

2-1-1972

Homiletics

George W. Hoyer
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Eugene F. Habin
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoyer, George W. and Habin, Eugene F. (1972) "Homiletics," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 43, Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol43/iss1/10>

This Homiletical Help is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

INTRODUCTION

Some strangely different lessons appear in the Roman Ordo during the Sundays in Lent, and frequently they strangely underscore the traditional accents of these Lenten days. Here Ronald Starenko suggests preaching that practices what his Ash Wednesday introduction accents. An "if" in our preaching of the Gospel makes forgiveness conditional, pushes God into the passive role, and denies the atonement of Jesus Christ. This Lenten series is proclamation of the fact of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Repentance can follow such constantly renewed experience of forgiveness in fact.

The background reflections for Holy Week and Easter supplied by Eugene Habin carry this stress on proclamation one step farther. He sees the lessons generating "a punch line for the Gospel rather than an outline." In fact, he despairs of suggesting an outline and suggests that the story carry its power without comment.

The *Invocavit* study states, "He's something else!" And many a preacher will react that if we are to become something else than we have too usually been, something else will be needed in these sermons. The voices of the Lenten Sundays over the generations have echoed the preparation of new converts, building them up to be new men in the power of Jesus Christ. He is the Firstborn from the dead, but rose that all His followers would rise to newness of living. This Lent sermons will be prepared during days that demand very specific decisions and determinations by the people of God. The presidential campaigns will bring into focus the alternatives of national direction: further billions poured into war and destruction or a new determination that our government will be for the people and for life more abundant. Congregations that have withheld funds from church organizations in order to protest what they have seen as doctrinal laxity may well be joined by Christians who refuse to invest further money into prolonged controversies about exegetical methodology or dogmatic definitions. The days will cry out for life-goal sermons, for specific proposals from politicians as to what the American goal ought to be, and for specific prophetic pulpit alerting to the things Christians ought to be doing.

Whatever the direction the sermons which may be assisted in takeoff by these sermon studies finally take, their Gospel power must be solidly stated. It may be that the need for Christian action and for clarity in the direction people of God must take should be met by increased stress on discussion and small-group study. But it may be as helpful as anything said in these outlines that in Holy Week the point is left unsaid. It remains, then, to be said.

GEORGE W. HOYER

ASH WEDNESDAY, February 16

The Roman Church in its new "A" series of pericopes has elected to go with the traditional lessons for Ash Wednesday. These readings include the words of Joel (2:12-18) where the prophet calls his people to the Lord, and that section from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18) where

Jesus speaks about parading piety. The one new lesson in the series (2 Cor. 5:20—6:2), which serves as the Epistle for the day, accents the urgency of repentance and renewal.

A familiar theme like repentance often comes out with the common distortion that "God will forgive our sins if we are sorry."

It is that "if" that makes forgiveness conditional, that pushes God into the passive role, that denies the atonement of Jesus Christ. In reality repentance follows, does not precede, the experience of forgiveness. Repentance is in fact the experience of forgiveness, the turning from our sins and the trusting in God's grace, *because of* the cross of Jesus.

In terms of our need we are faced with the question: What does a person hide behind? In the Gospel for the day (Matt. 6: 1b-18) our Lord tells us about

The Masquerade

Yesterday the streets and clubs of many cities were filled with uninhibited celebration. But today, the Mardi Gras festival over, everyone is sober. Fasting and forehead smudges are in evidence. The Lenten masquerade has begun.

Those hypocrites! Trying to cover up immorality with a show of piety! What self-deception! How nice it is to be free from Law, how happy we are to be "spiritual" in our worship, how much better off we are! But it is precisely by not fasting, by not smudging our foreheads with ashes, that we try to secure ourselves against being hypocrites, thus assuring God that we, unlike some other people we know, worship Him in spirit and in truth! And without knowing it, perhaps, we have begun a masquerade of our own.

