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The homily as a way to the synodal Church. The possibility of building a responsible laity

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Abstract

The homily as a way to the synodal Church. The possibility of building a responsible laity

The first Church was formed during the Pentecostal speech of the apostles. The first forms of evangelization were narratives of personal experiences with Jesus. With the formation of structures in the Church, the role of authority in official proclamation in worship also developed. We will try to show how a communal sharing of God's word is necessary for a communal participation in Christ's sacrifice on the way to synodality. Pope Francis encourages everyone to bear witness to Christ. We would follow the words that pope Francis wrote in the "Evangelii Gaudium": "We are not asked to be flawless, but to keep growing and wanting to grow as we advance along the path of the Gospel; our arms must never grow slack." The fear of losing touch with the sources of Revelation and from the diversity of faith experiences must not stop us from seeking a word that would, as at the first Pentecost, inspire people to live the gospel. The primary responsibility for more believers to participate in the sacrifice of the Word in our liturgy lies with those who can speak today. We will point out guidelines on how to educate for greater participation and open the possibility for institutional change through the homily as we know it today. We will also point out some good practices that reflect the possibility of education for the testimony of all believers needed for a synodal Church.

Keywords: homily, synodality, rhetoric, pope Francis, laity, authority in the Church

Abstrakt

Kazanie jako droga do Kościoła synodalnego. Możliwość kształtowania odpowiedzialnego laikatu

Pierwszy Kościół został ukształtowany podczas mowy apostołów podczas Pięćdziesiątnicy. Pierwsze formy ewangelizacji to opowieści o osobistych doświadczeniach z Jezusem. Wraz z powstaniem struktur w Kościele rozwijała się również rola władzy w oficjalnym głoszeniu w nabożeństwach. Spróbujemy pokazać, jak wspólne dzielenie się słowem Bożym jest konieczne do wspólnego uczestnictwa w ofierze Chrystusa na drodze do synodalności. Papież Franciszek zachęca wszystkich do dawania świadectwa Chrystusowi. Będziemy podążać za słowami, które papież Franciszek napisał w "Evangelii Gaudium": "Nie żąda się od nas, abyśmy byli niepokalani, ale raczej żebyśmy zawsze wzrastali, żyli z głębokim pragnieniem czynienia postępów na drodze Ewangelii i nie opuszczali rąk". Strach przed utratą kontaktu ze źródłami Objawienia i różnorodnością doświadczeń wiary nie powinien nas powstrzymać od poszukiwania słowa, które, podobnie jak podczas pierwszej Pięćdziesiątnicy, zainspiruje ludzi

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do życia Ewangelią. Pierwszorzędna odpowiedzialność za większe zaangażowanie wiernych w ofiarę Słowa w naszej liturgii spoczywa na tych, którzy potrafią dzisiaj przemawiać. Wskażemy wytyczne dotyczące sposobów edukacji w celu większego uczestnictwa i otworzymy możliwość zmiany instytucjonalnej poprzez kazanie, tak jak jest to znane dzisiaj. Wskażemy również kilka dobrych praktyk, które odzwierciedlają możliwość edukacji dla świadectwa wszystkich wiernych potrzebnego dla Kościoła synodalnego.

Słowa kluczowe: kazanie, synodalność, retoryka, papież Franciszek, świeccy, władza w Kościele

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The *Vademecum*,¹ which accompanies the preparatory document of the synodal journey, clearly indicates the direction of the universal Church in the matter of giving the laity a more responsible and intense role:

The entire People of God shares a common dignity and vocation through Baptism. All of us are called in virtue of our Baptism to be active participants in the life of the Church. In parishes, small Christian communities, lay movements, religious communities, and other forms of communion, women and men, young people and the elderly, we are all invited to listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who comes to guide our human efforts, breathing life and vitality into the Church and leading us into deeper communion for our mission in the world.²

It is a direction and a desire, but it requires a common search for the path to its realization.

