First the bow is bent in study. Then the arrow is released in preaching.
-Hugh of St. Cher

Introduction

I would divide preparation/preaching into three distinct “phases” – remote preparation, proximate preparation, and the preaching event itself. Remote preparation has to do with all the “background” (and baggage) that one brings to the ministry of preaching. Proximate preparation deals with preparing a specific homily. The preaching event itself includes the entire liturgy—not just the act of preaching itself. Therefore, how we proclaim the scriptures and how we preside/minister in the liturgy will impact how we are heard.

Please note: not all these sources are written from a Catholic perspective, and I do not necessarily agree with everything that each author has to say. With that in mind, I do think that each author listed has something worth considering as we develop our ministry as preachers. Those marked with an * are especially recommended.

Remote Preparation

Excellent one-volume overviews of the theology and practice of Catholic preaching are:


Other collections of essays on preaching:


**Know Thyself**

Whether explicit or implicit, we have our own “theology of preaching.” We have our own history of hearing preaching—and of preaching ourselves. We have our view of scripture, and how it ought to be interpreted. We have our family and personal history of praying the liturgy. All these things will color how we preach. Therefore, I would argue that it is important to make these elements as explicit as possible, so we can make conscious choices as we prepare to preach—rather than be governed by habit and history. A helpful resource for exploring these issues is:


While this book is about teaching homiletics, it approaches preaching as a spiritual discipline—and thus has much to say to preachers whether they teach homiletics or not:


While not specifically dealing with preaching, this resource by a master educator has much to say to preachers:


A helpful resource for re-igniting a passion for preaching and transforming our approach to homiletics, while not written explicitly from a Catholic perspective, is:


Sources for a Catholic theology of preaching include:


It may also be helpful to read on preaching from other perspectives:


Some helpful resources on theology and the scriptures:


**Know the Community**

Preaching is contextualized in a particular community. Therefore, it is important to do some “cultural anthropology” and get to know your community well. Some resources that will help you get at the “macro” issues include:


In addition, knowing the community means getting involved – not just in ministry, but in life. The arts, politics, sports, etc....all help to widen our field of vision. It is not that they become fodder for preaching, but they provide us with a deeper and more broad perspective. For example, see:


But the “micro” issues are important as well. Humans are incredibly diverse—in personality, generational cohort, gender, learning style, etc. All these factors, and more besides, affect how we listen, including how we “hear” the preacher. Therefore, we need to be attentive to these differences and structure our preaching in such a way that it can be “heard” by those in the assembly. Some helpful resources include:


Preaching Across Generations:


Preaching Across Cultures:


African-American Preaching:


Preaching in Latino/Hispanic Congregations:


Know the Heart and Mind of the Church

Preaching is a ministry of the Church, not an individual undertaking. Therefore, in all our preaching, it is important to understand what it is that the Church is asking us to do. I recommend the following:

Most importantly, I would read (and re-read) *Fulfilled in Your Hearing from the U.S. Bishops. This landmark document sets the bar for Catholic preaching in the United States. It is included in this book, which has accompanying commentary:


To this must be added recent documents from the Magisterium:

- Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily (USCCB, 2013)
- Evangelii gaudium (Joy of the Gospel; Pope Francis, 2013)
- Homiletic Directory (CDWDS, 2015)

Other resources include:


An excellent collection of official Church teaching regarding the scriptures can be found in The Bible Documents from Liturgy Training Publications. I especially recommend reading *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church from the International Biblical Commission. Please see Felix Just’s website (listed below) for electronic versions of key documents.

Proximate Preparation

I begin with a daily praying of the scriptures that I will be preaching on (lectio divina). Ideally, for Sunday preaching, I like to begin on the evening of the preceding Sunday. I focus on what questions the readings raise—especially in light of current events. Therefore, during the week, as I read the paper and listen to the news, I try to find any anchoring issues or events. I don’t turn to the commentaries until after I have “chewed” on the word myself for a while; depending on my schedule I begin the exegetical research around Tuesday. I like to begin writing by Thursday and have a final text by Friday. Saturday is for practice.
Lectio Divina

My personal approach is to pray the readings using the monastic model of *lectio divina*—reading the pericopes out loud, pausing as words or phrases “grab” my attention and resting in them. Those words/phrases often form the core around which the homily is built. I find it especially helpful to engage in *group lectio*—finding that the insights that others have into the readings can be quite profound, and an excellent way to help prepare a homily that will connect to the community. I continue this process daily until the preaching event; it is crucial that the issues of most import rise to the surface before turning to commentaries and the like. Some books on *lectio*:


Current Events / Pastoral Preaching

There is an old quip that Karl Barth prepared to preach with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Preaching is contextualized, both in space (this community, this liturgy) and time (this day/season)—and that means in the space/time where we live the other 6 days and 23 hours of the week. Find a pattern of reading the paper, watching/listening to the news, etc...it is where the assembly lives. You may want to look at the following resource as a helpful way of incorporating such resources into your preparations for preaching:


Structure (Method/Form)

How do you put the homily together? Is it deductive, beginning with a conclusion and then proving it? Or inductive, taking the assembly on a journey so they reach a conclusion with you? I recommend the following resources for review:


DeBona, Eslinger, and Wilson give overviews of contemporary preaching methods. If you want to read the original works, they are:


**Language**

What kind of language do you use to preach? Professorial? Forensic? Poetic? Preaching, since it deals with the most important of matters—the Divine, is going to be strongly metaphorical. How do we / dare we speak of God? Perhaps looking at texts like these ones will help raise important questions and challenges:


**Visual / Imaginal Preaching**


**The Liturgy**

In addition to being attentive to the season and the particular feast or rite being celebrated, I recommend looking at the Missal (Sacramentary) – and review the prayers of the day, the preface that you are going to use, the Eucharistic Prayer. All these can provide tremendous insights/images that parallel and complement what you find in the readings.

Be attentive to the structure of the Lectionary; remember that the second reading in ordinary time is independent of the other three. One of my professors counseled me: Look at the psalm; that is the anchor that holds the other readings together. We often jump right into the gospel – so perhaps a different entry into the readings via the psalm would be helpful. Resources include:


I also recommend the annuals from LTP (*Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons; Foundations for Preaching and Teaching*) or from Liturgical Press (*Living Liturgy*).

**Commentaries**

This comes later in the process for me, and I rely on both written and electronic resources. I will list a number here for you.
Here are two good general introductions to the various methods of Biblical interpretation:


**General Commentaries/References:**

In addition to a good Catholic Study Bible (RNAB), and to other translations of the Bible for comparison, consider the following:

A Bible Dictionary, for example:

*The Anchor Bible Dictionary (6 vol)*


General Commentaries, for example:


*And a 2-volume set from Fortress Press:*


Concordance and similar, for example:


Greek: If you are interested at all in how reading the New Testament in Greek might inform your preaching, a good place to start is:


*Series, Individual Commentaries, and Special Studies:*

I have found the *Sacra Pagina* series from Liturgical Press to be quite helpful, and use a number of individual commentaries from a variety of authors as needed.

Other resources include:


For different perspectives on Paul:


Lectionary-Based Resources:


Pilch, John J. *The Cultural World of Jesus (Cycles A, B, C).* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995-1997. [he also has series that focus on the 1st reading/psalm and 2nd reading]


Canonical Criticism

Here are resources that seek to (re-)connect the academic study of the Scriptures with the life of the Church (what is called “canonical criticism”):


Jewish Perspectives

The Church has given us *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* ([http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_popolo-ebraico_en.html)) to help us better understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and to avoid unintentional anti-Judaism in our preaching. Among other things, the document reminds us that we have much to learn from Jewish exegesis. To that end, I would recommend:


These texts explore the complex issue of Jewish-Christian relations:


These resources specifically address the problem of unintended anti-Judaism in Christian preaching:


*Websites:

Here are two websites that contain links to many other sites:

Diocese of Davenport: [http://www.davenportdiocese.org/preaching-links](http://www.davenportdiocese.org/preaching-links)

(all the links listed here are posted on this site)


There are literally thousands of preaching websites out there; these are the ones that I visit as a matter of routine preparation:


The Center for Liturgy: [http://liturgy.slu.edu/](http://liturgy.slu.edu/)


Creighton University: [http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/daily.html)
Finally, there is the downloadable resource from the Congregation for Clergy, called “Biblia Clerus” – you can link to it from the Deacon Links webpage (“Reading the Word of God with the Church”) or use this URL: http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerus/index_eng.html

Felix Just, SJ’s website is an excellent source of information on the Scriptures and on Church teaching regarding the Bible: http://catholic-resources.org/

The Preaching Event

Delivery & Wider Context

The art of verbal communication is complex; preaching is no exception. It is also true that our preaching takes place in the context of our proclaiming the scriptures and our presiding – and those ministries require our attention as well if our preaching is going to be heard. Some resources:


I also recommend the annual from LTP: Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers.

Feedback

Fulfilled in Your Hearing speaks of homily preparation groups; they are also invaluable for providing feedback. I would also recommend videotaping yourself, or having another preacher listen to your preaching and provide a critique. I recommend:


**History of Preaching**

Preaching has a fascinating history; here are a few resources that begin to delve into this often-overlooked area. As preachers, we are heirs of an amazing tradition:


