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THE HOMILY

THE TERM ὁμιλία generally means 'intercourse', namely an interchange of thoughts and feelings by words.¹ In Xenophon² it is used to indicate the instruction given by a philosopher to his pupils during familiar conversation, and in this meaning it has passed into Christian usage. The first Christian writer who probably first used the term ὁμιλία in this meaning is Origen: the talks on select chapters or passages of the Bible, which Origen delivered in liturgical assemblies have come down to us under the title 'Ὁμιλίαι; if Origen himself has given them this title, he must have derived it from the schools of philosophy. The nature of Origen's 'Ὁμιλίαι is that of a familiar talk to impart spiritual edification: the author's intention is mainly the care of souls, the conversational tone is predominant, there is no trace of rhetorical elaboration, and the outline disposition and external form are simple.

We find the term in St. Luke in the sense of 'speaking with',³ but in Acts 20, 11 St. Luke uses the word ὁμιλήσας of the same address he had previously described by the word διαλεγόμενος – for the first time the word is here used in connection with the breaking of bread, for St. Luke is referring to what was evidently an informal discourse or exposition of doctrine, as we are told that St. Paul 'talked a long time... until daylight.'

According to Photius⁴ the discourses of St. John Chrysostom were properly speaking not λόγοι but ὁμιλίαι as they were simple in style, without any artificiality and delivered in a style rather conversational

¹In this sense it is used in I Cor. 15, 33.

²Memorabilia, I, ii, 6 and 15.

³In Lk. 24, 14 we find the word ὁμιλοῦν and in Acts 24, 26 the word ὁμιλεῖ both in the sense of 'speaking with.'

⁴Bibl. 174, 4. The statement would apply to those homilies which have reached us as taken down by the stenographers, and not to those which were written for publication.

than formal, while the λόγοι were constructed according to the rules of art, and with a certain dignity and elevation of style.

The first time we find the term used in its technical sense of a sermon preached by a celebrant during the liturgical assembly is in the decrees of the Council of Ancyra (A.D. 314), which forbade presbyters who had sacrificed to idols προσφέρειν ἢ ὀμιλεῖν ἢ ὄλως λειτουργεῖν.⁵

In the West it seems that the term was not in common use before the fifth century, for we find St. Augustine saying that the Greeks use the term ὀμιλίας to indicate the 'sermones qui proferuntur in populis',⁶ and in several instances he supplies examples that such sermons were intentionally colloquial in style.⁷

From the earliest times the sermon followed immediately the reading of the Gospels. 'After the reader had finished his task,' St. Justin tells us,⁸ 'the one presiding gives an address, urgently admonishing his hearers to practise these beautiful teachings in their lives.' The sermon in fact belongs to the pre-Christian elements of the Liturgy: the Sabbath Bible reading in the synagogue had, according to rigid custom, to be followed by a clarifying explanation, and this was for Our Lord the main opportunity for proclaiming his kingdom.⁹ We find also St. Paul and St. Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia being invited by the head of the synagogue to address words of encouragement to the assembly.¹⁰

It stands to reason therefore to suppose that in Christian worship the homily was from the start intimately connected with the readings from the Scriptures, and must be considered as an indispensable part of public worship. This took place on Sunday 'on the day which is called

⁵ can. I.

⁶ Enarr. in Ps. 118, proemium.

⁷ Sermo 37, c. 10, n. 14: 'Dummodo omnes instruantur, grammatici ne timeantur.'

Sermo 299, in natali Apostolorum, n. 6: 'Nec quaerant grammatici quam sit Latinum, sed Christiani quam verum. Salus enim Latinum nomen est. Salvare et Salvator non fuerant haec Latina antequam veniret Salvator: quando ad Latinos venit, et haec Latina fecit.'

Enarr. in Ps. 138, n. 20: 'Non est absconditum os meum a te: quod fecisti in abscondito. Os suum dicit quod vulgo dicitur ossum, Latine os dicitur. Hoc in Graeco invenitur. Nam possumus hic putare os esse ab eo quod sunt ora; non os correpte, ab eo quod sunt ossa. Non est ergo absconditum, inquit, os meum a te, quod fecisti in abscondito. Habeo in abscondito quoddam ossum. Sic enim potius loquamur: melius est reprehendant nos grammatici, quam non intellegant populi.'