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- 1 Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for The Synod On Synodality*, <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html> (17.08.2023).
 - 2 Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for The Synod On Synodality*, p. 9–10, <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html> (17.08.2023).

The times in which we live bring many advantages that our ancestors could only dream of. And yet, man is losing ground. Instead of getting rid of fear, we see a conspiracy against humanity behind every unpleasant demand. The more we are connected through modern technology, the lonelier we are. We are increasingly alienated not only from others, but even from ourselves. To the extent that we uproot our connection to the past, lose our footing, and through the process of human emancipation erode all responsibility.³ In response to this immense weight of modern man, all kinds of remedies are emerging. But nothing seems to be able to satisfy the restlessness of a secularized society. All the achievements of science, modern technology, psychotherapy, medicine and social sciences cannot calm the frightened man.

Today, as so often in history, we expect to rely on tradition, on the heritage that our ancestors left us. Indeed, many are returning to the old, traditional solutions. Despite the high-profile attempts of all kinds of traditionalism, nationalism and conservatism, these solutions are not conducive to society. Christianity, which once guided, consolidated, and directed civilization, no longer finds its rightful place. Rodney Stark's assertion that the world is far more religious today than ever before⁴ gives us something to ponder. The leading sociologist, who has also written about the power of Christianity and its victory over the Roman legions, is convinced that a religious response to life's challenges is very much alive today. The question is only what response and in what way. The answer emerges from his research: the power of Christ and his salvation is still inviting and healing.⁵ Given that the churches in our localities are becoming increasingly empty, it is becoming more and more difficult to believe this.

The community of the church has always thrived on storytelling. The birth of the first ecclesial community is marked by the event of Pentecost, when the apostles spoke publicly for the first time about salvation

³ Ch. Delsol, *Sovraštvo do sveta*, Ljubljana 2019.

⁴ Cf. R. Stark, *The Triumph of Faith Why the World is More Religious Than Ever*, Wilmington, Delaware 2015.

⁵ Cf. R. Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion*, New York 2011.

through Jesus Christ.⁶ Previously, the group formed by Jesus himself had been preserved by the testimonies of all those who had encountered the Risen Christ. Mary Magdalene was the first to speak, and then the other disciples also spoke about the event of the resurrection. The message was spread through preaching, and the Apostle Paul only picked up what was already known. His appearance, if we may call it that, in Athens is a typical example of a practice that had become established. “Paul stood up in front of the city council and said, ‘I see that in every way you Athenians are very religious’ (Ac 17, 22). The desire to help the Athenians to believe moved Paul to speak.

Throughout history, various storytelling traditions have developed. The early church relied on conversation, also a type of dialogue in liturgical terms, but it was not until John Chrysostom that the homily was elevated to a ‘higher’ rhetorical level, with the main speaker taking on an increasingly larger role and thus responsibility. His homilies, however, are full of questions and a kind of conversation with his listeners, which clearly shows that he wants to stay connected to his listeners.⁷ Over the centuries, preaching became the primary responsibility of bishops, and only authorized priests were allowed to preach. The mediaeval sermon increasingly became a reflection of the skill and knowledge of the preacher. It was not until the scholastic influence and the new monastic movements that more sobriety and a consistent quotation of Scripture were introduced. The Renaissance return to classical rhetoric and the demand for an edifying homily after the Council of Trent shaped what has survived to the present day, even though the Second Vatican Council reintegrated the homily into the immediate liturgical setting and opened it to a more communal focus.

The Homiletical Directory summarizes the four fundamental themes of the conciliar renewal for the area of the homily: the new place of the Word of God in the liturgical celebration; respect for the principles of the Catholic tradition of biblical interpretation; adaptation of the preacher to these new expectations; and consideration of the situation of the

⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 732.

