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Touchstones for Preaching Transcript of Basic Touchstone 1: The Sacramentality of the Word of God

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 we you hear the word “Sacrament,” we immediately think of the seven principal liturgical rites of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, and so on. However, all the liturgical rites of the Church are sacramental. For example, the Rite of Dedicating a Church and an Altar, the Anointing of Catechumens, or the Blessing of New Parish Catechists, are all sacramental acts. Each rite, in its own distinctive way, does what the seven principal Sacraments do: they both express and bring about within us the saving work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, they give grace, they effect human transformation, they reveal God’s Kingdom, and draw us more closely into it.

When you look carefully at the liturgical rites reformed by the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, you’ll note that every single rite includes a Liturgy of the Word. Even the emergency forms of the rites to be celebrated when someone is near death include a Liturgy of the Word, although in brief form. For example, the emergency Rite of Anointing of the Sick, Penance, and Viaticum [Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing and Viaticum] begin[s] with a brief passage from Scripture.

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Liturgy of the Word and the liturgical action that follows it together form one act of worship. In other words, both the Liturgy of the Word and the liturgical act that follows it together constitute the sacramentality of the rite. The “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” published by the Second Vatican Council in 1963, explains the sacramentality in reference to the celebration of the Eucharist, saying:

The two parts which make up the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word and the eucharistic Liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form one single act of worship.
[“Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” paragraph 56.]

This understanding of sacramentality of liturgical rites holds two important implications for preaching. The first is about the Liturgy of the Word and the second is about the role of the homilist. First, the **Liturgy of the Word itself is sacramental**. It is not merely a warm-up or an introduction to what follows. Like all other sacramental actions, the Liturgy of the Word in all its parts, including the homily, is an encounter with God through which God enacts the work of salvation. I like the way “The General Instruction on the Order of Mass” explains this sacramentality in these words in paragraph 55:

For in the readings, as explained in the homily, God speaks to his people, opening them up to the mystery of redemption and salvation and offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present in the midst of the faithful through his word. [The “General Instruction on the Order of Mass,” paragraph 55]

Secondly, **the preacher is a mediator**. When God speaks to the liturgical assembly through the Scriptures, God awaits the assembly’s response, a response of gratitude and deepened discipleship. In other words, the Liturgy of the Word is a conversation between God and the liturgical assembly. The homilist is the mediator of this conversation. A mediator is one who stands in the middle—

Boston College

between two parties—and facilitates conversation. In the homily, the homilist speaks on the assembly's behalf by naming its God-given gifts and as well as its brokenness. At the same time, the homilist speaks on God's behalf so that the assembly can identify God's continued blessings in their lives and to hear God's response to their brokenness with words of comfort, healing, and hope.

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

[Questions on web page]

- How does the sacramental view of the Liturgy of the Word strike you?
- Can you describe an event in your own life in which you experienced the Word of God sacramentally?
- Does viewing the Word of God as sacramental, suggest any changes you need to make in the way you prepare your homilies and how you preach your homilies?