All of will find ourselves struggling in the desert of human suffering and longing, but Jesus leads us to the waters that alone will satisfy our thirst: himself." (AA, p. 71) Christ still seeks us out. We see this in the lives of the Elect. We see this in our own lives as Christ makes the gift of himself to us at Eucharist. "Is the Lord in our midst or not" (Ex 17:7)? Yes!

MC: Connecting the story of the water from the rock, and the story of the Samaritan woman, to baptism is not surprising. "This Sunday of the first scrutiny thus focuses on the gift of the love that quenches our thirst.... Water is a sign of a gift, and the gift is the love that justifies us through the action of the Spirit. How could the Church fail to link this water with the sacramental water of baptism (LY2, p. 91)?" Interestingly, patristic authors also made the connection of the water from the rock to eucharistic wine, as they connected manna to eucharistic bread (LY2, pp. 84-5). Water is a multivalent symbol. Yes, waters speak of the rebirth of baptism. Water, like bread, is also a symbol of wisdom (LY2, p. 112). Water "becomes a spiritual drink and is transformed into the blood of Christ that was poured out to ransom the multitude. Baptism and Eucharist together constitute a complete initiation into the life of God" (LY2, 87).

This "is indeed a 'sacramental Sunday'" (LY2, p. 91). For if "[t]he Lenten journey gives the Church at large and each believer the double experience of a thirst no well on earth can quench and the water that springs up from the heart into eternal life... [t]he liturgy is the privileged place where these living waters well up, abundant and varied, when the word of God is proclaimed. The Spirit awakens adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving in believers' hearts. [N.B. Eucharistic dispositions, to be sure!] The Lord gives himself to his people as food under the signs of bread and wine. But it is everyone's responsibility to make sure that these life-giving waters can spring up: 'the wells of our souls need a well-digger...'" (DL2, p. 117) That is, we must be attentive to the spiritual life (including the Sacrament of Reconciliation), to removing the dirt and debris that clogs the well so these waters can freely flow.

ML: The Samaritan woman is the model disciple. Having encountered Jesus, she is changed—and must share the good news. She becomes an evangelist. "We who already believe are called, like the Samaritan woman, to share our faith with others. Then, at Easter, the newly-initiated can say to the rest of the community, 'We no longer believe because of your word, for we have heard for ourselves, and know that he is truly the Savior of the world'" (HD 70).

In Romans, Paul makes the point that Jesus brings us to "the threshold of God's presence, but we ourselves must take the step [of faith] over that threshold." (PNL, pp. 99-100). By analogy, the community fosters our relationship with God, but in the end we must each make the leap of faith ourselves. This is true for the Elect, as they prepare for the Easter sacraments. This is also true for each of us every time we get into the Communion procession and dare to say "Amen" to the Gift offered to us.

The First Scrutiny

The Scrutinies are meant to “uncover then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good” (RCIA, 141). Prayer A over the Elect notes that, like the Samaritan woman, they “thirst for living water.” It is the Lord Jesus who is “the fountain for which they thirst,” the One who can “quench their thirst, and give them peace” (RCIA, 154A). Prayer B notes their desire (thirst) “to become your adopted children through the power of your sacraments” (RCIA, 154B).

4th Sunday of Lent

- 1 Sm 16:1b,6-7,10-13a
- Ps 23
- Ep 5:8-14
- Jn 9:1-41

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion*

If thirst and water anchored last Sunday, the primary symbols this Sunday are light/sight and darkness/un-seeing. “The Fourth Sunday of Lent is suffused with light, a light reflected on this ‘Laetare Sunday’ by vestments of a lighter hue and the flowers that adorn the church” (HD 73). If the concern last Sunday was more individual, the scope widens today to the community (PNL, p. 108). One caveat: please see the notes at the start of this document regarding the care that needs to be taken in speaking of the Pharisees in order to avoid advancing anti-Jewish sentiments in our preaching. Rather than point at the “blindness” of some of the Pharisees in the story, we need to point to our own lack of faith.

