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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

There is in our day a new appreciation of the place of preaching in the liturgy. The homily in the Mass of the Roman Church has received promotion reminiscent of Luther's own position that there should be no service which does not include a proclamation of the Word. As the Roman Catholic liturgy in the vernacular begins to catch up with Luther, Lutheran preaching ought to be examined carefully for its participation in the Lutheran mass.

The material on "Liturgical Preaching" was prepared by Prof. Andrew M. Weyermann for discussion in the Practical Department of Concordia Seminary. It may serve well for individuals to do practical self-examination of their preaching in the service. The liturgy is the church's way of worship. In the broadest sense, then, every service is an aspect of the liturgy, and every sermon is a liturgical sermon. The sermon prepared by the Rev. Prof. John Damm of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for a celebration of the Lord's Supper in the seminary chapel, is not only an example of liturgical preaching but an example of preaching in a specific liturgy on a unique day. There may be some risk in selecting such a specific frame of reference. Some may be reenforced in their feeling that liturgical preaching is somehow, some way, esoteric, reserved for those who like that sort of thing. The staff hopes, however, that it will instead provide opportunity to study how many of the elements of liturgical preaching ought to be standard in every Lutheran sermon.

LITURGICAL PREACHING

I

Preaching is a "Word event" in which the Word of God's will reveals the truth about the hearer's existence, and the proclamation of God's gracious deed in Jesus Christ frees the hearer in faith for love.

II

Liturgical preaching is shaped by the context of the Christian community at worship. The sermon is viewed as one form of the sacramental means of grace in the service and one medium through which the congregation is enabled to respond in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication to God and in a witness of love to the world.

III

Liturgical preaching addresses the hearer in terms of his corporate relation to the church, the people of God. The sermon will be marked by the "ecclesiastical we" that points the hearer to the reality of the Christian corporate body that is "before" and "beyond" his own individual existence. Liturgical preaching guards against a radical individualism or preoccupation with personal problems in which the hearer is thrown back upon himself in isolation.

IV

Liturgical preaching points the hearer back to his baptism and incorporation into the church and forward to the Eucharist where there is a continuing encounter with Christ, who makes the body one in the one loaf. The sermon, which refers to the continuing work of the Spirit through the means of grace in the church, guards against the impression that the power of the Gospel is confined to the past. The sacramental reference in the sermon guards against an intellectualistic distortion of faith as well.

V

Liturgical preaching consciously seeks to incorporate the expression of worship in the liturgy as a whole within the sermon itself.

The sermon is marked by significant references to the propers, the hymns, the symbolic actions, etc., that are part of the service for the day.

a

Since the Liturgy centers around the "remembrance" of the great redemptive event of God in Christ through which the Spirit created and nurtures the church, the reference to the liturgical parts of the service is not fundamentally a pedagogical device but has theological significance. Reminding the hearer how he is "remembering" and participating in the *Heilsgeschichte* of God is fundamental for the faith life of the Christian community. This stress on remembrance and participation in the "once for all" event guards against preaching that is reduced to a subjective analysis of personal faith and/or the equation of the object of faith with some philosophical or moral system of thought.

b

Liturgical preaching points to the work of the hearer in the liturgy as a way of reminding him how he has or will act out, in fact and symbolically, his own response of faith and love to the gracious act of God. The sermon thus reminds the hearer that worship is work in response to the work of God, that grace is free but not cheap, that faith is a gift that frees him for a life of love.

ANDREW M. WEYERMANN

EUCCHARIST IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

Yesterday we paused in the annual cycle of the church year to commemorate the giants and heroes of our faith: the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs. Today's commemoration is more personal and intimate as we remember those most near and dear to us who have departed this life in the faith and fear of Christ. With thanksgiving we recall their faith and their outgoing love toward us while they were on earth, and we

acknowledge that we are the better for having known them and for having had our lives touched by them.