⁸ Apol. c. 67.

⁹ Lk. 4, 16; Mk. 1, 21 and parallel passages.

¹⁰ Acts 13, 15.

after the sun';¹¹ but Sundays were not the only days on which homilies were delivered, for Christians did not meet together for the liturgical service only on Sundays.

At the time of Tertullian, Wednesdays and Fridays were 'station' days¹² and Holy Communion was received on such days, for Tertullian remarks that many did not receive Holy Communion on such days not to break their fast:¹³ such days might have been occasions for delivering a homily.

Homilies were certainly delivered on the 'natalitia' of the martyrs: several are extant among the writings of the Fathers, and in one such homily St. John Chrysostom remarks that the whole city had gone forth to celebrate the memory of the martyrs at their tomb.¹⁴

The great festivals and fasts of the Christian year were likewise naturally occasions for the delivery of a homily. In Lent it was customary to preach every day; the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, on the book of Genesis, for example, are a Lenten course of this kind.

It was also a general custom to preach in the afternoon on occasion of particular devotion, v.g. vigils. In several discourses of St. John Chrysostom there are clear references that he is preaching in the afternoon;¹⁵ St. Augustine several times makes it clear by the expressions he uses that he was wont to preach both in the morning and in the afternoon;¹⁶ three of St. Basil's discourses on the Hexaemeron were certainly delivered in the afternoon.¹⁷ It is quite evident that when this happened the morning and afternoon sermons could not have both been delivered

¹¹ Justin, *Apol.* c. 67; Pliny in his letter to the emperor Trajan says that Christians were accustomed to meet on a fixed day: 'stato die ante lucem convenire'.

¹² *De Ieiunio* 12, 2: 'cur stationibus quartam et sextam sabbati dicamus et ieiuniis parasceven.' Cfr. also *ib.* 10, 5.

¹³ *De Oratione*, 19, 1: 'de stationum diebus non putant plerique sacrificiorum orationibus interveniendum, quod statio solvenda sit accepto corpore Domini.'

¹⁴ In *Martyres homilia*: 'Quis enim hodierno die non coetum nostrum miretur splendidum istud theatrum, caritatem ferventem, affectum ardentem, indomitum amorem? Ita tota propemodum civitas huc commoravit.' Then he says it would be ridiculous to go home and get drunk 'post huiusmodi conventum, post vigiliae, post sacrarum auditionem Scripturarum, post divinarum participationem mysteriorum, et post spiritualement largitionem.'

¹⁵ V.g. *Homilia X ad pop. Antiochenum*: 'arbitror enim multos iam pransos esse.'

¹⁶ V.g. *Enarr. in Ps. 88*, sermo 2: 'Ad reliqua psalmi, de quo in matutino locuti sumus'.

¹⁷ *Sermo 2*: 'mane in paucis explicandis verbis immorati...'; *Sermo 7*: 'ea quae tum matutina tum vespertina oratione explevi...'; *Sermo 9*: 'qualis vobis matutina sermonum mensa visa est...'

during the Mass. In fact there is abundant evidence that homilies were preached on every occasion that the faithful assembled together in church for a liturgical service: the readings of the Scriptures during the service were followed by a homily. Later on these homilies were substituted by readings from the homilies of the Fathers and this still takes place during our office of Matins.

The homily followed immediately the reading of the Gospel without any further intermediary or any special introductory prayer.¹⁸ The preacher addressed the congregation with the usual greeting and started the sermon. The most common greeting was 'Peace be with you', and the congregation would reply 'And with your spirit.'

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, it was the practice of the preacher to begin with an *Ave Maria* while everybody knelt: this custom is probably traceable to the mendicant preachers, and it is prescribed in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*.²⁰ It seems to have been in use for a long time within the Mass. Alongside the *Ave Maria*, also the *Veni sancte Spiritus* and the Lord's Prayer were permitted.²¹ But this belongs to a period when a great change had come over the homily. Towards the end of the Patristic period the homily had degenerated and there was even a time when hardly any preaching was done at all. During the height of the Middle Ages the sermon is again revived, but it loses its homiletic character and becomes separated from the Liturgy, though we still find instances of sermons preached during the Mass. The preacher moves away from the altar, though his stand, which in many languages still indicates the sermon's connection with the Mass, is still on the so-called Gospel side of the Church — this also shows the connection of the sermon with the readings from the Scriptures.²² The preacher's stand