I. *Hiding behind what we do.* Jesus does not condemn fasting as such. In fact, He takes it for granted that His disciples will fast. As a matter of fact, He fasted. Originally the practice was an outward expression of an inward feeling.

Today we have broken that unity and have come to believe that true Christianity is something you feel inside as opposed to something you display. But our Lord is not asking us to choose between private disposition and public display. He is concerned

about bringing the two into harmony, so that one is the true reflection of the other. We can masquerade behind our inner piety as easily as the outward form. We can make our own religion of no secret to ourselves, always letting our left hand know what our right hand is doing. (V. 3)

A hypocrite is not someone who doesn't practice what he believes, but is, in our Lord's definition, someone who pretends he can make himself secure. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, for example, the Pharisee was a hypocrite not because he stood in the center of the temple and prayed but because he trusted in his own righteousness. The publican, on the other hand, was justified not because he hid himself in the corner but because he trusted in God's righteousness.

II. *Hiding behind what God does.* While our Lord speaks the Law against us when He condemns our going through the motions of being pious, of hiding behind either our inner feelings or our outward actions, He nevertheless speaks the Gospel to us. He says that the Father will remember us in secret. Those who seek to impress men will have their reward, the approval of others, security in conformity. But the reward that God gives is quite a different thing.

He does not reward us according to our own deeds (Ps. 103:10), whether they are good or bad. He rewards us according to His mercy. Indeed our lives are an open book. We can keep no secrets from God. But there is one secret He has not kept from us, something we can hide behind—the cross of Jesus. That's what the Father sees and remembers in secret, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. What may be hidden from everyone else is kept within the heart of God. (V. 18)

But it is not as hidden as we might think. It is now an open secret, an outward display of forgiving love. There was nothing private about the cross. It was a public act, that men may see it and find refuge in it, that we may

walk through the world, among men or apart from men, no longer masquerading behind what we do or do not do, but hiding behind

a deed of God that is the power of salvation.

Whenever you make the sign of the cross, remember what you are hiding behind!

INVOCA VIT, February 20

No matter how you look at it, the only way to begin Lent is to start with the ministry of Jesus Christ. For that reason, no doubt, the Roman Ordo A goes with the traditional Gospel lesson, the temptations of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11). The other lessons vary but in each case pick up the basic themes. The standard Old Testament lesson (Gen. 22:1-14) deals with the almost-sacrifice of Isaac because God really has someone else in mind. In the standard Epistle (2 Cor. 6:1-10) St. Paul describes his ministry "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing everything." He, too, had to be thinking of someone else. In the Roman Ordo A the Old Testament lesson (Gen. 2:7-9; 3:1-7) describes the garden scene where man meets temptation and yields to it. The Epistle (Rom. 5:12-19) shows that the history of man is more than temptation and fall; there is restoration and new life. St. Paul writes: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."

Truly, Jesus Christ is something else! He meets temptation where we face it—on the earth, in the world, in the course of life. He deals with it as Adam failed to do, as Israel failed to do, obedient to the Word of God. He not only fulfills what every disobedient son fails to do, but also by His obedience He forgives every disobedient son. For us there is always that something else that God now has in mind, Jesus Christ—

He's Something Else!

But He was tempted to be something other than what He was, as though He should be-

come something more than an obedient, beloved Son of God.

I. *To make bread instead of break it.* Young man, how long are you going to persist in this son of God bit? If I were you, I wouldn't carry that notion too far. You might get killed! You see, people have in their minds that anybody who is a son of God thinks of everybody else as a son of God, loves all of them, and you and I both know that not everybody's worth loving.

But if you must have it your way, how about proving to me at least that you really are the Son of God. Make these stones into bread! Why should a fine young man like you have to go hungry? You deserve a better fate than that.

Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me. I hunger now because I have taken upon Me the body of that race which tried to assert itself by eating, but when this body has been broken, I shall have bread to feed the multitudes.

II. *To impress instead of address.* Son, you're not going to have an easy job convincing folks these days that you are really sent from God. The world is so bad now—is anyone going to stop its madness? From where I see it, you aren't helping things by associating with the bad people. Things are going to get worse.

