

THE SYNOD ON THE WORD, PART II: EXERCISE OF THE MINISTRY

If the *instrumentum laboris* (working document) of the Synod stresses the value of the ancient practice of *lectio divina* especially for the entire Body of Christ, it also contains words of encouragement (and of critique) to ministers of the Word: that is to say, lector-proclaimer and preachers. What might the bishops' thoughts and the Pope's Apostolic Exhortation look like, based on these comments? Let's look at lector-proclaimers first of all.

One writer, a Catholic Biblical scholar, noted, "Our parish provides lectors with the *Workbook for Lectors* (Liturgy Training Publications) as a background resource. But even with this to help them, they say, 'I don't have a clue what [the 2nd reading's] about.'" The lectors at Our Savior also use this same aid; I wonder if they'd agree? I know that in preaching I often have to supply quite a lot of context to make sense of the excerpt (I'm more and more aware of this since I'm trying deliberately to preach from the 2nd reading in this 'Year of St. Paul'). But short participating in a multi-session study of, say, the Letter to the Philippians (where we are now in our Sunday cycle), how could our lectors easily come to the proper context and thus proclaim more clearly the text they have in front of them? It's all very well, as one lector-training guide put it, to "Get into the mind of St. Paul" when proclaiming. But how does one do that with a snippet that is often patched into a context that St. Paul himself might not have recognized?

To this end, the Synod might be ready to recommend a re-working of the Lectionary, both to ensure that the 2nd reading (and the others, too, at various times) are more coherent with their original context, and so that the 2nd reading (presently pretty well detached from the rest of the given Sunday's readings except in the "privileged seasons" of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter) might make more sense in the entirety of what is proclaimed on a given Sunday. We'll see.

If lector-proclaimers have an excuse for not always grasping the essence of St. Paul, preachers have no such bailout. We are ordained first and foremost to preach the Gospel, and that includes homiletics in worship. So we must be both equipped to do the work that enables us to exercise this ministry fully, and willing to spend the time and effort needed to carry this ministry out. Do we?

The same scholar referred to above comments on preaching: "An effective homily combines several factors: exegetical insight into one of the texts read, an application that connects the Word addressed to 'our ancestors in faith' with our contemporary situation, and a homilist who speaks to the people in the pews....In short, the Word preached must be a Word worth opening—that is, by inviting further thought, questioning and discussion." And, I might add, by inviting choices and action.

Are we (lectors and homilists) willing to take seriously these challenges? There are concrete implications for the living of our Faith, either way...