MB: In the first reading, we are cautioned to look beyond mere appearances (HD 74; AA, p. 73; PNL, p. 107). God provides the paradigm: it is God who looks to the heart, beyond the surface, to see the real person, choosing the unlikely—like David. Perhaps, like our own Elect (LY2, p. 99). God has a way of turning our expectations, our preconceived notions, upside down (PNL, p. 107).

“The Prayer after Communion states that God enlightens everyone who comes into the world: but the challenge is that, in great ways or small, we turn toward the light or away from it” (HD 74). One way to turn towards the light is to—as the Elect have done—accept Christ’s invitation to baptism. Illumined with the splendor of grace our hearts can see truly (PC; LY2, pp. 98-99; CCC 1216). And, seeing truly, seeing beyond surface appearance, we recognize the Eucharist not as mere bread and wine but as Christ present to and for us; the extraordinary hidden as the ordinary.

MC: The *Homiletic Directory* (73) draws the connections between the Paschal Mystery, celebrated at every Eucharist, and the baptismal imagery found in this Sunday's readings:

The association of the Paschal Mystery, baptism, and light is succinctly captured in a line from the second reading: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." This association finds an echo and an elaboration in the Preface: "By the mystery of the Incarnation, he has led the human race that walked in darkness into the radiance of faith and has brought those born in slavery to ancient sin through the waters of regeneration to make them your adopted children." This illumination, begun in baptism, is enhanced each time we receive the Eucharist, a point underscored by the words of the blind man taken up in the Communion Antiphon: "The Lord anointed my eyes: I went, I washed, I saw and believed in God."

ML: Once again, the liturgy puts before us a choice. "As with the other Scrutiny Sundays, catechumens and long-standing members alike are exhorted to make a choice... not only must we put away the works of darkness—our blindness to the needs of others, our prejudices, our complacency—but we must be ready to suffer for our choice" (PNL, pp. 108-9). To become a Christian is to radically shift commitments; to let go of allegiances to darkness in its varied forms (RCIA 168A); to walk as children of the light; to be light of the world (CCC 782, 1243, 2105): "a new state of being which requires a new way of living" (PNL, p. 106) as "staunch and fearless witnesses to the faith" (RCIA 168A).

But we do not always embrace this vocation. Therefore, rather than focusing on the pharisees and their failings, the preacher should encourage believers to "critically look at themselves and unceasingly question themselves anew. They have the Scriptures, which the Church today offers them in plenty. How do they read them and hear them in the liturgy and preaching? To seek confirmation for their ideas, even their prejudices? To accept the challenge of the Scriptures bring when they unmask the 'works of darkness,' which to their shame the 'children of light' perform (2nd reading)" (DL2, p. 123). If we lack the courage to look at ourselves, we risk growing tepid in the faith—becoming the lukewarm that God spits out of his mouth (Rev 3:15-16) (DL2, pp. 123-4).

The Second Scrutiny

In addition to the references above, the prayers refer to the elect as those both chosen for (168A) and who long for (168B) the sacraments. Again, we see the double-movement of the spiritual life: God calls first, and we respond.

5th Sunday of Lent

- Ez 37:12-14
- Ps 130
- Rm 8:8-11
- Jn 11:1-45

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion*

The concern of the readings widens once again: beyond the personal or communal, we are now concerned with the cosmic, the universal: life and death itself.

MB: Much ink has been spilled over the exchange between Martha and Jesus. Jesus asks: “I am the resurrection and the life.... Do you believe this” (DL2, pp. 131-2)? In reply, like Peter, she makes a profound profession of faith: “I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world” (HD 75). Yet, she balks at the grave: “there will be a stench.” As the Homiletic Directory (75) notes: “Again, we are reminded that the following of Christ is the work of a lifetime, and whether we are about to receive the sacraments of initiation in two weeks’ time, or have lived many years as Catholics, we must struggle continually to deepen our faith in Christ,” including our Eucharistic faith. I am the Bread of Life. Do you believe this?

