

# Mass Parts 16/52:

## *Homily*



There is a difference between a homily and a sermon. A sermon is based on a pre-decided theme. Scripture passages and stories are collected to back up that theme. We do not give sermons at Mass, we give a homily. A homily begins with the Scripture readings, which are already given in a three-year cycle for Sundays. These are the readings on which we have to preach. The basic definition of a homily is a preaching that opens up the message of specific Scripture passages, for a particular community, at a definite time of year.

There have been tens of thousands of writings, preachings, and art works on Scripture readings, throughout history. I could go on and on trying to list all of the possible meanings of a particular reading, but that would be boring. In writing about homilies, Pope Francis encouraged preachers to only use one image, or one idea, or one message, from the readings.

Let me start by saying that when I talk about “writing” my homily, I am not actually, physically writing anything down. I have learned that if I write things out on paper, then I have to read off the paper to deliver it. If I write it in my head, then I can give it from memory. A great point I learned in preaching classes was that: if I can’t remember what I am saying, how can I expect anybody else to remember it? I am also not writing out full texts in my head. I am coming up with bullet points, or sign posts, and the connecting movements between each post. I can phrase things however I am moved at a particular point, as long as I get to the next point.

So here is my process for the week to write my homily: it all starts on Monday. I first read all the readings for the next Sunday. This first reading is to just get familiar with what is happening. I try to find the uniting theme for the readings. If one unifying image or idea comes at this point, then I am done with my first reading. The rest of the week is about praying over this image and crafting how to relate it. If no immediate idea comes, this process is repeated on Tuesday and Wednesday. If by Thursday I don’t have the single image, then I start to look up Bible commentaries. If still not idea, only in the end do I look up homily helps online. The rest of the week is continuing to shape the message; by Saturday morning I better know what I am doing.

The prayer throughout the week is based on the events around us. What is going on in the world or our community to which this reading speaks? What do people truly need to hear right now? The most important question I ask throughout the process is: what is Jesus trying to say to people through these readings? Another great point from preaching classes was: don’t answer a question that nobody asked. I might find insightful, scholarly points in certain passages, but if it doesn’t speak to people’s lived experience, I skip it.

The most important point of all from class was: stick the landing! When you’re done preaching, be done. We have all heard it and I am guilty of it as well: it sounds like the homily is winding down, like the plane is coming in for a landing; but then it goes on, the plane has been waved off and is circling in again. So my whole mindset is: based on the given Scripture readings, what is Jesus trying to say? How can I share this with people in one point. When I have made that point, whether the point takes 3 minutes or 12 minutes, I sit down.

-Fr. Kopp  
Next Week: Creed