⁷ Cf. P. Beecher, *Homiletics*, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 2023, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07443a.htm> (17.08.2023).

faithful, their cultural and living conditions.⁸ The four points of reference should indeed lead to the fundamental goal of the homily, which should be “about the mysteries of faith and the standards of Christian life in a way suited to the particular needs of the listeners.”⁹ The same article emphasized the homily’s difference from other forms of teaching reflected in its liturgical context. This is to be achieved in three ways: by explaining the liturgical readings,¹⁰ by preparing the faithful community to realize the Eucharistic celebration of the Paschal Mystery,¹¹ and by advising how to bring the Gospel into the world of concrete life.

The question is how these goals can be achieved and whether the presently prevailing form and content is the best to achieve the goals set at a time when the institution is losing its primary authority in interpretation (of scripture?).¹² A homily that is merely a kind of performance according to the Gospel, with a more or less successful exposition, does not seem to achieve the set goals and does not lead to a deepened faith of the listeners, even less to a communicative faith in the era of digital man. Therefore, in this paper we want to show how a renewal of the homily is the first way to prepare a place in the Church more open to the proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ today, built on communal responsibility and so paving the synodal way.

1. Authority in the homily

Although religiosity in general should grow, according to Pope Francis, the Catholic Church needs a fundamental cure because it lacks witness and redemptive power. The disease of clericalism, the desire

8 Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*, 2.

9 Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*, 11.

10 Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*, 12.

11 Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Homiletic Directory*, 13.

12 Cf. St. Scholz, *Strukturen im Umbau oder Abbruch? Wandlung und Wallfahrt von Bibelkulturen im digitalen Raum*, in: *Digitalisierung als Transformation? Perspektiven aus Ethik, Philosophie und Theologie*, Hrsg. T. Holischka, K. Viertbauer, Ch. Preidel, Berlin 2022, p. 165–179.

for power, is responsible for many of the shortcomings that weaken its witness and close the door to those who need its good news, the Holy Father said. “Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today.”¹³ Clericalism is always about the abuse of power.¹⁴ Despite the changes in the understanding of the priest as the only one who may and is able to offer the sacrifice of Christ, which has been greatly consolidated since the Tridentine renewal, clericalism is still present even after the Second Vatican Council. Especially since the role of the priest as the only ‘alter Christus’ is strongly emphasized and therefore the promotion of the common priesthood at the level of community life has not increased significantly.¹⁵ While many radical critics see the solution to the disease of clericalism only in the abolition of the ministerial priesthood, the Pope and the universal Church have for some time been seeking a renewal of the role of the priest and his way of life in the midst of the community. The priest is to be more and more a shepherd, smelling of the sheep, and being one of them.¹⁶

A community based solely on the authority of the overseer will hardly be the image of the early Church community of the redeemed believers. The fundamental question, therefore, is how to renew the life and work of the priest in order to avoid the pitfalls of clericalism and build a more co-responsible community. “How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural

¹³ Francis, *Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God*, 2018.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Abraham, *Clericalism and the need for reform of the post-Tridentine model for the formation of seminarians*, “*International Studies in Catholic Education*” 12 (2020) nr 2, p. 207.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Abraham, *Clericalism and the need for reform of the post-Tridentine model for the formation of seminarians*, “*International Studies in Catholic Education*” 12 (2020) nr 2, p. 208.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Abraham, *Clericalism and the need for reform of the post-Tridentine model for the formation of seminarians*, “*International Studies in Catholic Education*” 12 (2020) nr 2, p. 213.

and organizational reforms are secondary—that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials.”¹⁷ The words of Pope Francis give direction to the action of the leader of the Church, which should strive to become a place of healing of wounds, a voice of salvation today.

