

Two councils of the Church, Trent and Vatican II, emphasized the importance of preaching for bishops and priests.

On the preacher and preaching

By Joseph I. Cisetti

But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? Romans 10:14

■ Two watershed events marking the early modern and late modern life of the Catholic Church have been the Council of Trent (1545-1564) and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Each was called to respond to the needs of the Church at that time. Both would steer the direction of church life for years to come. Of course there were many differences. Trent was convoked by Paul III to respond to the Protestant Reformation and Vatican II was called by Blessed John XXIII to address the Church and the modern world. Despite their differences and among their similarities, both these important councils emphasized the importance of preaching for bishops and priests.

Councils are large, cumbersome undertakings and can take years, decades and argu-

ably, centuries to implement. What is proclaimed by and for the universal Church must be embraced and incarnated on a more local level. This article examines two such applications, one from each council as regards preaching.

The first is by St. Francis de Sales. In a 1604 letter known today as, *On the Preacher and Preaching*, he gives advice to his friend, André Frémyot, Archbishop of Bourges. The second, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* was issued in 1982 by the Priestly Life and Ministry Committee of the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops. While differing in age, style, author and audience, these two works share three foundational elements: First is the desire to see the word of God preached well. Second, both are written in a post conciliar milieu and third, both represent more localized applications (one personal, one national) of a universal Church council.

On a more personal note, I encountered both these documents while in the seminary. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* was a text for a homiletics class while *On the Preacher and Preaching* was a work I read while doing research. Both have influenced my ministry and life as a preacher of the word.

This article examines these two documents and interfaces them, noting points of divergence and convergence. Attention will then be given to what St. Francis de Sales has to say to preachers today.

On the Preacher and Preaching

1) Background

When Francis de Sales wrote *On the Preacher and Preaching* in 1604, the Council of Trent had been concluded for nearly forty years. As both a zealous pastor and reforming bishop, he took the gospel imperative to preach very seriously. The Catholic Church was experiencing a much-needed renewal in preaching. He was a popular preacher among all classes of people. His preaching was known for its simplicity, beauty and clarity. For instance, he would translate his quotations into the popular tongue. He was further known not only for the quality of his preaching but for its quantity regarding both length and frequency. He was known not only to preach daily but to preach more than once a day. Interestingly, Francis' preaching was not necessarily part of a Eucharistic celebration but outside of it both temporally and geographically (many pulpits were well outside the sanctuary of the church). He even speaks of Mass and Communion as a preparation for preaching.

While a strong preacher, Francis de Sales was not known as a harsh one. Seeing the spiritual life ultimately as a love story, it was love more than fear that came through in his preaching. While known to use satire, Francis also remarked, "I assure you that I have never used invectives and reproaches without being

sorry for it." More important than being a talented preacher, Francis was an effective one.

In his ministry in general, and in the ministry of spiritual direction in particular, Francis de Sales exhibited an open, accessible and somewhat egalitarian manner, despite being an aristocrat and a bishop in a classified society. He would spend time with all, regardless of social status, give direction to all and he would preach to all.

Furthermore, Francis brought to the pulpit not only his depth of prayer and holiness but also his strong liberal arts background and humanist education. This all bore fruit in many conversions and in leading others to holiness of life. This found an expression in his letter to André Frémyot.

2) The Text

Although written rather extemporaneously, this work reveals Francis de Sales' encyclopedic knowledge of scripture, patristics and scholasticism. After an introduction and prior to a conclusion, this letter has been divided into four chapters: *The Preacher, Light and Warmth, The Word of God and How We Must Preach*. More succinctly, these chapters may be described as: the Who, the Why, the What and the How of preaching.

Chapter One focuses on the preacher. Here Francis quotes Trent's decree that preaching is the principal duty of a bishop. He lists three requirements for preaching: good life, good doctrine and lawful mission. He expounds on the first two noting that the lawful mission is already present by the office. Good doctrine must be sufficient but St. Francis does not see the need for this to be extraordinary. A preacher's knowledge will suffice if he does not desire to appear more knowledgeable than he really is. He notes that one becomes a preacher by preaching. He then explains how a bishop must live by a good example. This includes simplicity of life, avoiding occasions for scandal, and devotion to the Eucharist.



