



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 February 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue with the catecheses on the Holy Mass. We had reached the readings.

The dialogue between God and his people, developed in the Liturgy of the Word of the Mass, culminates in the proclamation of the Gospel. It precedes the chanting of the *Alleluia* — or, during Lent, another acclamation — with which “the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel”.^[1] As the mysteries of Christ illuminate the entire biblical revelation, likewise, in the Liturgy of the Word, the Gospel constitutes the light for understanding the meaning of the biblical texts which precede it, both of the Old and the New Testaments. Indeed, “Christ himself is the centre and fullness of the whole of Scripture”.^[2] Jesus Christ is always at the centre, always.

Therefore the liturgy itself distinguishes the Gospel from the other readings and surrounds it with particular honour and veneration.^[3] Indeed, its reading is reserved to the ordained minister, who concludes by kissing the Book; it calls us to stand up to listen and to make the sign of the Cross on our forehead, our mouth and our breast; the candles and incense honour Christ, who, through the Gospel reading, makes his effective Word resonate. From these signs, the assembly recognizes the presence of Christ who gives them the “Good News” which converts and transforms. What occurs is a direct discourse, as attested by the acclamations with which we respond to the proclamation: “Glory to you, O Lord” and “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”. We stand up to listen to the Gospel: but it is Christ who is speaking to us, there. And this is why we are attentive, because it is a direct conversation. It is the Lord who is speaking to us.

Thus, in the Mass we do not read the Gospel in order to know how things happened, but rather,

we listen to the Gospel in order to realize what Jesus once did and said; and that Word is living, the Word of Jesus that is in the Gospel is alive and touches my heart. Therefore, listening to the Gospel is very important, with an open heart, because it is the living Word. Saint Augustine writes: “The Gospel is the mouth of Christ. He is seated in heaven, but he has not stopped speaking on earth”.^[4] If it is true that in the liturgy “Christ is still proclaiming His Gospel”,^[5] it follows that, by participating in the Mass, we must give him a response. We listen to the Gospel and we must give a response in our life.

In order to get his message across, Christ also makes use of the words of the priest who, after the Gospel, gives the homily.^[6] Strongly recommended by the Second Vatican Council as part of the liturgy itself,^[7] the homily is not a trite discourse — nor a catechesis like the one I am giving now —, nor is it a conference nor a lesson. The homily is something else. What is the homily? It is taking up “once more the dialogue which the Lord has already established with his people”,^[8] so it may find fulfilment in life. The authentic exegesis of the Gospel is our holy life! The Word of the Lord concludes its journey by becoming flesh in us, being translated into works, as happened in Mary and in the Saints. Remember what I told you last time: the Word of the Lord enters through the ears, goes to the heart and passes to the hands, to good deeds. And the homily also follows the Word of the Lord and also follows this path in order to help us so that the Word of the Lord may go to the hands, by passing through the heart.

I have already addressed the subject of the homily in the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, where I recalled that the liturgical context “demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist”.^[9]

The homilist — the one who preaches, the priest or the deacon or the bishop — must carry out his ministry well, by offering a real service to all those who participate in the Mass, but those who listen to it must also do their part. Firstly by paying proper attention, that is, assuming the right interior disposition, without subjective pretexts, knowing that every preacher has merits and limitations. If at times there is reason for boredom because a homily is long or unfocused or unintelligible, at other times, however, prejudice creates the obstacle. And the homilist must be aware that he is not doing something of his own, but is preaching, giving voice to Jesus; he is preaching the Word of Jesus. And the homily must be prepared well; it must be brief, short! A priest told me that once he had gone to another city where his parents lived, and his father told him: “You know, I am pleased, because my friends and I have found a church where they say Mass without a homily!”. And how often do we see that during the homily some fall asleep, others chat or go outside to smoke a cigarette.... For this reason, please, make the homily brief, but prepare it well. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the Word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than 10 minutes, please.

In conclusion we could say that in the Liturgy of the Word, through the Gospel and the homily, God

dialogues with his people, who listen to him with attention and veneration and, at the same time, recognize he is present and acting. Hence, if we listen to the “Good News”, we will be converted and transformed by it, and therefore capable of changing ourselves and the world. Why? Because the Good News, the Word of God enters through the ears, goes to the heart and passes to the hands in order to do good deeds.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from England, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

APPEAL

Tomorrow, 8 February, Feast Day of Saint Josephine Bakhita, is World Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking. This year’s theme is “Migration without trafficking: say yes to freedom and no to trafficking”. Having few opportunities for regular channels [of migration], many immigrants decide to take alternative routes, where all manner of abuses, exploitation and slavery await them. Criminal organizations involved in human trafficking exploit these migration routes to hide their victims among the migrants and refugees. I thus invite everyone, citizens and institutions, to combine their efforts to prevent trafficking and guarantee protection and aid to the victims. Let us all pray that the Lord may convert the hearts of traffickers — this is an ugly word; traffickers in human beings — and give those who are caught in this shameful scourge the realistic hope of regaining their freedom.

The 23rd Winter Olympic Games will begin the day after tomorrow, Friday, 9 February, in PyeongChang, South Korea, with 92 countries competing.

The traditional Olympic truce is particularly important this year as delegations from the “two Koreas” will march together under a single flag and will compete as a single team. This fact raises hopes for a world in which conflict will be resolved peacefully through dialogue and mutual respect, as sports also teach us.

I greet the International Olympic Committee, the athletes who will take part in the PyeongChang Games, the Authorities and the people of the Korean Peninsula. I join everyone in prayer and renew the Holy See’s appeal to support every initiative in favour of peace and encounter between peoples. May these Olympics be a great celebration of friendship and sport! May God Bless you and keep you.

I address a special thought to young people, to the sick, and to newlyweds. Next Sunday will be the commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, the day on which the World Day of the Sick will also be celebrated. Dear young people, may you serve as providence for those who are suffering; dear sick people, may you always feel supported by the prayers of the Church; and may you, dear newlyweds, love life which is always sacred, even when it is marked by frailty and by sickness.

[1] *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 62.

[2] *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 5.

[3] Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 60, 134.

[4] *Sermon 85*, 1: pl 38, 520; see also *Lectures on the Gospel of John*, xxx, i: pl 35, 1632; ccl 36, 289.

[5] Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 33.

[6] Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 65-66; *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, 24-27.

[7] Cf. Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 52.

[8] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137.

[9] *Ibid.*, 138.