The homily is the only contact the priest has with the whole community, it is regular, it is part of his duties, and it is up to him how he performs it. If we take seriously the demand for a homily that works in the spirit of the new evangelization, we must remember that it is “first of all an introduction to friendship with Jesus and a way in his discipleship.”¹⁸ However, the very authority of the homily, attributed only to the clergy, is an obstacle to the consolidation of a genuine relationship with Jesus and points to the possibility of abuse in terms of the aforementioned authority. The fact that it relates to the liturgy is significant: “It is because the homily is an integral part of the Church's worship that it is to be delivered only by bishops, priests, or deacons. So intimate is the bond between the table of the Word and the table of the altar that it is fitting that ‘The Homily should be given by the priest celebrant himself’ (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 66), or, in any case, always by one ordained to preside or assist at the altar.”¹⁹ While noting that lay people can also make a significant contribution, it is made clear that this is only done in other circumstances that clearly have nothing to do with the liturgy. This makes clergy into even more isolated and detached individuals, thus risking to make them lose touch with life. This ‘ontological’ otherness that comes with ordination and can develop into clericalism harms everyone in different ways. “The laity is victimized and

17 A. Spadaro, *A Big Heart Open to God: An interview with Pope Francis*, 2013, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis> (17.08.2023).

18 A. Šegula, *Evangelizacija kot ena od poti do enega Boga v sodobnih pastoralnih smernicah*, “Bogoslovni vestnik” 78 (2018) n. 2, p. 456.

19 *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Homiletic Directory*, 5.

infantilized; the clergy is isolated and expected to be superhuman.”²⁰ It is precisely because of this double harm that it makes sense to start at the source: the question of authority, because the article above makes clear who has authority in worship and thus in preaching.

There is nothing wrong with authority itself, as long as it does not degenerate into authoritarianism. Being the only one at the microphone, standing before a crowd that has no right to dissent, being seen as the only expert in the whole congregation, and invoking God’s authority can lead to a quick degeneration from healthy authority to sick authority. Pope Francis expressed during a visit to Ireland that authoritarianism is synonymous with clericalism.²¹ He adds that the special mission and place that an ordained person has in the Church does not equal abuse. Only when we use the power that a position gives us to dominate, control, and subjugate others in one way or another, does it become authoritarianism.

The authority of the ordained person in worship derives from an understanding of revelation.

Thus the Church’s mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity.²²

God comes to us through the Church. In order to make his presence authentically known, bishops and priests are appointed as his co-workers. “They are ‘heralds of faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers’ of the apostolic faith ‘endowed with the authority of

²⁰ C. Wooden, *Clericalism: The culture that enables abuse and insists on hiding it*, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/22/clericalism-culture-enables-abuse-and-insists-hiding-it> (28.07.2021).

²¹ Cf. C. Wooden, ‘Elitist, clericalist’ church allows abuse to thrive, pope says, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/elitist-clericalist-church-allows-abuse-thrive-pope-says> (28.07.2021).

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 738.

Christ’.”²³ The fundamental task of the Church is to preserve the truth of the true faith, the truth that alone liberates.²⁴

2. A new direction in preaching

By emphasizing the shared responsibility through the baptismal priesthood, the Second Vatican Council sought to move beyond authoritarian pastoralism and open up by placing the proclamation of Christ in a concrete time and place.²⁵ Despite these efforts, the old structure remained largely intact and the changes did not correct the deeper inner motivations of the Church.²⁶ The search for a new evangelization, according to Pope St. John Paul II, not only brought about the need for new forms of proclamation, but also revealed the need for a reorientation of the entire structure of the Church. Therefore, Pope Francis does not just stick to calls to fight against the old, ossified structures, but also points out the reasons and the direction of how and where we should go as a faithful community. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door.”²⁷ The question is how to accomplish this openness so that the inspiration of the Spirit can come alive. According to the Pope, coldness and exclusion from active life after the sacraments is one of the locks that keep many from entering.

The way to warm and open the participation of all in the fundamental sacrament of the Church, the Eucharist, is certainly the homily. However, the fact that it is expressly reserved for the priestly ministry and excludes others can be a major obstacle from the outset. Not so much

²³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 888.