Chapter Two examines the Why and actually begins also to explore the How on a more general level. Here Francis looks at the end. "What then is the end of the preacher in the act of preaching? His end and intention must be to do what our Lord came into this world to do. *Ego veni ut vitam habeant et abundantius habeant.*" The preacher must do two things and a third. The first is to enlighten the intellect and the second is to inflame the will. Thus, in terms of Aristotle one now finds ethos (the credibility of a good life addressed in the first chapter), logos (the appeal to the intellect) and pathos (the appeal to the will or emotions). The third aspect is to bring delight. Here Francis distinguishes between delight that flows from learning the path to heaven and that which tickles the ears and is based on artifice. The second is to be avoided while the first is to be employed.

Chapter Three is the longest chapter and concerns the What, and this What is primarily the word of God. The foundation of all preaching is to be the word of God. Here Francis outlines a hierarchy of sources. First and foremost is the Bible. After that there are conciliar statements and the Fathers of the Church. Then one has the lives of the saints, which are seen as a type of gospel in song. Profane sto-

ries and fables as well as poetry may be used, but rarely and cautiously.

The chapter continues as Francis briefly outlines the four traditional methods of interpreting scripture: literal, allegorical, anagogical and tropological. The literal requires familiarity with scholarship but the preacher must decide how to apply this to his given situation. At times throughout history some preachers have taken the allegorical to an extreme. While accepting the allegorical, Francis insists it must be harmonious with the literal meaning and that this is a comparison not a fact. Furthermore, the allegory should be becoming, simple and used with good judgment. These cautions must also be used for the anagogical and tropological aspects.

This chapter then explores the use of reason, illustrations and comparisons. As the chapter continues, Francis highlights the importance of method insisting, "We must adhere to method in all things; there is nothing that is more helpful to a preacher." He insists that this method be clear and then gives examples.

Following his own advice, the final chapter on the How one is to preach possesses a stronger affective content. The answer to the How is with simplicity and from the heart. Francis admits that how one communicates is important insisting that marvelous things said poorly say nothing. He insists, "The supreme art is to have no art." Reflecting Salesian concern for the heart he says, "We must speak well, but heart speaks to heart, and the tongue speaks only to men's ears." Preaching is to be done in a way that is spontaneous, dignified, courageous, natural, sturdy, devout, serious and a little slow. In spiritual direction Francis is known for promoting an interior freedom and one hears some echoes of this in his description of preaching.

Francis approves simple homiletic tools such as enumeration and warns against flattery. He speaks of preparing for preaching

before the Blessed Sacrament. He insists that preaching does not need to be too long (a half hour minimum is sufficient) but confesses that he himself has been guilty of going too long. He warns against displaying anger. His definition of preaching comes not at the beginning of his work but rather toward the end.

To preach is the publication and declaration of God's will, made to men by one lawfully commissioned to that task, to the end of instructing and moving them to serve his divine Majesty in this world so as to be saved in the next.

Fulfilled in Your Hearing

1) Background

Like the Council of Trent, Vatican II envisioned a renewal of preaching, particularly regarding its scriptural and liturgical foundations. By now in the life of the Church, preaching occurred more regularly within the

celebration of the Eucharist but not necessarily as part of that celebration. With Vatican II, preaching at Mass was to be seen as part of the liturgical celebration. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* emerged from the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life Ministry and published in 1982. The principal author was William Skudlarek, O.S.B.

Unlike *On the Preacher and Preaching*, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* was not extemporaneous and represented the long work of a committee. It was composed for publication and to a broader audience. It is less generic and concerned not with all types of preaching but specifically with the Sunday homily.

2) The Text

Like *On the Preacher and Preaching*, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* contains an introduction and conclusion with four chapters. These are: The Assembly, The Preacher, The Homily and

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We are told that a homily should sound more like a personal conversation than a speech or lecture. The style is to be purposeful and personal, avoiding whatever sounds casual and chatty or impersonal and detached.

Homiletic Method. More succinctly, these are: the Who Part I, the Who Part II, the What and the How.

