

Boston College

Touchstones for Preaching Transcript of Basic Touchstone 3: Preparing the Homily

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In their 1982 document on preaching, entitled “Fulfilled in Your Hearing,” the United States Catholic Bishops recommend that preachers enrich their homily preparation process by participating in a **homily preparation group**. The homily preparation group does not require the preacher to chair it. Rather, it is a place where a preacher *listens* to God speaking through others and *thinks* about what others are saying.

A homily preparation group is easy to organize. Simply invite four or five people you are comfortable with to join you for an hour at the beginning of each week. These can include parishioners and/or parish staff. Previously established support groups of priests can also function as a homily preparation group. Agree on who will facilitate the meetings.

If your group is made up of parishioners, you might want to consider having one member drop out after the fourth week and invite a new member to come in. Then invite another one [to] drop out after the fifth week and invite another person into the group, so that after eight weeks you will be working with a new group. In this way you will always have fresh ideas infused into the conversation.

How does a homily preparation group work? There are seven suggested steps in this one-hour meeting. Let’s look at each step.

[Visual]

1. Read the Lectionary passages (15 minutes)
2. Share the words (10 minutes)
3. Exegete the texts (10 minutes)
4. Share the Good News (10 minutes)
5. Share challenges these words offer (10 minutes)
6. Explore the consequences (5 minutes)
7. Give thanks and praise (5 minutes)

1. **Step one: read the Lectionary passages** (15 minutes). Begin with the Gospel, then the first reading, the Psalm, and the second reading. As one participant reads a passage, others jot down images, words, or phrases that strike them.
2. **Step two: share the words** (10 minutes). This is not time for discussion, but an opportunity for each participant to share the images, or words or phrases that captured one’s imagination. As the sharing proceeds, the homilist may pick up recurring words or phrases and note what parts of the

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Scriptures are being highlighted. The responses are indicators of concerns or questions present in the lives of the parishioners.

3. **Step three: exegete the texts** (10 minutes). One member of the group prepares ahead of time and offers a brief exegesis of the texts. The purpose is to make an effort to determine what concrete human concerns the biblical author was addressing when the text was written, and also to try to determine what question about life experience these biblical texts are providing at least a partial answer for.
4. **Step four: share the Good News** (10 minutes). Focus on questions like:
 - What Good News did the first listeners hear in these accounts?
 - What Good News does the present group hear?
 - Can God's power, presence, and influence in the biblical story be identified in our personal stories in today's world?
5. **Step five: share challenges these words offer** (10 minutes). Ask:
 - What doubt, sin, pain, or fracturing in our own lives do the Lectionary passages touch?
 - To what conversation do these words call us?Try to identify concrete examples.
6. **Step six: explore the consequences** (5 minutes). Center the conversation on questions like:
 - What difference will the Good News, embodied in these Lectionary passages, make in my life?
 - What will happen when the Good News of the Scriptures is applied to the bad news in our lives?
 - Can the world be changed if we believe in the Good News and act according to it?
7. **Step seven: give thanks and praise** (5 minutes). Conclude the hour with prayers of thanksgiving for the inspiration God's Spirit has offered the group during this time together.

Now according to the Bishops' document, "Fulfilled in Your Hearing," there are two main advantages to this collaborative process. First, the homilist hears the Good News of the Sunday Lectionary passages as they are heard by the people in one's own congregation. Second, the homilist is better equipped to point to concrete and specific ways that hearing the Good News can make a difference in the lives of those who hear it.

Now, spend a few moments reflecting on the questions at the bottom of the page.

[Questions on web page]

- What advantages do you feel the collaborative homily preparation process can contribute to your preaching?
- Would you envision establishing a homily preparation group to support your preaching?