²⁴ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 890.

²⁵ Cf. T. Stegu, *Žrtev in pashalna skrivnost ter homilija na Slovenskem*, “Bogoslovni vestnik” 76 (2016) n. 2, p. 396.

²⁶ Cf. G. Abraham, *Clericalism and the need for reform of the post-Tridentine model for the formation of seminarians*, p. 208.

²⁷ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (28.04.2023).

because of the person who delivers the homily, but because of the consciousness of the one who delivers it and of those who 'come' to hear it. In order to pass on the treasure of faith in a right and dignified way, and at the same time to open the door to this treasure to all who wish to hear it, one only has to look at how the homily is understood today. The Pope is clear about what it is meant to be and what its purpose is:

The homily has special importance due to its eucharistic context: it surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion. The homily takes up once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people.²⁸

It must be more than instruction, as the Directory points out. It is a conversation that is currently difficult to derive from the homilies as we know them. Especially since it should be an ongoing conversation between a person who is in some way connected to or seeking God, and the preacher should just get on with this process. It is even more challenging to have a conversation of communion, which is a fundamental characteristic of the Catholic Church, if we do not listen to the faithful, and even more difficult if we do not listen to God. It is precisely because of this double connection that the Pope places even greater emphasis on the liturgical framework of the homily, which is a continuation of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council:

When preaching takes place within the context of the liturgy, it is part of the offering made to the Father and a mediation of the grace which Christ pours out during the celebration. This context demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist.²⁹

Connection with God involves connection of people, which requires a high degree of openness.³⁰ Openness is hardly reflected in the notion,

²⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137.

²⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 138.

³⁰ Cf. S. Kranjc, *Gostoljubje – osebna izkaznica liturgičnega in pastoralnega sodelavca*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 80 (2020) n. 3, p. 490.

often shared by both worshippers and preachers, that only the worship leader is connected to God and therefore has the authority to instruct the worshippers. Such approach describes a connection with God that is hardly conducive to the necessary conversation of the whole congregation with God.

The Pope also points out how to open this space in the liturgy when he first writes about the nature of the Church. He compares her to a mother caring for her children:

It reminds us that the Church is a mother, and that she preaches in the same way that a mother speaks to her child, knowing that the child trusts that what she is teaching is for his or her benefit, for children know that they are loved. Moreover, a good mother can recognize everything that God is bringing about in her children, she listens to their concerns and learns from them. The spirit of love which reigns in a family guide both mother and child in their conversations; therein they teach and learn, experience correction and grow in appreciation of what is good. Something similar happens in a homily.³¹

Words that any zealous preacher would surely repeat. The first question to be answered, therefore, is how it is that the benevolent mother-talk, so desirable, so rarely occurs in preaching.

3. Homily is not persuasion

The history of Christian preaching began to follow the Aristotelian model of communication relatively early in its development. Aristotle's communication is conditioned in the spirit of the times by rhetoric, which served to regulate public life and is understood as such from this context of communication established at the time. It is based on the art of persuasion, which in the process of communication leads to successfully convincing the listener of what one wishes to communicate.³² The success of the persuasion process depends largely on the speaker's ability to use both external and internal means (of communication?). It is of particular interest to us that Aristotle emphasizes that this is the case with

³¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 139.

³² Cf. Aristotel, *Retorika*, Ljubljana 2011, 1355a.