The name of Chapter One, The Assembly, already reveals a very different starting point with no parallel by Francis de Sales. The authors acknowledge this may be unusual but defend this decision on two levels. On the theoretical plane they insist one's audience must be understood if the communication is to be effective. On the ecclesiological level they insist that the preacher is still part of the People of God. The three major elements of liturgical preaching are described as the preacher, the word drawn from the Scriptures and the gathered community. The identity of the assembly is explored as something complex and the preacher is described in the surprisingly traditional term of "mediator." The preacher represents the community by voicing its concerns and naming its demons and also as representing the Lord by sharing a word of healing, pardon, acceptance and love. The preacher is to enable the community to celebrate by offering a word in which they recognize their concerns and God's concern for them.

Chapter Two, The Preacher, is more conventional and finds a parallel with the work of Francis de Sales. This work stresses the role of preaching as striving to know the particular audience and that of listening and praying.

This listening is described as a way of life and a type of prayer. The authors hold that from listening to the word of God in scripture and in the lives of people, preaching begins to emerge. Here too, some of the How is explored as it suggests daily meditating on the Sunday scriptures. Another section of this chapter involves interpreting the scriptures. Here preachers are told that it is the faith of the Church that must be proclaimed and one must know some background on this as the history of interpretation is part of the contemporary meaning. Attention is given to meditating on the word of God, the exegesis of the Fathers, conciliar documents and the Magisterium. It then explores the broader cultural bases of the liberal arts, the fine arts, entertainment and forces in the contemporary world. The point is "... not that preachers must know everything but that there is no limit to what they can draw upon." The chapter concludes with the limitations of the preacher. Here too there is a concern that preachers not give the impression that they know more than they in fact do and that they are not to use the pulpit for their own doubts, anxieties or problems but rather to be a person of faith speaking to people about faith and life.

Chapter Three, The Homily, like Chapter Three in *On the Preacher and Preaching*, is also more extensive. The unique nature of a homily as one type of preaching is explored. A homily is part of a liturgical celebration flowing from Scripture and is addressed to a congregation of believers. Hence, it presupposes faith. Next, faith is described as an interpretation, as a way of interpreting the world and the preacher is put forth as a Christian charged with sharing the Christian vision of the world as the creation of a loving God. This faith requires a response that can take many forms.

The role of the homily and the Lectionary is explored. The authors tell us that the hom-

ily is not so much on the Scriptures as *from* and *through* them. The preacher's goal is not to interpret a passage but to draw on the text to interpret people's lives so that they may celebrate the Eucharist. Scholarly methods are important but not enough. In addition to prayerful listening and study, one needs "incubation time" to let ideas develop. The point is that the homily not only *flows from* the Liturgy of the Word but *flows into* the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Another section of the same chapter is entitled, Homiletic Style. We are told that a homily should sound more like a personal conversation than a speech or lecture. The style is to be purposeful and personal, avoiding whatever sounds casual and chatty or impersonal and detached. At the same time, the form and style will also be determined by the Scripture, the character of the liturgy and nature of the congregation. Language should

be specific, graphic and imaginative, a poetic language that invites people to respond from the heart and mind. Obviously, preachers must pastorally decide the most suitable form of preaching.

In Chapter Four, Homiletic Method, further attention is given to the How. The authors insist, "Every art is based on a theory and a method, and preaching is no exception." We are told that the most important feature of any method is precisely that it be methodical, that is, orderly and regular. Here too, toward the end, we are given a definition not of preaching in general but of a homily. It is:

A scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God's active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel.

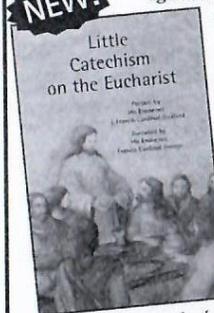
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The chapter goes on to explore steps of homily preparation and lists "non-negotiables" of this work: time, prayer, study, organization, concreteness and evaluation.

Points of connection and contrast

These two works, henceforth referred to as OPP and FYH, hold points of convergence and divergence. Some of these are accidental while others are more significant. Seldom, if ever, would they be seen in direct conflict. Rather, many of the differences are in emphasis. At times, one author may develop a point not treated by the other but one may assume that on some level, there would be agreement.