MC: “The heart of the Paschal Mystery is that Christ came to die and rise again precisely to do for us what he did for Lazarus: “Untie him and let him go.” He frees us, not only from physical death, but from the many other deaths that afflict us and bind us: sin, misfortune, broken relationships. This is why it is essential for us as Christians to immerse ourselves continually in his Paschal Mystery [especially at the Eucharist].... Our weekly encounter with the crucified and risen Lord is the expression of our faith that he IS, here and now, our resurrection and our life” (HD 76). For “[w]hen Christians receive the Body of Christ, they sing of their own resurrection, for of that the Eucharist is their pledge” (LY2, 104; cf. CCC 1402-1405) – particularly at the celebration of Viaticum (CCC 1524). “It is that conviction that enables us to accompany him next Sunday as he enters Jerusalem, saying with Thomas, ‘Let us also go and die with him’ (HD 76).

ML: “The passage from Romans provides the clearest and most complete commentary on the entire liturgy of the fifth Sunday: Since we are baptized, the Spirit of Jesus dwells in us and we have the pledge of resurrection and life” (LY2 p. 106). “God’s life and Spirit become the source of life for a new reality and a new beginning,” (as seen in Ezekiel’s vision) (AA, p. 79; cf. HD 76). “Both original creation (which is good – see RCIA 175B) and this resurrection from the dead are unconditional gifts from a magnanimous God” (PNL, p. 109).

“Living in that Spirit of God is Paul’s advice to the Romans” (AA p. 79). There, “Paul contrasts two ways of living: life in the flesh and life in the spirit.... When Paul refers to the flesh he is not thinking of specific bodily or sexual behavior. He is speaking of human nature in all its limitations, limitations that sometimes incline one away from God and the things of God” (PNL, p. 111). “For Paul, the flesh designates the human world stained by sin [not materiality per se], the world under the yoke of death. The spirit, on the contrary, evokes the divine world in which humanity is assumed by Christ [incarnation], the spiritual world engendered by God in Jesus’ resurrection... (DL2, p. 128). “[L]ife in the spirit is attuned to God” (PNL, p. 111). “When we speak of ‘Christian being’ we are led to discerning what is ‘Christian acting.’ The conduct of Christians is nothing other than their faith lived out” (DP2, p. 129), a living out made possible by our sharing in the Eucharist.

It is clear that we do not always live according to the spirit; the flesh often holds sway. In response as expressed in the responsorial psalm, God, “moved by compassion... shows mercy to those who have sinned and grants them forgiveness... a free gift from God” (PNL, p. 110). Such an offer of new life is not earned through penitential practices, but freely given as gift. “It is almost as if God us asking for another chance, another chance to shower us with mercy” (114). Such is the Eucharist!

The Third Scrutiny

In the prayers over them, the Elect are referred to as “those who await your life-giving sacraments” (RCIA 175A) and those “who eagerly approach the waters of new birth and hunger for the banquet of life” (175B). Perhaps as the already-baptized we might ask ourselves: how much do we hunger for the Eucharist, for the life the sacraments (in our case, Eucharist and Reconciliation) bring?

Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion

- Procession: Mt 21:1-11
- Is 50:4-7
- Ps 22
- Ph 2:6-11
- Mt 26:14-27:66

Connecting to the Revival

*MB = Mystery to be Believed; MC = Mystery to be Celebrated; ML = Mystery to be Lived;
PO = Prayer over the Offerings; PaC = Prayer after Communion*

“Two ancient traditions shape this unique liturgical celebration: the custom of a procession in Jerusalem, and the reading of the Passion in Rome. The exuberance surrounding Christ’s regal entry immediately gives way to the reading of one of the Songs of the Suffering Servant and the

solemn proclamation of the Lord's Passion. And this liturgy takes place on Sunday, a day always associated with the Resurrection of Christ. How can the preacher bring together the many theological and emotional elements of this day, especially since pastoral considerations suggest a rather short homily? The key is found in the second reading, the beautiful hymn from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, which admirably summarizes the whole Paschal Mystery.... In the liturgical celebrations of the coming week we do not simply commemorate what Jesus did; we are plunged into the Paschal Mystery itself, dying and rising with Christ." (HD 77)

The connection to the Eucharist is pretty straightforward: what we recount in the passion narrative is what is made present every time we celebrate Mass: "It is this [Paschal] mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world" (CCC 1068; cf. CCC 654, 1067, 1085, 1362).