listeners who are unable to gain a comprehensive insight into matters when faced with many facts nor to draw logical conclusions without sufficient context.³³ Something similar has also been accepted by modern communication science in the last century as the basis of any regularity of communication. This model was soon called linear because it is based on the power of the communicator, and it is the communicator who is the only one able to and obliged to control the whole communication process.³⁴ In the early centuries, when the Church spread more by word of mouth than in public places, this model was unnecessary and even often suspect. Faith is a gift of God, and catechumens were helped by careful personal instruction to discern it and understand it from the larger picture of revelation. St. Augustine, with his thorough knowledge of classical rhetoric, responded effectively to the challenge of growing numbers of believers as Christianity became the official religion (of the Roman Empire?). The leader was able to use the opportunity of his rhetorical skills and witness to lead them along the path of faith. Because of the authority Augustine still enjoyed later in the Church, he influenced the formation of the tradition of the Church's liturgical oratory to this day.³⁵ Here, deep in the unconscious background of the ecclesiastical orator lies the conviction that the audience is ignorant and finds it difficult to think logically in matters of faith and revelation, as Aristotle argues.

Thus, very early in the preaching tradition, it was understood that it is the preacher who shapes the message for the whole congregation. The homily does not exist before the preacher prepares it—it begins with the preacher, and in a sense the sermon is finished before it is spoken before the faithful gather. Moreover, the homily is almost invariably a monologue. The preacher's success is measured by the extent to which he gets his listeners to follow his message and adopt it into their lives.³⁶ In preaching, it is increasingly forgotten that there are two sides in the communication process—the preacher and the congregation. In this form of communication, only the voice of one side is heard, which is not

³³ Cf. Aristotel, *Retorika*, 1357a.

³⁴ Cf. E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, "Diacovensia" 28 (2020) n. 1, p. 109–110.

³⁵ Cf. E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, p. 111.

³⁶ Cf. E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, p. 112.

conducive to a community that celebrates the offering of God's Word together and lives as a community through and from the sacraments.

Thus, it is not surprising that homily listeners are gradually becoming mere consumers of religious content and theological doctrines—they can only decide on the type of sermon they hear in church on Sundays and whether they like it or not. In other words, the religious community becomes passive observers of the religious spectacle put on by the clergy. This is in stark contrast to what the worship service is intended to do. Similarly, the homily does not follow a maternal address, as Pope Francis suggests. If the art of persuasion is to get the listener to respond to the speaker's appeal, that is hardly the case in this form of communication and in a world where people receive hundreds of messages every day. Popularity of the message does not equate conversion, which an address during worship should lead to.³⁷ It is even less related to the communicants' participation in the celebration of the sacraments. Taking an active role is necessary for success of persuasion, which in itself cannot be successful, since it is not enough to be persuaded to believe. Two fundamental problems arise from this understanding of worship communication: the sense of powerlessness of the preachers and the sense of powerlessness of the proclamation itself among the listeners.

In this sense, preaching as the transmission of facts and well-defined answers can miss its target if it offers solutions to problems that do not exist or answers questions that the listeners do not actually ask. Such model of communication also springs from the belief that more knowledge about God and the church will lead to a more Christian life.³⁸ Especially in a time when we already live in a culture of individualism and indifference, only active participation and inner transcendence of linear communication can move individuals to follow the message.³⁹ Paul Watzlawick has clearly shown that every communication is in some way an interaction.⁴⁰ His first statement, which is that we cannot avoid communicating, already challenges the model of linear and thus homiletic

37 Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, Grand Rapids 2005, p. 21.

38 Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, p. 113.

39 Cf. I. Nežič Glavica, *Vloga izkustvenega učenja v gestalt pedagoškem modelu učenja in poučevanja po Albertu Höferju*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 79 (2019) n. 1, p. 198.

40 Cf. E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, p. 114.

communication. If I, as a preacher, imagine my congregation as a vessel into which I simply pour the message, I am completely wrong. In this process, the sender of the message is always the receiver. We need to adapt to this interactional model the consciousness of the preacher—the communicator—and the place of the receiver—the hearer—in our worship proclamation.⁴¹ We do not change the message, the Word of God, but actively include it in the process of communication. Theologically, this is based on the dialogical communication that God has in the course of the history of revelation, first with the chosen people and then with the Church. Finally, the Word became incarnate and dwelt among us. This, then, is also a model that can help us overcome the fear of losing revelation and overcome the awareness of the abuse of authority that manifests itself in clericalism, which is clearly based on a misguided model of communication that is theologically inappropriate for the form of worship in the Eucharist and for the life of the Church. The persuasive form of preaching, following the Aristotelian model of rhetoric, is closer to manipulation than to guidance in the journey of faith.⁴²