The first and most obvious difference, after that of the varying centuries, is that of *authorship* and *purpose*. OPP is written by one person as a private letter to another. While that author was talented and personal, the work was done rather quickly and his postscript admits this. By contrast, FYH, despite having a principal author, is the work of a committee and written with publication in mind and as such, would have faced many reviews and revisions. It is drier and less personal. Francis de Sales wrote to and for another bishop while the draft committee was made up of bishops, priests, a deacon and lay people. Their document was written largely, but not exclusively, for priests.

Perhaps the contrast is most obvious with regard to *focus*. OPP concerns preaching in a more general sense and seems to envision it primarily, if not exclusively, in an extra-liturgical context or at least outside the regular celebration of the Eucharist. Conversely, while acknowledging other types of preaching, FYH, as its subtitle indicates, concentrates on the homily within the specific celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. Its focus is thoroughly and unabashedly Eucharistic and liturgical. The homily flows from the celebration of God's word and leads into the celebration of the Eu-

charist. St. Francis de Sales did not develop this because it was not his experience.

Connected to all this is the *role of the assembly*. This is the first chapter of FYH and a defense of it is given in terms of theory and ecclesiology. This developed role of the assembly is present in OPP only by its absence. Again, Francis de Sales' focus on preaching is more extra-liturgical. He was concerned about the congregation, for instance, warning against flattery and telling the preacher to translate his citations. In his life he showed concern for his congregation and like any good communicator, would gear his talk to his audience. His concern for the hearers of the word does not have the same theological and ecclesiological underpinnings of FYH. He would not necessarily disagree with this vision but it certainly is not explicit in his thought.

Another area of examination is found in the *use of Scripture*. Both documents place high value on the word of God and both see it as the foundation of preaching but Francis de Sales quotes scripture much more readily throughout his work. There are 65 scriptural citations in this relatively small work. FYH quotes scripture with less frequency although the primary citation, from which the work gets its title, is quoted at greater length. It is Luke 4:14-22a. Both works mention and value the Fathers of the Church but Francis goes on to quote them.

One of the most striking similarities of these two works is to be found in the *importance of method*. While methods may vary, homiletic method is quite important. In a subsection entitled, "The Homiletic Method," St. Francis notes, "We must adhere to method in all things; there is nothing that is more helpful to a preacher, makes his preaching more profitable, and is so pleasing to his hearers." In a strikingly similar line that begins a chapter called "Homiletic Method," FYH states, "Every art is based on a theory and a method, and preaching is no exception." The same chapter later adds, "The most important fea-

ture of any method is precisely that it be methodical, that is, orderly and regular."

Both these works are *theoretical and practical*, explaining different homiletic methods and exploring how to construct one's preaching. Francis defines this as sharing God's will with people to lead them to salvation. It is for the preacher to apply or at least set forth divine truths to the hearers. FYH places more emphasis on interpreting peoples' lives in and through the Scriptures. The horizontal dimension, not denied by OPP, finds greater development in FYH.

Both works deal with *scriptural interpretation* but do so differently. Francis employs the traditional fourfold categories of literal, allegorical, anagogical and tropological. FYH sees preaching not so much as on the biblical text as rather in and through that text. However, it also insists that contemporary meaning includes the history of interpretation. This

would include the methods used by OPP

Another area to be examined is the *preacher's educational background*. FYH outlines this in terms of knowing one's people, some scriptural knowledge, and then exploring the base of the liberal arts, fine arts, and entertainment, *et al.* Francis de Sales does not mention this directly but he represents Christian humanism at its finest and even speaks using examples from the natural sciences. In his letter he was writing as one well-educated man to another.

Another aspect regards the *life of the preacher*. Both works dedicate a chapter to this role. FYH explores the pastoral role, that of listening and praying and also of one's own limitations. OPP stresses the importance of a good life and simplicity. It also lists concrete activities a good preacher is to moderate or even avoid completely.

