

First the bow is bent in study. Then the arrow is released in preaching.

-Hugh of St. Cher

Introduction

I would divide preparation/preaching into three distinct “phases” – remote preparation, proximate preparation, and the preaching event itself. Remote preparation has to do with all the “background” (and baggage) that one brings to the ministry of preaching. Proximate preparation deals with preparing a specific homily. The preaching event itself includes the entire liturgy—not just the act of preaching itself. Therefore, how we proclaim the scriptures and how we preside/minister in the liturgy will impact how we are heard.

I list a number of resources below. I have put an asterisk (*) next to the resources that I most highly recommend (for whatever that’s worth). I do not agree with everything that each one has to say, but I have found them helpful and challenging—and am a better preacher for them.

If you are interested in liberational preaching, preaching and postmodernism, preaching in the African-American tradition or in Hispanic communities, please let me know and I can get you a list of these resources as well.

Remote Preparation

Know Thyself

Whether explicit or implicit, we have our own “theology of preaching.” We have our own history of hearing preaching—and of preaching ourselves. We have our view of scripture, and how it ought to be interpreted. We have our family and personal history of praying the liturgy. All these things will color how we preach. Therefore, I would argue that it is important to make these elements as explicit as possible, so we can make conscious choices as we prepare to preach—rather than be governed by habit and history. A helpful resource for exploring these issues is:

*Schlafer, David J. *Your Way with God’s Word: Discovering Your Distinctive Preaching Voice*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995.

There are some excellent sources for a Catholic theology of preaching:

DeLeers, Stephen Vincent. *Written Text Becomes Living Word: The Vision and Practice of Sunday Preaching*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2004.

*Hilkert, Mary Catherine. *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Janowiak, Paul. *The Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly*. Collegeville, MN: A Pueblo Book, The Liturgical Press, 2000.

*Waznak, Robert P. *An Introduction to the Homily*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

It may also be helpful to read on the spirituality and ministry of preaching from other perspectives:

Resner, André. *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1993.

Troeger, Thomas H. *The Parable of Ten Preachers*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992.

Some helpful resources on theology and the scriptures:

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Scripture, The Soul of Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994.

Fretheim, Terrence E. and Karlfried Froehlich. *The Bible as Word of God in a Postmodern Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

*Harrington, Daniel J. *How Do Catholics Read the Bible?* New York: A Sheed and Ward Book, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005.

Martin, George. *Reading Scripture as the Word of God: Practical Approaches and Attitudes*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1998.

Schneiders, Sandra M. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, the Liturgical Press, 1999.

Know the Community

Preaching is contextualized in a particular community. Therefore, it is important to do some “cultural anthropology” and get to know your community well. Some resources that will help you get at the “macro” issues include:

*Tisdale, Lenora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

In addition, knowing the community means getting involved – not just in ministry, but in life. The arts, politics, sports, etc....all help to widen our field of vision. It is not that they become fodder for preaching, but they provide us with a deeper and more broad perspective. For example, see:

Boyle, Elizabeth Michael. *Preaching the Poetry of the Gospels: A Lyric Companion to the Lectionary*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

But the “micro” issues are important as well. Humans are incredibly diverse—in personality, generational cohort, gender, learning style, etc. All these factors, and more besides, affect how we listen, including how we “hear” the preacher. Therefore, we need to be attentive to these differences and structure our preaching in such a way that it can be “heard” by those in the assembly. Some helpful resources include:

*Jeter, Joseph R. and Ronald J. Allen. *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation*. St. Louis, Chalice Press: 2002.

Webb, Joseph M. *Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998.

*Wisdom, Andrew Carl. *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2004.

Know the Heart and Mind of the Church

Preaching is a ministry of the Church, not an individual undertaking. Therefore, in all our preaching, it is important to understand what it is that the Church is asking us to do. I recommend the following:

Most importantly, I would read (and re-read) **Fulfilled in Your Hearing* from the U.S. Bishops. This landmark document sets the bar for Catholic preaching in the United States. It is included in this book, which has accompanying commentary:

Wallace, James A., ed. *Preaching in the Sunday Assembly: A Pastoral Commentary on Fulfilled in Your Hearing. Commentary and Text*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010.