We will only follow the possible changes that the preacher, the communicator, makes in his homily. At first glance, this seems to follow the old linear path of the Aristotelian model of persuasion. However, in the triangle of communicator, message, and receiver, we want to highlight the one who currently bears the greatest responsibility and has all the means to change the process of homiletic communication. In this way we want to turn the negative authority to the good: It is the power of the speaker that can help to change the situation of the Church, in which the Word no longer comes alive and does not draw itself into true divinity.

In such moments, the Church takes on a different face and, at best, a different language. The constant pressure that makes every message sound forced and desperate then falls away. Faith becomes a sincere offer, and not a few people accept it gratefully.⁴³

41 Cf. D. Kraner, *Vpliv socialnih reprezentacij o katoliški Cerkvi v Sloveniji na družbene napetost*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 78 (2018) n. 2, p. 611–624.

42 Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, p. 32.

43 E. Flügge, *Žargon prizadetosti: Kako Cerkev umira zaradi svojega jezika*, Ljubljana 2017, p. 149.

4. Homily as a Synodal Path

In conclusion we offer some concrete suggestions that can help preserve preaching and create a space in worship as increasingly emphasized by the Church's teaching. We list those that are possible and appropriate for the worship leader and do not require any special skills, apart from intellect and due diligence. The proposals are also part of the renewal of the demands of the New Evangelization, which aims to renew the whole society from within.

The first thing we can do as worship leaders is to keep reminding ourselves that we are part of a community of believers and seekers. The easiest way to show this outwardly, and thus to reinforce it within ourselves, is to cultivate physical closeness and genuine eye contact, which requires a much greater responsiveness on the part of the preacher. If in classical rhetoric the body is only one component of persuasion, in Catholic theology the body is the basis of sacramentality. Therefore, knowing that I am preaching with my whole body, and not just that I am persuasive, means that I am faithful to the Incarnate Word. The celebration of the Eucharist is a re-presentation of the Body of Christ; therefore the full presence of the preacher is also a way of witnessing to the faithful that they are fully involved in this process of transubstantiation. At the same time, the preacher becomes more vulnerable as he sees and experiences the congregation's response to his own preaching. To be fully present necessarily involves the whole person, who is always a physical being with a face that reveals his personality. It is precisely this living presence of the Eucharistic minister that will help to lift him, at least partially, out of the patronizing attitude of clericalism. Testimony, which according to St. Augustine has greater power than mere teaching, will thus become much more prominent, and only through it will the true authority that comes from a life of faith and the real presence of Christ emerge.⁴⁴

Similarly, the preacher will show his own vulnerability through his exposure. Thus, instead of playing the role of the preacher or even hiding behind it, he will need to reveal his true humanity and expose his

44 Cf. E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, p. 118.

positive and negative sides to the listeners, in order to truly belong to the community to which he preaches. Worship is only genuine when there is a real human being behind it. Many people today come to church only half-heartedly. They do not even know each other, and if they do, they try to show off in the community of believers the same way as they do on digital social networks: with their best character traits. Christ has always known man and invited him to free himself from the filth that paralyzes him. Therefore, true Christian worship is only possible where man can participate in all sincerity. The testimony of the leader most profoundly contributes to this. His vulnerability gives courage, and his trust in God's power is the true authority that leads to the fullness of the proclamation. At the same time, the preacher becomes more and more one of the people and no longer just someone who stands in front of people.⁴⁵