If I were you, I'd do something spectacular right here in the middle of the city. Do something to shake people up. They are looking for signs of God's presence. Why don't you leap off this temple and fall unhurt? What could impress people more

than that? Furthermore, the Bible says that God will give His angels to take care of you. You do believe the Bible, don't you?

The Scriptures also say that we are not to tempt the Lord God. This generation seeks a sign, but there shall be no sign given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be in the earth. God will not impress with thunder and lightning; He will address the world through My death and resurrection.

III. *To rule the world instead of redeem it.* Let's talk sense. We both know why you are here. The old prophecy says that you will crush my head. It also says something

about me crushing your heel. Why can't we make a deal? It will go easier on both of us if you will give up the idea of the cross, the blood, the sweat, the tears, even the bruised heel. You are destined for something greater than that.

Satan, you've got it all wrong. You have lied from the very beginning, and even now you dare to suggest that there is a shortcut to glory. You forgot that God alone deserves worship. There is no way I can worship Him but by serving Him. When I ascend to the Father I will not go alone. I will take with Me all those who have been redeemed. Then there will be joy in heaven — and on earth.

He's something else!

REMINISCERE, February 27

There seems to be little point in trying to correlate the standard lessons for this day. The Old Testament reading (Ex. 33:12-23) speaks of the paradox of meeting God face to face but seeing only His back. The Epistle (1 Thess. 4:1-7) is a comment on sexual behavior. The Gospel (Matt. 15:21-28) is the powerful story of Jesus pulling faith-filled conduct out of a Gentile outcast.

The selections in the Roman Ordo A provide a more unified Biblical thrust. In the Old Testament piece (Gen. 12:1-4a) God calls Abraham to become the father of a new race, though it is finally the Son who becomes the Lord. The Epistle from the pastorals (2 Tim. 1:8b-10) is an encouragement to suffer for the sake of the Gospel now that our Savior Christ Jesus has appeared. The Gospel turns out to be the Transfiguration of our Lord (Matt. 17:1-9), which, located in this season of the year, proves to be as significant here as at the end of the Epiphany cycle. At least it connects the Transfiguration with the struggle of the disciples to identify Jesus. And God says,

This Is My Beloved Son

In their vision the disciples were seeing things. Too much at one time, it seems. The things they saw didn't seem to fit. First there were two heroes of the past, Moses and Elijah, who symbolized the hope of the Jewish people. (Some of them, in fact, believed that one or the other would return as a latter-day Messiah.) When Christ appeared in resplendent majesty, a prefiguring of His future place in the kingdom, they didn't know what to make of that. And then, when they have their feet on the ground again, they find that He is determined to suffer and die. Their first reaction is shocked disapproval.

I. *He is more than He appears to be, or what we want Him to be.* The Hebrew people, shaped by their traditionalism and nationalism, were expecting not something new but a repetition of the old, a repristination of the past.

They would have settled for a new law-giver. That is not so much different from the world today. Multitudes view Jesus as

nothing more than a model or a guide. There is the delusion of trying to be like Him or the disillusionment of not coming even close to His image. The idealists have found a hero, the pessimists a fool.

Then there is the domesticated Jesus, rubbed flat by custom and routine. There is no terror in His beauty, no judgment in His claims, no commitment to His style. He is old hat.

When we do begin to catch a glimpse of Him we are embarrassed. He talks about repentance. He performs acts of mercy. He does not avoid suffering. He does not try to escape the cross. He will not let God occupy some place on the periphery of life. He isn't even concerned that people mistake Him for something other than what He appears to be.

II. *He appears as He really is, as more than we expect Him to be.* Judaism wanted

a Christ that would affirm their law; instead He comes to fulfill it. His contemporaries wanted a Messiah who would respect their traditions, but He comes rather to replace them. They wanted a theology of glory and instead He offers them a theology of the cross.