Burke, John and Thomas P. Doyle. *The Homilist's Guide to Scripture, Theology, and Canon Law*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986.

An excellent collection of official Church teaching regarding the scriptures can be found in *The Bible Documents* from Liturgy Training Publications. I especially recommend reading **The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* from the International Biblical Commission.

Proximate Preparation

I begin with a daily praying of the scriptures that I will be preaching on (*lectio divina*). Ideally, for Sunday preaching, I like to begin on the evening of the preceding Sunday. I focus on what questions the readings raise—especially in light of current events. Therefore, during the week, as I read the paper and listen to the news, I try to find any anchoring issues or events. I don't turn to the commentaries until after I have “chewed” on the word myself for a while; depending on my schedule I begin the exegetical research around Tuesday. I like to begin writing by Thursday and have a final text by Friday. Saturday is for practice.

Lectio Divina

My personal approach is to pray the readings using the monastic model of *lectio divina*—reading the pericopes out loud, pausing as words or phrases “grab” my attention and resting in them. Those words/phrases often form the core around which the homily is built.

I find it especially helpful to engage in group *lectio*—finding that the insights that others have into the readings can be quite profound, and an excellent way to help prepare a homily that will connect to the community.

I continue this process daily until the preaching event; it is crucial that the issues of most import rise to the surface before turning to commentaries and the like.

Current Events

There is an old quip that Karl Barth prepared to preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Preaching is contextualized, both in space (this community, this liturgy) and time (this day/season)—and that means in the space/time where we live the other 6 days and 23 hours of the week. Find a pattern of reading the paper, watching/listening to the news, etc...it is where the assembly lives. You may want to look at the following resource as a helpful way of incorporating such resources into your preparations for preaching:

*Foley, Edward. *Preaching Basics*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

Rutledge, Fleming. *The Bible and The New York Times*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

Structure (Method)

How do you put the homily together? Is it deductive, beginning with a conclusion and then proving it? Or inductive, taking the assembly on a journey so they reach a conclusion with you? I recommend the following resources for review:

Burghardt, Walter J. *Preaching: The Art and the Craft*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

*DeBona, Gueric. *Fulfilled in Our Hearing: History and Method of Christian Preaching*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005.

DeBona, Gueric. *Preaching Effectively, Revitalizing Your Church: The Seven-Step Ladder toward Successful Homilies*. New York: Paulist Press, 2009.

*Eslinger, Richard L. *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletic Method*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Eslinger and DeBona give a great overview of contemporary preaching methods. If you want to read the original works, they are:

Buttrick, David. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.

Craddock, Fred B. *As One Without Authority*. Revised edition. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001.

Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

Long, Thomas. *The Witness of Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.

Lowry, Eugene L. *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. Expanded edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.

Rueter, Alvin C. *Making Good Preaching Better*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997.

In regards to imaginal (literally and figuratively) preaching:

Jensen, Richard A. *Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual Images in Preaching, with CD-ROM*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

*Troeger, Thomas H. *Imagining a Sermon*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

Language

What kind of language do you use to preach? Professorial? Forensic? Poetic? Preaching, since it deals with the most important of matters—the Divine, is going to be strongly metaphorical. How do we / dare we speak of God? Perhaps looking at texts like these ones will help raise important questions and challenges:

Geary, James. *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

McKenzie, Alyce M. *Novel Preaching: Tips from Top Writers on Crafting Creative Sermons*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Ramshaw, Gail. *Reviving Sacred Speech: The Meaning of Liturgical Language*. Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2000.

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *When God is Silent*. Boston: Cowley Publications, 1998.

*Willobee, Sondra B. *The Write Stuff: Crafting Sermons that Capture and Convince*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

*Witherup, Ronald D. *A Liturgist's Guide to Inclusive Language*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.

The Liturgy

In addition to being attentive to the season and the particular feast or rite being celebrated, I recommend looking at the Missal (Sacramentary) – and review the prayers of the day, the preface that you are going to use, the Eucharistic Prayer. All these can provide tremendous insights/images that parallel and complement what you find in the readings.

Be attentive to the structure of the Lectionary; remember that the second reading in ordinary time is independent of the other three. One of my professors counseled me: Look at the psalm; that is the anchor that holds the other readings together. We often jump right into the gospel – so perhaps a different entry into the readings via the psalm would be helpful.