A word of caution: please see the resources above to help prevent preaching on the Passion in a way that promotes anti-Jewish sentiments.

MB: The readings today present to us "a self-emptying savior" (PNL, p. 121) who loves us with abandon. Why? Because that is who God is; not for any merit of ours. Because of the depths of this love, Jesus—imaging the Suffering Servant in Isaiah—allows himself to be executed for our sake. "As the Prayer over the Offerings puts it: 'by this sacrifice made once for all, [may] we feel already the effects of your mercy'" (AA, p. 88).

MC: The readings (esp. Phil 2:9) also present to us "a highly exalted savior" (PNL, p. 121), helping us to avoid "a one-sided emphasis on suffering" (LY2, p. 170). "The Palm Sunday liturgy thus gives a complete and rounded theological vision of the [paschal] mystery of Christ. It tells that this mystery is not a mystery of death alone but a mystery of life that triumphs over death. This vision is important for a proper conception of the spiritual life" (LY2, p. 170), and, it should be added, for understanding and celebrating Eucharist. "How fitting, then, that Christians should sing, as they approach the communion table, the words, "Father, if this chalice cannot pass without my drinking it, your will be done (Matt 26:42). For to drink the blood of the new covenant is to accept the Lord's passion in a fully real and concrete way so that we may also share his triumph with him" (LY2, p. 170).

ML: Finally, the readings also present to us a savior who is an example for us. "If we are to be saved we must go where salvation takes place... wherever Christ empties himself for our sake." (PNL, p. 121). We are sent from the Eucharist (and all it means) to live Eucharistic lives (and all that means).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Church Documents

- HD Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Homiletic Directory*. 2015. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_d oc_20140629_direttorio-omiletico_en.html
- ILM The Roman Missal. *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass*. 1997. Available at: <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/Lectionary.pdf>
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edition. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

Preaching and the Liturgical Year / Lectionary

- AA DeBona, Gueric. *Between the Ambo and the Altar: Biblical preaching and The Roman Missal, Year A*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013.
- DL2 *Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year*. Volume 2: Lent. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993.
- LY2 Nocent, Adrian. *The Liturgical Year*. Volume 2: Lent, the Sacred Paschal Triduum, Easter Time. Introduced, emended, and annotated by Paul Turner. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014.
- PNL Bergant, Dianne and Richard Fragomeni. *Preaching the New Lectionary, Year A*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Mystagogical Preaching

- Besl, Emily and Jeffrey Kemper. *What is Mystagogical Preaching?* Accessed 11 August 2003 from <http://mtsm.org/preaching/mystagogicalpreaching.htm>; no longer available; Internet.
- Connors, Michael E., CSC, editor. *Preaching as Spiritual Leadership: Guiding the Faithful as Mystic and Mystagogue*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2021.

Resources for Preaching Matthew

- Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Sacra Pagina Series, Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, editor. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991.

Matthew and Judaism

- For an extensive list of resources, please visit: <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/preaching-links#AvoidingAntiJudaism>
- Bibliography: <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/documents/2022/4/litSelectBibliography-PreachingAndJudaism.pdf>

Matthew and the Eucharist

- LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Eucharist in the New Testament and Early Church*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996.

Preaching at the Rites

- Connors, Michael E., CSC. *Preaching for Discipleship: Preparing Homilies for Christian Initiation*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2018.
- Wallace, James A. *Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart: The Homily on the Feasts and within the Rites*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002.