Both works stress *the role of prayer* in

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Both works deal with scriptural interpretation but do so differently. Francis employs the traditional fourfold categories of literal, allegorical, anagogical and tropological.

preaching. Francis situates this more around prayer before the Blessed Sacrament while FYH stresses meditating on the biblical text. These methods are, of course, complementary of each other.

Francis emphasizes the *role of love* insisting that, "To love well is sufficient for speaking well." FYH does not use such language but it is in no way denied.

Further similarities can be found regarding *style*. Both works value clarity. OPP insists

that preaching must be "spontaneous, dignified, courageous, natural, sturdy, devout, serious, and a little slow." FYH holds that one's style should be like a personal conversation "avoiding whatever sounds casual and chatty or impersonal and detached." It goes on to speak of language that is specific, graphic and imaginative and that invites a response of the heart and mind. This response ties in neatly with Francis's notion that preaching should enlighten the intellect and inflame the will as well as his insistence that effective preaching consists of heart speaking to heart.

Finally, both works are concerned with the "How" and the "What" of preaching. Both are concerned with the "Who." FYH divides this into two chapters concerning both the preacher and the assembly. OPP develops the why more clearly although FYH is concerned with it as well. These two works can and do complement each other. Together, they would well serve a homiletics class.

St. Francis de Sales' message for preachers today

Francis de Sales' premise that the end for the preacher is "That they might have life and have it more abundantly," is as true now as it was four centuries ago. His notion that preaching is to enlighten the intellect and inflame the will nicely illustrates the point that preaching is not merely imparting information nor is it merely motivational speaking but rather a harmonious marriage and application of the two, shared with a given audience.

Perhaps Francis de Sales' most important message to preachers today would be: "Preach from the heart, to the heart." Francis insisted that this preaching from the heart was necessary for effective preaching but the term "heart" must be properly understood. Today, heart is associated with the emotional and perhaps even the irrational. Heart and head can be seen in opposition to each other. Francis however held a more biblical understand-

ing of the heart. For him the heart represented not just the seat of emotions but something more holistic involving the center of one's being and including the intellect and will. Heart could be described as the depth of one's being. Therefore, to preach from the heart means to preach from the depth of one's being. It requires both logos and pathos. This includes not just the emotional but the intellectual and he reveals both in his work and in his own preaching. In contemporary language we might call this, "Holistic Preaching." To preach from the heart in the Salesian sense does not deny the intellectual aspects but, in fact, requires them. It does not exclude the ecclesial and magisterial aspects of preaching but also requires them. Moreover, this is not just from the heart of the preacher but directed towards the depths of the listeners, towards their hearts.

Striving to be good

While I was in the seminary, the rector spoke of wanting to see our seminary produce a generation of great preachers. Later, a homiletics professor commenting on that address, said his hope was that the seminary would produce a generation of good preachers. He did not say this to disparage us. Rather, he observed that great preachers tend to have great egos. Francis de Sales spent his life encouraging people to be good. He insisted that they strive to be good people not angels. For most of us, being good will be our life's work. Despite their similarities and their obvious differences, both *On the Preacher and Preaching* and *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* share a common goal. It is to promote and encourage preaching that is good. Perhaps, in the end, it is a sincere, constant, prayerful striving to be good that makes us great. ■



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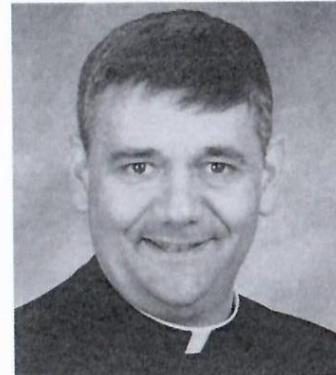
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Reverend Joseph Cisetti was ordained a priest for the Diocese Kansas City—St. Joseph in 1991. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Mundelein Seminary and a Licentiate of Sacred Theology from the University of St. Mary of the Lake. He is currently a candidate for an M.A. in Christian Spirituality at Creighton University. Fr. Cisetti is a pastor of St. Bridget Parish in Pleasant Hill, Mo. For several years he worked in the Diocesan Vocation Office. He has published articles in Emmanuel, The Priest, Our Sunday Visitor, Vocations and Prayer, and The Catholic Key. This is his first article for HPR.