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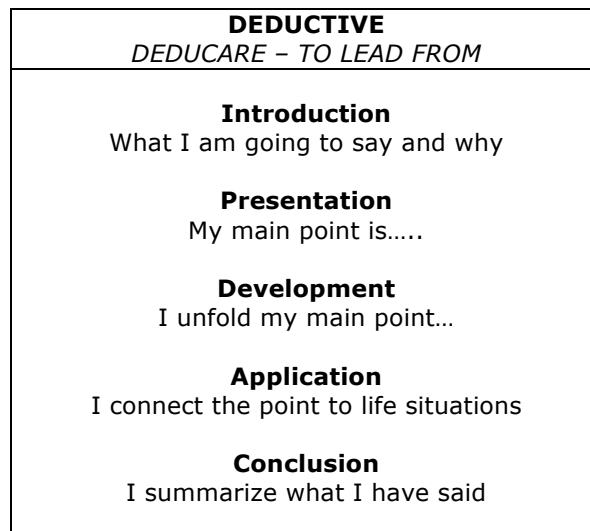
Touchstones for Preaching Transcript of Basic Touchstone 4: Shaping the Homily

presented by
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“Touchstones for Preaching” is a resource of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, produced in partnership with The Church in the 21st Century Center.

When I first began preaching, I believed that I had a foolproof structure for organizing my Sunday homilies. I used it every week for the first ten years of my preaching life. It is called the **deductive form**. It looks like this:

[Visual]



A popular way of describing the deductive form is: tell ‘em what you’re gonna say, then tell ‘em, then tell ‘em what you said. We call this deductive form, from the Latin verb, *deduco*, which means “to lead from.” The main piece of the homily is at the beginning—the presentation. Here you present the main point or central truth of the homily. The rest of the homily flows from it.

When I was preaching in the deductive fashion every Sunday in those first 10 years as preacher, feedback from parishioners was sparse. The feedback I did receive were things like, “You are very clear,” “You are very organized,” or “I like how you presented that.” But I never heard any feedback from a spiritual perspective. I never heard anyone say something like, “God really spoke to me this morning” or “Thank you for those inspiring words.”

So I decided that I needed professional help. I voluntarily checked into a clinic—a preaching clinic—the Word of God Institute in Washington, D.C., located in the Dominican House of Studies on Michigan Avenue, just across the street from the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. There I participated in a two-week immersion program on preaching, under the expert direction of homiletics professor and Dominican Father John Burke. One of the most valuable lessons I learned at the Word of God Institute was how to structure my homilies according to the **inductive form**.

The inductive form looks like this:

[Visual]

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| INDUCTIVE <i>INDUCARE – TO LEAD INTO</i> |
|---|
| <p>Movement 1 Here is a real life situation</p> <p>Movement 2 This is what the sacred texts have to say about this situation</p> <p>Movement 3 Here is the real life situation in new perspective as interpreted through the lens of the sacred texts.</p> |

We call this the inductive form, from the Latin verb *induco*, which means “to lead toward.” In the inductive form, the main piece of the homily comes at the end. You build up to it. Inductive homilies are structured like a story—one chapter builds on the previous one and then the final chapter brings everything together.

It is important to know that this is the way the Gospels are actually written. We start with Jesus’ early days, then his public ministry. We experience his death and burial, and only at the end of the Gospels do we discover his resurrection. Through this ending, the resurrection, we gain a new perspective on everything that preceded it. We come to understand the real perspective of everything that occurred before his resurrection.

When I started preaching regularly in the inductive form feedback was generous, and most often from a spiritual perspective. Just this past Sunday, Trinity Sunday, after Mass at the church doors, a parishioner said, “I used to believe that I would finally meet the Trinity when I died and went to heaven. Now I believe I’ve been meeting the Trinity every single day, but I didn’t know it.”

