

Between the Ambo and the Altar: Biblical Preaching and The Roman Missal, Year A.

Guerric DeBona, OSB. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2013. ISBN 978-0-8146-3459-2 (alk. paper). ISBN 978-0-8146-3484-4 (ebook).

Catholics have come to expect that the homily will reflect on the scripture readings of the day. However, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says that the homily may also explain “another text from the Ordinary or the Proper of the Mass of the day” (65).

Guerric DeBona promotes preaching from both the Lectionary for Mass and the Roman Missal. He has reflected deeply not just on the Sunday scriptures, but on the corresponding presidential prayers. He also references sources from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* to the Order of Mass. DeBona finds the profound in the familiar. The responsorial psalm receives scant mention, but throughout the author helps the homilist, who stands *Between the Ambo and the Altar*, to broaden the base of sources.

Focused more on ideas, DeBona rarely sketches a homiletic outline. Instead, he lightly salts his commentary with occasional samples, which will invigorate the preacher to weigh new methods. On Good Friday, for example, the author proposes a “monologue homily”, in which the preacher adopts a persona from the Passion. Some preachers can do this expertly; others cannot. But the proposal sparks ideas.

DeBona can sculpt metaphors, so he demonstrates the creativity that supports good homilies. His frequent references to cultural treasures reveal a strategy he never makes explicit: To preach well, learn literature.

The lectionary’s cycle of readings has goals distinct from those of the presidential prayers on corresponding Sundays. Two different post-Vatican II study groups devised these systems.

They respected their respective traditions, while realigning texts for the contemporary Church. Consequently, one should not expect the same correlation between the collect and the second reading that one finds between the gospel and the first reading. This does not dissuade DeBona, who finds even unintended connections.

Preachers should “exegete the assembly,” a point the author repeatedly stresses. Specific advice pertains to the sometime churchgoers of Christmas, Palm Sunday and Easter. Yet many faithful Catholics participate on those days and also deserve attention.

The commentary on Christmas treats only one mass, not all four. The author generously includes the Second Sunday after Christmas, even though it does not exist on the liturgical calendar in the United States of America. The newly revised Pentecost Vigil receives brief comment. The recommendation to replace prayers from the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time with ones from the Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples will disturb those who more scrupulously observe liturgical law.

At times, the author’s understanding of Latin is questionable, as on the Feast of the Holy Family, where he states that the Roman Missal translates the word *dignatus* as “shining”, whereas *præclara* performs that service. At times the biblical exegesis is questionable, such as the suggestion on the Solemnity of the Ascension that Theophilus was a catechumen, a term that first appeared a century after the writing of Luke/Acts. However, DeBona’s book concerns preaching. Scholarly commentary on the missal and the bible exist in other resources.

The author's well-intentioned suggestion on the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time that Catholics should welcome our Hispanic brothers and sisters overlooks the reader who is already preaching to Catholic Hispanic assemblies.

In general, though, this book breaks new ground in homiletics. It will even profit catechists and other believers who want more insight into the Sunday readings. DeBona offers valuable service through his careful commentary on the lectionary of Year A. Readers will justly anticipate B and C.

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This review appeared in *Worship* 89/1 (January 2015):94-95.