He picks up the sin of the world, our idolatry and inhumanity, and carries it. Whether we expect that of Him, whether we deserve that from Him, no matter, that's what He is determined to do. He conceals nothing. He is content to reveal who He is, the beloved Son of the Father who ordains Him at His baptism to bear away the sins of men, who blesses His ministry as the Suffering Servant.

You can identify the Christ by His redemption and by His resurrection. There is really nothing more to see, only less. There is no one else to follow.

OCULI, *March 5*

Again, the standard lessons for this day, though timely texts each in its own way, do not provide a unified theme. In the Old Testament lesson (Jer. 26:1-15) the prophet spoke against the cities of Judah and was threatened with death. In the Epistle lesson (Eph. 5:1-9) the apostle encourages a life in imitation of God. The regular Gospel for the day (Luke 11:14-28) is the pre-Easter announcement that the kingdom of Satan is divided and in disarray.

The lessons according to the Roman Ordo A have a central theme: help for the helpless. In Ex. 17:3-7 we have the story of ancient Israel drawing water from Mount Horeb. The Epistle (Rom. 5:1-2, 5-8) declares that as helpless as we are, Christ still died for us. The Gospel (John 4 *passim*) is the familiar account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

The Gospel of John is a unique story of the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior

of the world, with many sacramental and eschatological allusions. The John 4 text is no exception. Just as the Christ is the bread (John 6) that satisfies our hunger both in the Eucharist and the heavenly feast, so our Lord, as the Water of life, is the answer to our thirst. Verses 5-15 especially allude, if not to Baptism, then certainly to the arrival and fulfillment of the new age where there is

All the Gusto You Can Get

One of our beer commercials tries to make that point much less convincingly. You only go around once, we are told, so you've got to grab all the gusto you can get. A beer may boast of its flavor, and everyone knows it cannot satisfy our basic thirsts in life. And yet, because we want immediate satisfactions in life and because we do not want to work at the "deeper things" in life, we dip into the wells of work, pleasure, family. Our separation from God is so deep, our search

in life so misdirected that we would prefer simply to dip into stuff or find the magic potion that will provide effortless pleasure or a perpetual trip. As the woman said, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." (V. 15)

Those who do go around only once and who try to grab all the gusto they can get are thirsty people. That's important, but that's not the point. Jesus exposes need, but He comes in the first place to meet it. And so, this is a Gospel lesson, and there are basic human needs that He fills, our need

I. *For God.* Jesus speaks about "the gift of God" (v. 10), a living presence in His own person. The experience of God's love and forgiveness in the midst of life is our first need. There is all the gusto you can get.

II. *For worship.* Jesus speaks not about a place but a posture, not about a ritual but response, not about commemoration but celebration. The ability to "worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (v. 23) has nothing at all to do with whether we gather in churches and cathedrals or out in nature or in the privacy of our own hearts. The choice rather is whether there is a spiritual life and truth to share, whether there is a Gospel to

celebrate. Wherever Jesus meets us with His Word, we are able to respond with our worship. There is all the gusto you can get.

III. *For faith.* John reports that "many more believed because of his word" (v. 41). If water meets a thirst, then drinking and swallowing is the way to grab it. Even to drink a draft of beer is an act of faith, the laying hold of a value. It is not, however, a faith that saves or fulfills, since the beer cannot produce the faith because it cannot come across with life. Faith is created by its object. False faith tries to create its own object, the consequence being that there is a letdown. Not so with our Lord who says, "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling to eternal life" (v. 14). There is all the gusto you can get.

The Gospel concludes with the words, "We know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (v. 42). For He who went around once and for all and instead of grabbing gave all the gusto He could give, who in the faithful offering of His life by means of the cross supplied us with a living water, so that He now says, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (v. 14). All the gusto you can get!

LAETARE, March 12

The standard lessons for this day, because of the sheer impact of the Holy Spirit's power to give freedom and life through Christ, the living Bread, are hard to improve upon. That was not the intention, of course, in the selection of the Roman Ordo series. Nevertheless, there is some merit in using alternate lessons simply to expose the hearer to other segments of Scripture. It appears, however, that the lessons for this day would have been more useful for Oculi Sunday with its emphasis of the eye of faith toward the Lord. Furthermore, the living water

theme corresponds more naturally to the one of living bread.