¹⁸ It was not uncommon to say a short prayer before beginning the homily, but there was no prescribed form for this. As examples of such prayers we quote St. Augustine, Enarr. in Ps. 91: 'Attendite ad psalmum: det nobis Dominus aperire mysteria quae hic continentur'; Enarr. in Ps. 139: 'Iusserunt Domini fratres, et in ipsis Dominus omnium ut istum psalmum afferam ad vos intellegendum quantum Dominus donat. Adiuvet orationibus vestris ut ea quae dicam oportet me dicere, et vos audire.'

¹⁹ This was called in Greek *προσφησις* the address or salutation Cfr. Smith-Cheetham, Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, vol. II, Preaching.

²⁰ 1, 22, 3, 'Capite detecto, signat se signo crucis, et genuflexus recitat Salutationem Angelicam, non *Regina coeli*, etiam Tempore Paschali, voce intelligibili et devota.'

²¹ Jungmann, Missarum Solemnia, vol. I, part III, c. 7.

²² In France it takes the name of *chaire* from *cathedra*, while in Germany it

becomes a high pulpit, towering above the heads of his listeners: this is the result of the impassioned oratorical form which the sermon takes on, a form more appropriate to profane speaking than to the proclamation of God's Good News to the world.

The Council of Trent²³ insisted on the duty of pastors to preach to the faithful on the readings of the Mass often, but especially on Sundays and feast-days; we find the same obligation in the Code of Canon Law.²⁴ But the decree of the Council of Trent and the Code of Canon Law, though ordering a sermon during Mass, do not impose any obligation that the sermon should be intimately connected with the Mass itself and with the Liturgical mystery which is being celebrated. And so we find that although sometimes a sermon is preached at Mass, often its subject-matter is altogether unconnected with the Mass itself, or it is just an explanation of the Gospel without any reference at all to the rest of the Mass, or it is just a catechetical instruction, or worse still an 'apologia' of the person celebrating the Mass. There were also instances when the sermon was preached while the celebrant continued to say Mass, in such a way that the sermon ended with the end of the Mass so as not to keep the people too long in church!!! All this could happen only because we had lost all notion of what the homily actually is.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, approved at the end of the second Session of the Second Vatican Council (4th December 1963), has given the homily its former place in the Liturgy, while the Instruction issued by the Congregation of Rites to implement the Constitution clearly states what the homily really is.²⁵ The Constitution also stresses the

takes its name from the ambo as an extension of the chancel (*Kanzel*), Jungmann, l.c.

²³ Sessio XXII (17 sept. 1562): 'Doctrina et canones de sanctissimo Missae sacrificio, c. VIII: '...ne oves Christi esuriant, neve parvuli panem petant et non sit, qui frangat eis; mandat sancta synodus pastoribus et singulis curam animarum gerentibus, ut frequenter inter missarum celebrationem vel per se vel per alios ex his qui in missa leguntur, aliquid exponant atque inter cetera sanctissimi huius sacrificii mysterium aliquod declaret, diebus praesertim dominicis et festis.'

²⁴ can. 1345: 'Optandum ut in missis quae, fidelibus adstantibus, diebus festis de praecepto in omnibus ecclesiis vel oratoribus publicis celebrantur, brevis Evangelii aut alicuius partis doctrinae christianae explicatio fiat.'

²⁵ Instructio ad executionem Const. de S. Lit. recte ordinandam, A.A.S. 56 (1964) p. 89i.

n. 54 Nomine homiliae ex textu sacro faciendae intelligitur explicatio aut alicuius aspectus lectionum Sacrae Scripturae aut alterius textus ex Ordinario vel Proprio Missae diei, ratione habita sive mysterii qui celebratur sive peculia-

grave obligation of preaching a homily on Sundays and feast-days; the obligation is such that the Bishop himself cannot dispense from it even 'iusta de causa.'²⁶

The homily ended with a doxology or a short prayer to which the people answered 'Amen':²⁷ this was a fixed rule similar to that which required that the liturgical prayer should end with a doxology. Towards the ninth century in Germany it was customary to recite a formula of general confession, preceded by the Lord's Prayer and the Creed and followed by a prayer of absolution: later on the rite was adopted by Rome and is still extant in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*.²⁸