Let’s look once again at the deductive form and the inductive form side by side:

[Visual]

| DEDUCTIVE <i>DEDUCARE – TO LEAD FROM</i> | INDUCTIVE <i>INDUCARE – TO LEAD INTO</i> |
|---|---|
| <p>Introduction What I am going to say and why</p> <p>Presentation My main point is.....</p> <p>Development I unfold my main point...</p> <p>Application I connect the point to life situations</p> <p>Conclusion I summarize what I have said</p> | <p>Movement 1 Here is a real life situation</p> <p>Movement 2 This is what the sacred texts have to say about this situation</p> <p>Movement 3 Here is the real life situation in new perspective as interpreted through the lens of the sacred texts.</p> |

In the deductive form the main point is at the beginning, and the rest of the homily flows from it. In the inductive form, everything leads to the main point at the end. A deductive homily is composed more like a journal article. An inductive homily is composed more like a story. A main strength of the deductive form is clarity. A main strength of the inductive form is that it appeals more easily to the

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listeners' imaginations. A weakness of [the] deductive form is that it can tend to sound academic, like a lecture, even when you use real life stories as examples. A weakness of the inductive form can be a lack of detail.

Sometimes we use the nouns *sermon* and *homily* interchangeably. Actually, they're not synonyms. There are differences between the sermon and the homily:

[Visual]

| SERMON | HOMILY |
|---------------------------------|---|
| An enhancement of the Mass | Ritual element of the Mass itself |
| Stands by itself | Organically related to the sacred texts |
| Informational or moralistic | Encounter with Christ the Living Word |
| Normally deductive in structure | Normally inductive in structure |

A sermon is an enhancement to the Mass. In the Tridentine Missal of 1570, preaching was not an ordinary part of the Mass. It was added to the Mass on special occasions, but it was not considered a normative element of the liturgy. Some commentators of the Tridentine Mass refer to the sermon as an "interruption," meaning you stopped the Mass after the Gospel, then you inserted the sermon, and then you resumed the Mass with the Creed. This is one reason why the sermon often began and ended with the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross set the sermon off from the rest of the Mass.

On the other hand, the homily is a constitutive element of the Mass itself. It is not the icing on the cake, but is part of the cake itself. The rubrics of the Mass mandate a homily for Sundays and solemnities and strongly recommend a homily for weekdays.

A sermon stands by itself. A sermon was a talk given during Mass. The topic was chosen by the preacher. Sometimes a diocese would send parishes a syllabus for sermon topics, for example, a seven week series on the Sacraments, or a three week series of talks on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. So really it did not matter if the sermon was or was not related to the Lectionary passages of the day, the liturgical feast, or the liturgical season.

The homily is organically related to the sacred texts of the liturgy. The homily unfolds one or more of the Lectionary passages or other liturgical texts of the day's liturgy. It is strategically positioned in the liturgy to allow us to look back at the sacred texts in order to see how the God of Scripture is still working in our midst today, and to look forward to the Eucharistic Prayer during which we express gratitude for God's saving work in our midst today. In other words, the homily leads us to doxology, from biblical text to the praise of God.

The sermon tended to be informational or moralistic. It told us about God or about the Church; it exhorted listeners to embrace good or avoid evil. Indeed, all of this is necessary and certainly helpful for listeners even today.

The homily is an actual encounter with Christ the Living Word. As part of the liturgy itself, the homily—like the rest of the liturgy—is sacramental. It is not so much giving information about God, but an actual encounter with God, who is present as the Scripture is proclaimed to us, who speaks to us as the Scripture is proclaimed by lector or Gospel reader, and this proclamation of the Scriptures effects spiritual transformation within us.

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A sermon is deductive in structure. We reviewed the deductive structure earlier in this presentation. We saw how it was shaped, more likely lecture, with its main point at the beginning and the rest flowing from that main point to the end of the sermon.

The homily is normally inductive in structure. We reviewed this structure earlier in this presentation. We saw that the inductive form is structured more like a story, in which one movement builds upon the previous one leading up to the main point in its final movement.

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

[Questions on web page]

- Can you identify which homiletic form you customarily utilize: inductive, deductive or another?
- Are you willing to experiment with the inductive form if it has not been your customary homily form?