But as Christians we are concerned with more than memories. A human being made new in Jesus Christ lives forever. We know that in Holy Baptism we enter into eternal life . . . a life that begins at the font and continues on forever, for at the font we have already passed from death to life.

To be sure, because of sin, death comes and separates us from those we love and those who mean much to us. Death comes and causes us to know the sorrow and pain of separation, but it cannot kill that life which was begun in Holy Baptism, which has been nourished by the Gospel, and is continually set free in holy absolution and strengthened by the medicine of immortality. Death cannot destroy the fellowship that Christian people have with one another because of their common life in Christ.

Christianity is by its very definition a corporate religion. It is a religion in which we find new personal lives in a fellowship with God that is enjoyed not in isolation from but in solidarity with our human brothers in the body of Christ.

It is always in terms of Christ, through Christ, and in Christ that we have this fellowship with God and one another. And it is specifically based on participation in the facts of suffering and death worked out in time outside a city wall. It is vindicated in the Easter triumph of the Lord. So great is that triumph that twice the liturgy repeats Saint Paul's victory hymn of thanksgiving because it is a victory over the sin and frustration that beset and separate the human race.

This is the significance of our baptismal regeneration. This is the "sense" of the unity given in the Holy Eucharist, for here the church does what it is. It strengthens and evidences the common brotherhood in Christ of those who have been made brothers in Him.

And central to this Eucharistic understanding is the cross of Christ. The cross is the point of reference. It is the pledge and promise that the broken, the frustrated, the sinful, the separated may be restored and in Christ are restored to wholeness and community and communion. Here we have the rightful ordering that is the foretaste of heaven, the perfected communion in and with God, who is "all in all." Hence our fellowship breaks through death and includes those who have departed this life in faith.

That is why it is right to say with T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets* that despite its tragic side "yet we call that Friday good." The sacrifice of Golgotha is a victory beyond all understanding, for God is reigning from the tree. And we can see this because our faith is not anchored exclusively on Calvary to the loss of the victory that Easter and the Ascension signify.

The life that we share with one another today is a life that was dead and is alive again. The risen Lord still bears those "dear tokens of His passion," but He is the risen Lord, and our fellowship with God and with one another is fellowship in the risen life of the crucified Son of God. Hence the fellowship that we have continues forever. It knows no ending. Neither time nor death nor Satan can separate us from one another.

We need a day like this to be reminded of such fellowship. We need to remember this in those hours of sadness that follow the death of a loved one. Indeed, we need to remember this at every step along the pilgrim's way. We are all part of that fellowship which is eternal. And in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist the awareness of that fellowship is heightened and intensified.

The worshipping community that gathers here is much broader than the total number of persons present here in the body. The Christian fellowship extends to every part

of the world, among all those who name the name which is above every name. Yet even this is not the total fellowship. In every celebration we are reminded that there are others who cannot be seen or heard at that moment but whose voices are united with ours in praise: "Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name." We are here referring to the angelic armies; but it is equally true of all the heroes of faith, and not only of them but of every faithful Christian who has fallen asleep in Jesus. . . . "All one body we!"

Today in the Prayer of the Church you will be given the opportunity to affirm this solidarity by silently remembering by name those from this institution and those close to you who have already followed the Pioneer and Captain of their faith and now rest from their labors.

You will recognize of course that this is no attempt on our part to change the situation of those who have died. Our prayers cannot change God's mind. His judgment is irrevocable. What we are doing is giving expression to the solidarity that is ours in Jesus Christ. Our commemoration of the faithful departed is an affirmation that we believe God and His promises. We trust Him who is the firstfruits of the resurrection.

So we come to His altar this morning and with the whole church catholic we affirm that those who depart this life in Christ rest from their labors. "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let the Light Perpetual ever shine upon them." We affirm our oneness with them, and we pray for ourselves that we may not grow weary but, keeping an eye on that distant shore, that "sweet and blessed country," we may not fall away during our pilgrimage or at our last hour, but fighting the good fight of faith may lay hold on the fullness of eternal life. JOHN DAMM