It would be an exaggeration to say that all Church preaching should be limited to the framework of the Mass, for, even in the early Church we also meet with a type of preaching which is not homiletical, namely the catechetical instructions given to catechumens during Lent in preparation for their Baptism. But we must never forget the characteristic nature of homiletic preaching; the homily is not an *instruction*, but an *initiation*, that is, an introduction into the *mysterium*: it is a talk about the Word of God which has been proclaimed in the readings, a talk which is not meant to stifle the Word of God but to apply it to the actual needs of the congregation – it is the application of the Scriptures just read, to everyday life. The homily does not imply the whole preaching of the Church, but it is the living word of the Church in the Liturgy witnessing to the higher world in which it lives and into which it enters after being renewed by the Sacred Mysteries.

The hierarchical character of the homily is clearly visible both in the manner in which it is delivered and as regards the person who delivers it.

As a rule the bishop, to whom preaching was reserved in Christian antiquity, spoke from his *cathedra*, and, as an expression of his author-

rium necessitatum auditorum.

n. 55 Si schemata praedicationis intra Missam habendae pro aliquibus temporibus proponuntur, intimus nexus cum praecipuis saltem temporibus et festis anni liturgici seu cum mysterio Redemptionis harmonice servandus est; homilia enim est pars Liturgiae diei.

²⁶ Constitutio de Sacra Liturgia, Commentarium in Eph. Lit. vol. 78 (1964), p. 274.

²⁷ Sometimes the doxology was substituted by a concluding prayer, examples of which may be found, v.g. in St. Augustine's serm. 34; and 67.

²⁸ II, 8, 50: 'Expleto sermone, Diaconus, qui cantavit Evangelium, stans ad sinistram episcopi, aliquantulum inclinatus, faciet Confessionem ante episcopum... qua finita... episcopus... legit absolutionem, videlicet *Precibus et meritis etc.* et... dat benedictionem.'

ity, he was seated, or else standing on the steps that lead to the cathedra, though St. John Chrysostom preferred the ambo to the more distant cathedra for the convenience of the audience.²⁹ The people remained standing, and this troubled St. Augustine, who praises the custom existing in certain parts of Italy of providing seats for the congregation,³⁰ although St. Caesarius of Arles would permit only the infirm to be seated,³¹ most probably on the floor. Only clerics were generally provided with seats in those days,³² the faithful helping themselves with canes on which to lean:³³ pews in churches belong to modern times, and came into use first in Protestant countries.

While delivering the homily, the preacher held the book of the Scriptures in his hand:³⁴ this was a right which belonged to the bishop alone, according to a rule of the Egyptian church.

We have already said that in Christian antiquity the preaching of the homily was reserved to the bishop. St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the phrase of St. Paul, 'a bishop must be apt to teach,' refers to this as especially required of the bishop.³⁵ He fully develops the theme in the fourth book of his treatise on the priesthood. Cyril of Alexandria speaks of the episcopal office as ἀξιωμα διδασκαλικού,³⁶ and Ambrose complains that, although not versed in theology, as bishop of Milan, he had to preach to the faithful.³⁷ We find the same thing in Africa: Cyprian's

²⁹Jungmann, l.c.

³⁰De catech. rudibus, 19: 'Quod ubi senserimus... aut oblata sessione succurrere, quamquam sine dubitatione melius fit, ubi decenter fieri potest, ut a principio sedens audiat; longe consultius in quibusdam ecclesiis transmarinis non solum antistites sedentes loquuntur ad populum sed ipsi etiam populo sedilia subiacent.'

³¹Sermo 78, 1: 'Ante aliquot dies propter eos, qui aut pedes dolent, aut aliqua corporis inaequalitate laborant... consilium dedi... qui stare non possunt, humiliter et cum silentio sedentes, attentis auribus audiant quae leguntur.'

³²Ordo Romanus I, 24 (ed. Andrieu): 'sedentes in presbiterio, episcopi quidem ad sinistram intransibus, presbiteri vero in dexteram.'

³³These canes were laid aside during the reading of the Gospel. Canes of this sort are still in use among the Abyssinian clergy.

³⁴V.g. St. Augustine, Tract. 40 in Ioan., I: 'De sancto evangelio secundum Ioannem, quod gestare nos videtis.'

