

Fr. Joe Chapter 3 ~ Homilies In his own words...

It was not long before I realized the importance of a good homily on Sunday. In large parishes people have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and growth in their faith. Programs are offered such as adult education classes, bible study groups, lectures, Christ Renews, and retreats, but when there are only a few Catholics scattered throughout a large area, this is impossible. People's only knowledge of the truth of their faith is what they received in CCD classes in grade school years and possibly in high school years. The only way to broaden and deepen their faith was the Sunday homily.

I never used notes in those days. I would pick out a point; memorize an outline beforehand, and then just talk to the congregation. I never spoke beyond ten minutes because my schedule did not allow the time. Furthermore, people's concentration time is limited.

Some days I attended an ecumenical meeting of the ministers of the local protestant churches, and they surprised me when they said, "Young man, you are to preach the Good Friday service."

On Good Friday we gathered at the Presbyterian Church to pray. As we were vesting, one minister asked me whether I had my notes for the sermon. I told him that I did not speak from notes. He said that the other ministers were going to hear something today - a preacher not speaking from notes. I swung it through a 25-minute sermon and afterwards received raves from both the clergy and the congregation. I did not do so good all of the time.

On the next day, Holy Saturday, I was busy all day hearing confessions and trying to prepare for the celebration of Easter. That night I was so tired that I did not prepare a homily for Easter. I figured I would wing it with a short talk.

After the first Mass on Easter Sunday, I was standing at the church entrance when two nicely dressed women came up to me and said, "We are from the Methodist church. We heard your homily and brilliant message on Good Friday and thought that we would come to your service and hear another brilliant message on Easter. It turned out, that we are very disappointed."

It was like that on Christmas Eve when I was so busy getting the church ready, and hearing confessions, I thought I would just read the story of Comrade the Cobbler. It was a good Christian Christmas message. I admit I imagined one of my...The church was full. After Mass one of my better parishioners came up to me and said that he finally got his wife and some of her friends and family from the Methodist Church to attend a Mass with him. They enjoyed the experience, but were disappointed with the homily. But people did encourage me.

One day a man dressed in a jogging suit stopped and talked to me about the homilies. He said that in the old days it was rather negative, sort of blah in terms of presentation. He would just sit back in his pew and look around at the others and try to figure out who it was meant for. Now he likes the positive approach. He sits back, listens, looks into himself and seeks out of the homily what applies to him.

People are hungry for the bread of life. They are bogged down with daily life problems, fears and failures. People seek strength and direction. They are not looking for a nice literary presentation or a pat on the back, but for an answer in their lives. God sent the Israelites in the desert with bread, manna, and he also supplied meat, as quail flew into the camp.

A good homily is a message that brings strength and hope and direction into the lives of people. It may be flavored with a joke or a story, but it has to be digested so that they take it with them and it will nourish them through them throughout the week.

In preparing a homily, I always think: If I were in the pew, what would mean something to me? And what means something to me will mean something to others.