So, going with Roman Ordo A, we note that the Old Testament lesson (1 Sam. 1b, 6-7, 10-13a) is the anointing of David as king of Israel. The Lord's words to Samuel are central to this lesson: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (v. 7). The Epistle (Eph. 5:8-14) is an exhortation to walk as children of light. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from

the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (v. 14). The Gospel is the entire ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel about Jesus' healing of a blind person. Our Lord's own words explain the reason for this healing miracle, "that the works of God might be made manifest in him." (V. 3)

Any Fool Can See That

Even that's not hard to see. The only trouble is that what is apparent enough for a fool to understand can be denied categorically. You see, there is sight for the blind; and there may be blindness among those who think they can see. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." (V. 39)

I. *The blindness of those who see.* The disciples get into the act first by asking Jesus concerning a blind man, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2). Blindness is not good, so somebody must have done something wrong to make it happen. That's obvious. Any fool can see that.

Then the Pharisees do their insightful thing. They see that a man has been cured of his blindness, but conclude that whoever heals on the Sabbath and whoever presumes to tamper with God's order and judgment has got to be a sinner. And that blows the whole thing. "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (v. 17). Any fool can see that.

The Pharisees are not agreed on that conclusion. Some had a more logical explanation of what really happened. Not only is it possible that he could not have been healed; it is also possible that he may not have been blind. John reports: "The Jews

did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight . . ." (v. 18). Any fool can see that.

II. *The sight of those who are blind.* Of course, if you want to check out your information about a blind man, you consult his parents. They corroborate the story. He was blind and now he sees. They know more than they are telling. They had gotten the word that anyone who confesses the Christ will be put out of the synagog. So they tell the Pharisees that their son can speak for himself. They don't know much about what happened, but they begin to see that there's something to it. This Jesus Christ has upset things. Any fool can see that.

Now we are back again to the man who had been blind. Maybe he can see what's going on here. The first time the Pharisees questioned him about who opened his eyes, he answered, "The man called Jesus . . ." (v. 11). Any fool, any blind fool, could see that. When the Pharisees interrogate him a second time, he doesn't change his story. He merely inquires about their earnest searching, "Do you too want to become his disciples?" (v. 27). He thought they really wanted to see. The truth is they really wanted to remain blind.

There is no guilt in being born blind; there is, however, considerable guilt when you have the chance to see and stubbornly wish to remain blind and stupidly imagine that you see things very clearly. But since light has come into the world there is no longer any need to remain blind, physically or spiritually, no longer any need to live in guilt. The Son of Man has come to heal and to give sight, to die for the sinner and to deliver him from darkness and despair. Any fool can see that.

JUDICA, March 19

The traditional lessons for this day are indeed useful, especially because they focus

on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament reading (Num. 21:4-9) pro-

vides the historical background, the serpents in the wilderness, for the sacrificial death of our Lord. The Epistle (Heb. 9:11-15) announces the once-and-for-allness of His offering to God on behalf of sinners. The Gospel (John 8:46-59), one of the longest until the Roman Ordos came along, is remarkable in that Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees sets the stage for personal claims that are validated by His subsequent death and resurrection.

The Roman Ordo A series for this day accomplishes much the same thing. There is, however, more unity in the selections. Another advantage is that they accent more, as a prelude to Easter, the resurrection theme and the work of the Spirit. In Ezek. 37:12-14 we have the prophecy that the Lord will open the graves of His people, raise them up, and give them a new land. In Rom. 8:8-11 the apostle writes that the Spirit which raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies, both as the power to live in righteousness now and to triumph over death in the end. The Gospel for the day (John 11:1-45) is about believing grieving, a faith that sees through illness and death to the glory of God, which is not only the Lord's raising of Lazarus from the dead but also His own rising from the grave. Such greatness makes possible

Good Grief

We spend a good portion of our lives working diligently to acquire those things that make life rich and meaningful — friends, family, job, money, material comforts, security. And when we lose any or all of these things we grieve.