Resources include:

Monshau, Michael, ed. *Preaching at the Double Feast: Homiletics for Eucharistic Worship*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2006.

Skudlarek, William. *The Word in Worship: Preaching in a Liturgical Context*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.

*Wallace, James A. *Preaching to the Hungers of the Heart: The Homily on the Feasts and within the Rites*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002.

I also recommend the annual from LTP: *Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons*.

Commentaries

This comes later in the process for me, and I rely on both written and electronic (web-based) resources. I will list a number here for you.

General Commentaries/References:

In addition to a good Catholic Study Bible (NAB with revised NT & Psalms), and to other translations of the Bible for comparison, consider the following:

A Bible Dictionary, for example:

The Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vol)

Stuhlmüller, Carroll, et. al., eds. *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.

General Commentaries, for example:

Bergant, Dianne and Robert J. Karris, eds. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*.
Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1989.

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy. *The New Jerome
Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Concordance and Similar, for example:

Throckmorton, Burton H., ed. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*.
Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979.

Series, Individual Commentaries, and Special Studies:

I have found the *Sacra Pagina* series from The Liturgical Press to be quite helpful, and use a number of individual commentaries from a variety of authors as needed. Other resources include:

Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Malina, Bruce J. and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Malina, Bruce J. and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

Lectionary-Based Resources:

*Bergant, Diane with Richard Fragomeni. *Preaching the New Lectionary, Year A, B, C*.
Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999-2001.

*Matera, Frank J. *Strategies for Preaching Paul*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001.

*Nowell, Irene. *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993.

Pilch, John J. *The Cultural World of Jesus (Cycles A, B, C)*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995-1997. [he also has series that focus on the 1st reading/psalm and 2nd reading]

Sloyan, Gerard S. *Preaching from the Lectionary: An Exegetical Commentary with CD-ROM*.
Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.

Jewish Perspectives

The Church has given us *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html) to help us better understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and to avoid unintentional anti-Judaism in our preaching. Among other things, the document reminds us that we have much to learn from Jewish exegesis. To that end, I would recommend:

Berlin, Adele and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Jewish Study Bible*. Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Levine, Amy-Jill and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

This resource specifically addresses the problem of unintended anti-Judaism in Christian preaching:

Salmon, Marilyn J. *Preaching without Contempt: Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

**Websites:*

Here are two websites that contain links to many other sites:

Diocese of Davenport: <http://www.davenportdiocese.org/lit/litpreach.htm>
(all the links listed here are posted on this site)

The Word on the Web: <http://www.kn.sbc.com/wired/fil/pages/listpreachergr.html>

There are literally thousands of preaching websites out there; these are the ones that I visit as a matter of routine preparation:

The Athenaeum of Ohio: <http://www.mtsm.org/Homilies.aspx>

Jude Siciliano, OP / The Preachers' Exchange: <http://www.preacherexchange.com/>

The Center for Liturgy: <http://liturgy.slu.edu/>

The Text the Week (ecumenical): <http://www.textweek.com/>

Finally, there is the downloadable resource from the Congregation for Clergy, called "Biblia Clerus" – you can link to it from the Deacon Links webpage ("Reading the Word of God with the Church") or use this URL: http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerus/index_eng.html

An excellent source of information on the Scriptures: <http://catholic-resources.org/>

The Preaching Event

Delivery & Wider Context

The art of verbal communication is complex; preaching is no exception. It is also true that our preaching takes place in the context of our proclaiming the scriptures and our presiding – and those ministries require our attention as well if our preaching is going to be heard. Perhaps these can provide some insights:

Rang, Jack C. *How to Read the Bible Aloud: Oral Interpretation of Scripture*. New York: Paulist Press, 1994.

Schultze, Quentin J. *Communicating for Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, Baker Book House Company, 2000.

Webb, Joseph M. *Preaching Without Notes*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

I also recommend the annual from LTP: *Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers*.

Feedback

Fulfilled in Your Hearing speaks of homily preparation groups; they are also invaluable for providing feedback. I would also recommend videotaping yourself, or having another preacher listen to your preaching and provide a critique. I recommend:

Untener, Ken. *Preaching Better: Practical Suggestions for Homilies*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.