This also addresses the needs of two-way communication, which requires the preacher to be attuned to his listeners. The preacher must find ways to facilitate communication and do everything possible to ensure that the message is heard and understood and open to further interpretation. The very fact that he stays with his congregation for a while after the service, or better yet, that he stimulates a conversation about the homily, is one way to facilitate at least partially open interactive communication. Marriage, Bible, youth, and student groups, in which he encourages the participants to comment on the Word of God on Sunday, provide the worship leader with an opportunity to understand his congregation and listen to their experiences and ability to grasp the biblical message. In this way, he also sets himself apart from the perception that he is the only one competent to interpret the Word of God. At the same time, this makes it easier to overcome the passivity of believers, who often feel much more comfortable listening silently to an expert than taking an active stand, and who therefore find it more difficult to actively engage with the proclamation.⁴⁶

Words in themselves have no meaning—it is the hearer who gives meaning to the words. Therefore, the meaning of the biblical message cannot be expected to be received directly from the biblical text or the preacher's confession, but the process by which hearers internalize the

⁴⁵ Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, p. 28.

message and 'translate' it into their own understanding must be considered. The need to follow the theme of the homily in various contemporary forums can help the preacher understand his congregation and their process of understanding. As a mother uses the words of her children and patiently builds upon them, so should the preacher draw upon the meanings that the believers can grasp, patiently unpacking the deeper contents of Revelation. He will succeed most easily if he is close to the real lives of his believers. The preacher should strive for concreteness, but not in an abstract way, by merely highlighting the text in its context, but by expressing its meaning in the life situations of the listeners.

Listening is a prerequisite for any meaningful dialogue in preaching. For this reason, we should stop taking listening for granted, but consider it a crucial factor in the proclamation of the 'saved' life in any community. Simply paying attention to the reactions of the faithful during the homily, listening to the comments after Mass, and suggesting topics worth addressing can lead to what is called a 'conversational homily'. This is not a matter of going among the faithful with a microphone and introducing some kind of maieutic method into the homily. In that way, the priest would only be emphasizing his authority, his place, without giving space to the One who gathers us all. Since it is a conversation with the life of the believers, the homily must reflect real life. Jesus always goes to concrete people, addresses them directly and shows them in a very practical way the consequences of their action or inaction. Today's preachers also have this opportunity. It is a special way of living and working that allows us to do this. When we are open to such moments and can include them in our preaching, a space of conversation opens up that teaches us that we are all one Church and we only have one teacher. We can therefore understand Wesley Allen when he points out that a conversational homily

...begins with the recognition that the proclamation of the Gospel is the responsibility of the whole Church and that it is done through a matrix of theological, religious, political, and personal conversations and is not simply the responsibility of a single preacher proclaiming from the pulpit.⁴⁷

47 E. Šeba, *Neke novije komunikacijske teorije i njihova primjena na homiletiku*, p. 124.

Our desire to tell the story of God and our salvation in our communities is good, but the way of speaking as a kind of performance is wrong. Our desire to connect people to the truth of God is right, but speeches given only for show will not accomplish this.⁴⁸ A model for an approach that goes beyond authoritarianism and clericalism is the apostle Peter. His encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10) shows how we can listen to God and people at the same time, and how Peter is transformed in the process. His faithfulness to the tradition of not ingesting anything unclean began to change in his encounter with the Gentile. But first, he had to enter into conversation with him, listen to him, and even follow him. Cornelius accepted the message and changed his life because he felt that his life meant something to the God that Peter represented. Because Cornelius accepted the message, Peter also understood the revelation better. It was not a matter of monological persuasion, abuse of authority, clericalism, but of the message, a conversation, “this is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue.”⁴⁹ When Cornelius entered the community of believers with his house, Peter understood that the Church of Jesus Christ must go its own way, welcoming even those whom it would not welcome according to its own purely human judgement. It was a dialogue that fundamentally opened obedience to the divine inspiration: to be called into the Church and to open it to all.

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⁴⁸ Cf. D. Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 142.

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