The question is how to grieve. What is expected, to break down or to keep a stiff upper lip? But grief is always deeper than that. It may take the form of resentment and hostility, even despair, and that is destructive. It can take the form of genuine sorrow over sin and loss and failure that

deals with reality in a constructive way, the good grief of those who have hope. The grief of Jesus concerning Lazarus and Martha and Mary is more than sympathy. It is an empathy that gives hopes, that creates life.

I. *Grieving when we shouldn't.* There are, to be sure, situations in life where grief is natural and inevitable. It isn't only a death in the family that produces grief. Other experiences do too — divorce, retirement, letting the children go, moving to another town.

The deeper dimensions appear, however, when our grieving over loss exposes our idolatry. "Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died" (vv. 21, 32), said both Mary and Martha. When we feel let down, we become resentful. Our gods have failed us and we end up grieving for ourselves and against God. But to that disorder Jesus says, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." (V. 4)

II. *Not grieving when we should.* One way of dealing with our hurt, our sense of loss, is to deny it. Certainly bottled-up emotions will take their toll on our lives. It is healthy to express feelings. But that is never enough to bring about complete healing. There is still a trouble about which we may refuse to grieve, which we may choose to ignore altogether. We may rebel against God and deny the feelings we have toward Him. We may refuse to confess our need for different feelings, our need for His strength to grieve in faith. Not to be able to grieve could be worse than grieving. It could be the sickness unto death.

III. *Grieving as we are made able.* The courage to grieve, even to die, is hope in God. And that which gives us hope in God, which makes us able to grieve constructively, is the grief of Jesus Christ. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He cried from the cross. Feeling with us? Yes. Feeling for us? That's the point. His grief

redeems. He was willing to suffer the pain and the loss, to be sick unto death, to go through even the torments of eternal anguish and still come out on the other end, the Resurrection and the Life! (V. 25)

Such a Lord can make our grief good.

He makes us able to believe, to throw ourselves into the hands of God, to hope. Because of the glory that has been manifested in Jesus Christ, we are able to face the worst in life and still find forgiveness and salvation.

PALMARUM, March 26

The last Sunday in Lent is very much like the first, a temptation to grab the glory and run. The Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 9:9-12) according to the traditional series of lessons echoes the Jewish hope that the king of God's people would come triumphant and victorious. The humility of the king's entry into the city, which must have been embarrassing to the people, was a sign of the Lord's self-emptying on the cross, the accent of the Epistle lesson for the day (Phil. 2:6-11). The procession with palms, the Gospel (Matt. 21:1-11) with its hoo-rays, represents a temptation to ascend the throne without the blood and sweat of Calvary.

The lessons according to Roman Ordo A take quite a different tack. Although the Epistle remains the same, the Old Testament reading (Is. 50:4-7) contains the prophecy that the Lord God will give His back to the smiters and His cheeks to those who pulled out the beard. Jesus' readiness to offer Himself for the sake of friends and enemies alike is the message of the Gospel for the day (Matt. 26:14-29). The unique thing about this Gospel selection is that it is probably the first time the narrative of the Last Supper forms the lesson of the day. That fact alone, that we may share these eucharistic sayings of Jesus, makes this Gospel proclamation a most fitting accent for Palm Sunday. We have here the word about

Betrayal and Bestowal

There was anticipation in the air as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sun-

day. The people were looking for deliverance, but they did not see the cross as the means of that deliverance. Jesus also longed for the deliverance of His people, but He understood only too well what that would mean in terms of His own life. He is most keenly aware of this reality when He gathers with His disciples for the Passover celebration. There is the sorrow of betrayal and the joy of bestowal.

I. *Anxiety means sorrow.* Judas was not a very hopeful man. The disciples also were not especially optimistic about the way things were going. By this time the promise of Palm Sunday had worn off. The Kingdom didn't come! And they must have approached the Passover celebration with something less than joy.

When we are frustrated or fearful we have lost the ability to wait, to wait for God. How often Jesus reminded His followers that He must suffer and die. And each time they either did not understand Him (or didn't want to) or they suggested that He give up such crazy notions. Such thoughts are not fitting for a king. Judas in particular, the revolutionary that he was, was determined to force Jesus' hand. He was even willing to betray the Lord to make the Kingdom come! And so, whenever we see God where He is not (in instant success, easy conversions, immediate satisfactions) or when we fail to see Him where He is (in weakness, suffering, and sacrifice) we betray our lack of trust in Him.

II. *Anticipation means joy.* Jesus saw all of the anxiety. He felt it in His own soul.

When He said, "My time is at hand" (v. 18), He had a date to keep. The Passover must not only be celebrated, it must also be consummated. To suffer betrayal was part of the sorrow of the cross. But He moves toward the ultimate suffering not only to accept the suffering of betrayal but to die for the betrayer. He had come to bestow new life on His people, to fulfill all their dreams since the days of the Exodus, to establish a new covenant of forgiveness of sins by means of His blood.

He told His disciples that He would "not drink again of this fruit of the vine until

that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (v. 29). That's optimism! In love He is willing to die for His fellows; in hope He longs to see the completion of that work. He approaches His task with joy. In that spirit He gave us the Eucharist.

What better way is there for us to face our frustration and fear than to celebrate in the Eucharist all that He has bestowed upon us and to anticipate the dawn of a new day in the Father's kingdom.

RONALD C. STARENKO
Paramus, N. J.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, *March 30*

The Same Old Line . . . Love One Another

The lessons which Ordo A suggest help to generate a punch line for the Gospel rather than a mere outline.

Ex. 12:1-8 and 11-14 appear to be in harmony with our standard reading although the Passover "recipe" has been omitted in v. 9 and 10. The Exodus lesson sets the scenery for what is to come in the Epistle and Gospel. The scene is a communal meal, commanded by Yahweh to be celebrated forever as a remembrance of His mighty act of delivering Israel from Egypt.

The *celebration* of the New Testament meal (1 Cor. 11:23-26) is the *only concern* of Ordo A. The scoldings and warnings have been eliminated. The abuses of Corinth (preceding context) are omitted, and the subsequent warnings about "unworthiness" and its connection with "being sick and dying" become unnecessary. To find similarities to the Corinthian fiasco at the celebration of the Holy Supper today is indeed rare, especially on Maundy Thursday, a day which generally attracts those folks who hold particular devotion for the Lord's Supper. To surround our celebration with such an unfortunate mark would be flying by the

exception rather than the rule. The new pericope invites us to celebrate the Eucharist, *sola*.

The two preceding readings then provide a cradle for the Gospel. The Gospel appears in garments of infant softness, but it supports the kind of wallop we would expect to come from the carriages that cradle cannons. John 13:1-15 is not new (either in comparison to the standard lessons or to Maundy Thursday listeners). However, there is no need to be bereft of surprise because the traditional reading is familiar. The surprise could come when we discover how the words, by virtue of their own self-contained life, can support us in doing what they request us to do, namely, to copy the servanthood of our Lord Jesus Christ among His people. Hence, the gospel writer does not merely give us an example of love *par excellence*, but he directs us to *the source* of the power for repeating the act of love. The "new commandment" is acted out in the context of the Eucharist. Our Lord never makes a demand of us for which He is not willing to assume responsibility Himself.

If the "new commandment" is the central concern of Christians, then the Eucharist is

the central means for empowering that concern. Allow God's deliverance to be re-enacted, or better yet, allow His deliverance to be re-presented (remembering, New Tes-

tament usage). The Gospel as a punch line will not leave us the same as we were after hearing the same old line: "Love one another."