³⁵Hom. X in I Tim., 1: doctorem... maxime omnium desideratur in eo, cui hoc officium creditum fuit.'

³⁶Ep. ad Monach. in Conc. Eph.

³⁷De Off. Ministr. I, 1, 4: 'Ergo enim raptus de tribunalibus atque administratio-nibus infulis ad sacerdotium, docere vos coepi quod ipse non didici. Itaque factum est ut prius docere inciperem, quam discere.'

letters frequently use phrases as *me tractante* and *tractante episcopo*, which imply that the duty of preaching was wholly reserved to the bishop; and Possidius in his *Vita Augustini*, says that when Valerius permitted Augustine to preach, this was a marked departure from common use.³⁸

If it was possible to reserve to the bishop the duty of preaching in Italy and Africa, this could not be so in Gaul, for the Gallican dioceses were much larger than those of Italy and Africa, where each small town had its own bishop. And so we have the Council of Vaison (A.D. 529), presided over by St. Caesarius of Arles, giving permission to priests to preach both in the city and in the countryside.³⁹

In the Eastern churches priests could more easily preach in Mass, in fact Possidius tells us that Valerius had derived the idea of permitting Augustine preach from the knowledge of this fact, and so ignored the outcry raised against him.⁴⁰ St. Jerome stigmatizes the custom of not permitting priests to preach before the bishop as a very bad custom in certain churches.⁴¹ On the other hand Socrates⁴² asserts that after the incidents provoked by Arius in 318, the patriarch did no longer permit priests to preach at Alexandria, though Socrates later on also records that at Constantinople Atticus often preached before being chosen as patriarch of the city.⁴³ We also know that St. John Chrysostom preached

³⁸ III, iv, 6: 'Erat tum in more institutoque positum Ecclesiae Africanae, ut presbyteri verbum Dei aut numquam praedicarent... aut saltem coram Episcopis illud in ecclesia non tractarent'.

³⁹ can. 2: '... pro aedificatione omnium ecclesiarum et pro utilitate totius populi nobis placuit, ut non solum in civitatibus, sed etiam in omnibus paroeiciis verbum faciendi daremus presbyteris potestatem ita ut, si presbyter... aliqua infirmitate prohibente per se ipsum non potuerit praedicare, sanctorum patrum homiliae a diaconibus recitentur; si enim digni sunt diaconi, quod Christus in evangelio locutus est, legere, quare indigni iudicentur sanctorum patrum expositiones publice recitare?'

⁴⁰ Vita Aug. III, iv, 6: 'Valerius... cum in orientalibus ecclesiis presbyteros coram episcopis ex usu recepto populum ducere non ignorarent, Africanum illum morem solvere non est veritus... Id nonnulli carperunt episcopi, sed venerabilis ille senex minorem putavit habendam esse obtreptantium linguarum rationem quam ipsius utilitatis et fructus quem ecclesiae suae per ministerium presbyteri eam erudientis... procurabat.'

⁴¹ Ep. 52 ad Nepotianum, n. 7: 'Pessimae consuetudinis est in quibusdam ecclesiis, tacere presbyteros et praesentibus episcopis non loqui, quasi aut invideant aut non dignentur audire.'

⁴² Hist. v, 22.

⁴³ Hist. vii, 2.

for several years at Antioch before being chosen patriarch of Constantinople, and many of the homilies he preached as a priest are still extant.

At Rome priests were not allowed to preach, and Pope Celestine I disapproved the decision of the bishop of Arles to permit his priests to preach, as, in this way, he had given them occasion to express dangerous opinions on Grace.⁴⁴

