

“What is a Homily?”

Homily? What is it? Is it just a fancy word for sermon? Or is there a difference?

Yes. There is a difference. A sermon's purpose is to educate in regard to some facet or tenet of the Faith. A homily is more of a personal reflection of the Scriptures that are proclaimed that day in the Liturgy.

The primary purpose of the homily is to help the congregation in their reflection on the Scriptures: “What am I hearing in these Scriptures that can be related to the events of my life?” “How is this Scripture being fulfilled in my life?” The homilist's reflection assists the individuals of the congregation to reflect upon the movement of God in their lives. A homily attempts to bring together Faith and the ordinary events of our lives. In that sense, it is a very personal, subjective effort.

A sermon is much more objective and attempts to hand on the doctrines and tenets of the Faith. The sermon attempts to teach objectively more than to share personally.

There are times in which people express a desire to hear sermons rather than homilies: “How will Catholics know the Faith if it is not handed on objectively?” “At Mass, we need to be taught! Where else will people learn?”

The need for sermons belies an attitude of “one stop shopping,” that is, it is an attitude of people who want to spend that one hour on Sunday and “get it all.”

The Mass on Sunday, ultimately, is not about education. It is about worship. We come together to praise God and to enter into the Mystery of God's Presence. We delve into the Scriptures, the living word of God, to experience God's activity in our lives. Because we experience God's Presence in our lives and because we give God praise and glory, we desire to experience more. So, naturally, we desire to know and learn more about this God and about God's activity in the community, the Church. Now we have the need to be educated.

This education takes place not during worship, primarily, but in and through the life of the community during the week. Through adult faith formation, religious education classes, parish organizations, small church communities, and reading and sharing with other Catholics who are on the same journey of Faith. This takes commitment, and involvement in the life of the community during the week. It means making Parish a way of life, not a “one hour stopover” on Sunday.

St. Thomas More offers many opportunities in which parishioners can grow in the understanding and knowledge of one's Faith. Take advantage of these opportunities.

Please don't expect to be educated (primarily) at Mass. Come to enter the Mystery of God's Presence and to worship in awe with the other members of the Parish Family. And because we desire to worship God, we will desire to be educated in God's ways. Because we desire to be educated in God's ways, we live our lives in union with a Parish, a community of people on the road of worship and education.

Happy Travelin'!