GOOD FRIDAY, *March 31*

The standard readings and Ordo A differ in two readings: Is. 50:6-9, the standard Old Testament reading, is replaced by the standard Epistle on the Ordo A chart. Hence Is. 52:13—53:12 becomes the Old Testament reading. In place of the standard Epistle, Heb. 4:14-16; 5:7-9 has been added. The Gospel, John 18:1—19:42, is common to both.

The resurrection accounts are "short" in comparison to the Passion narratives. Early Christians, looking back at the climax of salvation history, considered resurrection and ascension in keeping with divine power. Little more than a witness of one's personal experience was needed for the record. That God should suffer and die was apparently not so understandable. Much more is written about the Passion than is recorded about the resurrection.

I know when I'm licked. The great servant song in Isaiah, coupled with two lengthy chapters of the Passion, defy my gleaning a central thought and providing an outline for a sermon. It would either say too little about something as panoramic as the death of Jesus Christ or say too much about one section of a massive work. I would not

preach on any (or heaven forbid, all) of these texts on Good Friday.

I would suggest the following alternative: Polish skills in oral interpretation and read the lessons well. (The Word can stand by itself without us—it did on Good Friday.) Is. 52:13—53:12 sounds particularly forceful from *The Jerusalem Bible*. The poetry affords us a picture in itself, and poetry often tells a story which does not welcome commentary. If the poem cannot do the job by itself, then it is lacking. The final servant song in Isaiah is not lacking.

The Gospel in the Ordo A scheme, encompassing the whole Passion narrative according to St. John, has been set up to be read dramatically by different voices. Different voices speaking the Gospel take our humanity into account. (Is it safe to say that most people today are not accustomed to hearing long soliloquies?) A variety of voices provides a tantalizing medium for the communication of this dramatic account.

Involve laymen in the reading. Do not underestimate the possibilities for interpreting with voice rate, tone, pause, volume, and so on. How the witness of prophet and evangelist are read can tell the hearer how both are believed.

EASTER, *April 2*

A preacher need not be a clever man to move his hearers from Easter morn to the events immediately following the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. (Most worshipers will not mind that they, who came to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, are be-

ing pushed beyond it to a personal encounter with the risen Christ.)

The Gospel prescribed by Ordo A, John 20:1-9, turns the reader's attention from the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples' confrontation with the risen Lord. V. 8 care-

fully directs our attention from the empty tomb to the belief of the beloved disciple. Although Peter was the first to enter the tomb, John was the first to believe. Thus the Gospel for the day goes beyond itself, pushing us farther into the day.

The background for the rest of chapter 20 is set, and Jesus then proceeds to meet His would-be believers. Overwhelmed with joy, Mary does not question our Lord about the empty tomb, but she responds with a confession of faith, "Rabboni." (How else could she have responded to someone who confronts her not with issues—not even the doctrine of the resurrection—but calls her by name?) For the rest of the characters who occupy John 20, the day becomes truly good. Jesus, I believe, chose His greetings quite carefully. "Good day" would not be an inappropriate translation of the greeting in v. 19 (I'll say it was a good day—the very best day). What made the day so good was not merely that God raised Jesus from the dead, but that Jesus stands in the midst of His people.

The Gospel lesson seems to indicate that

the whole day must be seen *in toto*. The writer portrays the day as a whole by skillfully combining two traditions: the tradition of the resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15: 5-8) and the tradition of the discovery of the empty tomb (standard Gospel).

If any man should be bold enough to say, "Christ is not risen," the facts are not altered. If another should say, "He is," we are not necessarily helped. But if I am led by testimony of the Word and the Spirit to discover the risen Christ "along the way" where I walk (even where I run around frantically trying to justify my life by what I do), where I doubt, suffer and die, then I have become incorporated into the tradition and thus participate in both the death and resurrection of Jesus. (See the Epistle for the day, Col. 3:1-4)

A preacher need not be clever today, just convinced that God stands ready to make this day an unmistakably "good day" through Word and Sacrament.

EUGENE F. HABIN
Hamden, Conn.