Sozomen⁴⁵ makes a remarkable statement about the Church of Rome, saying that at Rome neither the Pope nor any priest was known to preach publicly to the people. This fact is mentioned by Cassiodorus in his *Historia Tripartita*, without hinting that it is incorrect, and Valesius, commenting on Sozomen's passage, says that no sermons of any bishop of Rome are extant before St. Leo the Great.⁴⁶ There is an oration delivered by Pope Liberius in St. Peter's on the feast of the Navidity when Ambrose's sister, Marcellina, took the veil, but this sermon, rather than a homily, is an exhortation to Marcellina.⁴⁷ Sozomen's statement must be exaggerated, as St. Leo himself makes references to the sermons of his predecessor Sixtus III,⁴⁸ and the poet Prudentius, who visited Rome in 401, describing the basilica of St. Hippolytus' mentions the ambo from which the pope preached.⁴⁹ Probably Sozomen's statement only meant that Rome had not adopted the formal sermons which had become common in the East where the rhetoric of the schools had completely made its way into the church and brilliant Christian orators like St. Basil, the two Gregories and St. John Chrysostom flourished. Preaching in Rome may still have been of a familiar character and therefore not worthy of being considered a rhetorical composition: in fact Rome produced no great preachers comparable to the great Easterns, before Leo the Great.

We can therefore conclude that the power and duty of preaching in the early Church belonged primarily to the bishop, who could and usually

⁴⁴ Righetti, *Storia Liturgica*, vol. III, sez. ii, c. 2, n. 6.

⁴⁵ *Hist.* vii, 19.

⁴⁶ Smith-Cheetham, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, vol. 2, Preaching, p. 1687.

⁴⁷ The discourse is found in St. Ambrose's *De Virginibus*, book III, c. 1-3.

⁴⁸ He says of him that he was a great builder of churches, but that he was greater still as a builder of souls: 'ut in ipso frueretur devota posteritas et habitando quod condidit et faciendo quod docuit' (Cfr. Righetti, *Storia Liturgica*, l. c.)

⁴⁹ 'Fronte sub adversa gradibus sublime tribunal

Tollitur, antistes praedicet unde Deum.' (Peristeph., xi)

did authorize priests who were capable of discharging this duty, to do it.

The power of preaching was not committed to deacons in the early church: the duty of deacons during the Liturgy was to call the congregation to prayer, to call the attention of the faithful to the various parts of the Liturgy, and such like.⁵⁰ Nevertheless several sermons and discourses of St. Ephraem, who was only a deacon, are still extant, and there is nothing to prove that they were never preached. The Council of Vaison (A.D. 529) permitted deacons to read the homilies of the Fathers when the priest was prevented by sickness from preaching, and in the life of Caesarius of Arles we read that when he was no longer able to preach through sickness and old age, he committed the duty of preaching not only to his priests but also to his deacons, but the whole context shows that they only read the homilies of the Fathers.⁵¹

We must therefore conclude that the preaching by deacons during the Mass was a very rare exception, as rare as that of laymen and monks preaching during the Liturgy. Eusebius⁵² relates the well-known case of Origen, who, still a layman, was requested by Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, to preach before him; Alexander defended himself by saying that it was a well-known practice for a layman to preach if he was well qualified and quoting other instances, otherwise unknown to us.

Such a custom never existed in the West and Pope Leo the Great in an epistle to Maximus of Antioch says that monks and other laymen, however learned, should not usurp the right of teaching and preaching as this belonged to the priests of the Lord. It may be that in monastic establishments of the East, monks capable of preaching and expounding the Scriptures, might have habitually preached to their communities, though this did not please Jerome who felt that a monk's duty is not to teach but to weep. Such preaching would not have taken place during

⁵⁰ Smith-Cheetham l.c.p. 1686.

⁵¹ They were to deliver the homilies or discourses 'Ambrosii, Augustini, seu parvitatibus meae vel quorumcunque doctorum Catholicorum' (Smith-Cheetham l.c.)

⁵² Hist. eccl. vi, 19: 'Eusebius quotes the letter of Alexander of Jerusalem and Theocistus of Caesarea to Demetrius of Alexandria who had protested because these bishops had permitted Origen to explain the Scriptures in church when still a layman: 'Quod vero in litteris tuis adiecisti, nunquam antea visum nec factum fuisse, ut, praesentibus episcopis, laici concionarentur, in eo nescio quomodo a veritate longissime aberrasti. Nam sicubi reperiuntur qui fratribus prodesse possunt, eos sancti episcopi ultro adhortantur ut ad populos conciones habeant. Sic Tulpeus Saraudis rogatus est a Neone, Paulinus Iconii a Celso, Theodorus apud Synnoda ab Attico, fratribus nostris beatissimis. Idque etiam alibi fieri credibile est, quamvis nos ignoremus.'

the Liturgy, and therefore there is no question of monks or laymen delivering homilies, although there's still Origen's case, for Origen at Jerusalem did not preach as a catechist but as a preacher.⁵³

Another custom of the early Church was that of having several sermons preached one after the other to the same assemble, the bishop, if there was one present, or the person of greatest dignity, coming last. This is clearly stated in the Apostolic Constitutions,⁵⁴ in the *Peregrinatio Etheriae*,⁵⁵ and by St. John Chrysostom.⁵⁶ St. Augustine approves such a custom existing at Carthage,⁵⁷ and he himself often invited one of his priests to deliver the sermon after he had spoken to the congregation for a few minutes.⁵⁸

We have already made reference to canon 2 of the Council of Vaison, which permitted deacons to read the homilies of the Fathers. This custom arose at a comparatively early period for we find Augustine already suggesting that those who had a good delivery but no power of composition should adopt the sermons of others,⁵⁹ and Caesarius of Arles is said to have composed homilies which he sent to various bishops in Frankish territories so that they could have preached them in their churches.

The constant habit of using sermons of others, in the process of time led to the formation of collections of homilies, with which those who were unable or unwilling to compose homilies could avail themselves. There must have been many collections of homilies during the eighth century, but many of these collections laboured under great defects, as

⁵³ Smith-Cheetham, l.c.

⁵⁴ II, 57: 'When the Gospel is read, let the presbyters, one by one, but not all, speak the word of exhortation to the people, and last of all the bishop, who is the governor or pilot of the ship.'

⁵⁵ II, 25: 'Sane quia hic consuetudo est, ut de omnibus presbyteris qui sedent, quanti volunt, praedicent, et post illos omnes episcopus praedicat.'

⁵⁶ V.g. in his Hom. in illud Vidi Dominum de verbis Isaiae, preached at Antioch when still a priest: 'Sit igitur nobis tempus tacendi, qui detur et praeceptoris tempus loquendi.' (Hom. 2, 3.)

⁵⁷ Ep. 41, 1: 'Impletum est gaudio os nostrum... praecipue de sermone presbyterorum qui te praesente populo infunditur.'

⁵⁸ Sermo 20, 5: 'Exhortamur charitatem vestram ut impigre et vigilanter verba Dei ministrantibus presbyteris, vos audire non pigeat.'

⁵⁹ De Doctr. Chr. 4, 62: 'Sunt sane quidam, qui bene pronuntiare possunt, qui autem pronuntiant excogitare non possunt. Quod si ab aliis sumant eloquenter sapienterque conscriptum memoriaeque commendent atque populum proferant, si eam personam gerunt, non improbe faciunt.'

in many cases they were written by men of no authority, full of errors of style, and utterly uncritical, accepting indiscriminately historic truth and the most crude and incredible legends; on the other hand they also displayed considerable knowledge of the letter of the Scriptures, care and acuteness in reasoning upon it, an ardent and simple piety, considerable spiritual insight, and remarkable earnestness and beauty. The many defects of the *Homiliaria* of his time induced Charlemagne to commission Paul Warnefrid to draw up a collection of homilies from the Fathers which would be free from faults: this *homiliarium* quickly succeeded in supplanting all others, and from it a considerable part of the homilies in the Breviary are derived.⁶⁰

From what we have said, it is quite evident that homilies were generally written, but one can also quote examples of extempore sermons. Eusebius⁶¹ tells us that Origen only when sixty years old permitted stenographers to take down the unwritten sermons which he preached in church, while Sozomen relates that St. John Chrysostom returning from banishment was obliged to enter the great church and preach to the people there and then.⁶²

When the language of the people was slowly changing from Latin, the Church began insisting with the bishops that they should use the language of the people in their homilies. In 813 the Council of Rheims enjoined bishops to preach the sermons of the Fathers in the dialect of their several dioceses, so that all might understand. In the same year the Council of Tours ordered that every bishop should have homilies prepared containing needful admonitions for the use of those under them and that each should endeavour to translate into the Rustic-Roman and Teutonic tongue so that all might easily understand the things spoken; the same thing was imposed by the Council of Mayence in 847.⁶³

But as early as the third century we find traces of the Church's pre-occupation that the Word of God be fully understood by the faithful. The Euchologion of Serapion of Thmuis has a prayer — *pro episcopo et ec-*

⁶⁰ The commission given by Charlemagne to Paul Warnefrid or Paulus Diaconus one of the most erudite and famous monks of Monte Cassino was 'ut studiose catholicorum patrum dicta percurrens, veluti e latissimis eorum pratis certosquosque flosculos legeret, et in unum quaque essent utilia quasi sertum aptaret.'

⁶¹ Hist. eccl. 6. 36.

⁶² Hist. 8, 18.

⁶³ can. 17 of the Council of Tours says: 'in rusticam Romanam linguam aut Theoticam quo facilius cuncti possint intellegere quae dicuntur.'

clesia – in which mention is made of the *lectores* and the *interpretes*: these were those who translated the liturgical passages for the benefit of the faithful. These interpreters are also mentioned in Etheria's *Peregrinatio*.⁶⁴

Translations are not the best solution to bring the Word of God to the people: we have already referred to St. Augustine's insistence to make himself understood by the people rather than please the *grammatici*. St. Gregory of Tours and St. Caesarius of Arles purposely used the popular Latin in their sermons to be understood by their faithful. The inscription on the tomb of Pope Gregory V (+999) makes reference to his sermons in the vulgar tongue.⁶⁵ Briefly it was the duty of the preacher to find above all through his own efforts the proper medium between the language of the people and the pretensions of the highly educated.

The sermon during Mass has passed through many vicissitudes during the centuries. In the early Church there was little scope for the rhetorical arts of the orator: one spoke *ex abundantia cordis et plenitudine intima charitatis*. At a later period, when the burden of doctrinal teaching and polemical discussion was thrown upon a far more cultured and leisured class of clergy, the typical discourses of the age became more elaborate and literary in character, even while the great bulk of popular preaching remained comparatively unchanged. By the end of the 4th century the rhetoric of the schools had completely made its way into the Church and in the brilliant group of Christian orators who flourished in this period, St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, we have the typical examples of a greatly altered style of Christian preaching. The custom of applauding the preacher with the clapping of hands and stamping of feet had by degrees extended itself in the churches, and this shows the great change that had come over the habits of Christians. Rhetoric had in fact speedily passed into mere unreal and fictitious artifice and the sermon sunk to

⁶⁴ '... episcopus, licet siriste noverit, tamen semper graece loquitur et numquam siriste: itaque ergo stat semper presbyter, qui, episcopo graece dicente, siriste interpretatur, ut omnes audiant quae exponuntur. Lectiones etiam, quaecumque in ecclesia leguntur, quia necesse est graece legi, semper stat qui siriste interpretatur propter populum, ut semper discant. Sane quicumque hic latini sunt, id est qui nec siriste nec graece noverunt, ne contristentur, et ipsis exponitur eis, quia sunt alii fratres et sorores graecolatini, qui latine exponunt eis.'

⁶⁵ 'Usus francisca, vulgari et voce latina, Instituit populus eloquio triplici.' (apud Righetti, I.c.)

be little higher than an intellectual exercise. The prevalent secularity of time may have been one of the causes which brought about a disuse of preaching: the little preaching there may have been in the eighth and ninth centuries shows a singular mixture of piety and dense ignorance.

A new blossoming was brought about by the Mendicant orders, but now the sermon is slowly separated from the Liturgy, and at a later stage it will be regarded as an interpolation in the course of the Liturgy, rather than a step forward in its progress.

The Second Vatican Council in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy has again given the homily its original character and its lawful place in the Liturgy, for the homily is now again an exposition of the mysteries of faith and the guiding principle of Christian life during the Liturgical year from the sacred texts read at Mass; in simple and familiar language it proclaims the fulfilment of the mystery of the Redemption *hic et nunc* in each one of those assembled together as God's own people; it is in a way the summit of a building up which slowly takes place every time the Liturgy of the Word is celebrated; the first step is the reading of the lessons and of the epistle by the lector; then follows the Gradual psalm which actually is the assembled congregation's response to the lessons proclaimed to them; then comes the solemn proclamation of the Gospel by the deacon; finally the celebrant himself, the one presiding the liturgical assembly, 'breaks the bread of the Word', so that the Scripture which has been proclaimed to the assembly is assimilated by all and by each one according to his measure, before it finds its echo in the bidding prayers which conclude the Liturgy of the Word, and its fulfilment in the active participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice.

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