



C A T H O L I C  
WOMENPREACH



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# Synodal Preaching Guide

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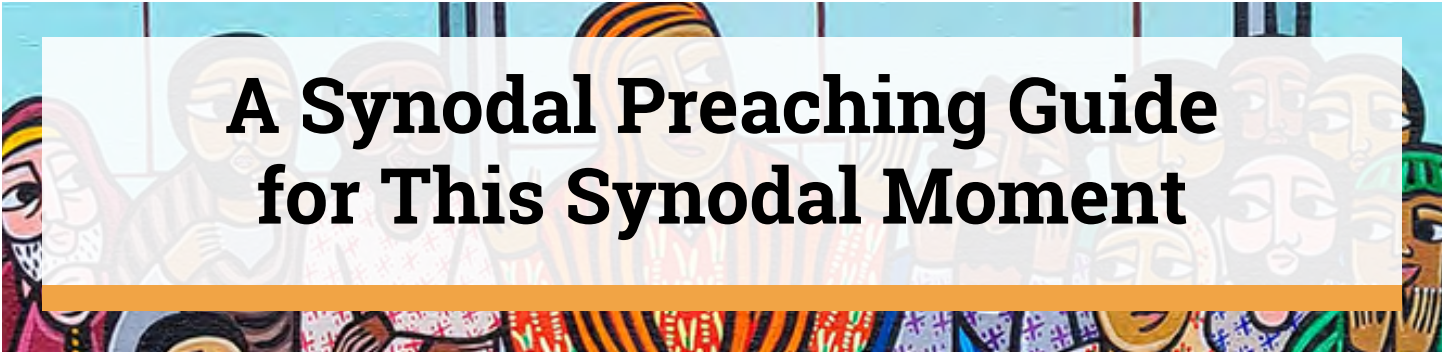
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# A Synodal Preaching Guide for This Synodal Moment

**“A good sermon starts  
before its proclamation.**

**It is found as you  
listen to the needs of  
the community and  
consider how God may  
be calling you to speak.**

**It means listening as  
the community shares  
their stories and their  
experiences of God. It  
means not assuming you  
know what they need even  
before you have met them.**

**Preaching shows us, as  
synodality should, that if  
we do not hear, then we are  
not ready to speak.”<sup>1</sup>**

**- Kayla August -**

Developing the Voice of the Laity  
*Commonweal Magazine*

Synodality is more than just a buzzword that Pope Francis has made popular in his papacy. Since the Synod on Synodality, with the key themes of communion, participation, and mission, began in October 2021, Catholics are being invited into a new way of being church. Rooted in and flowing from the vision articulated in the Second Vatican Council, synodality offers a powerful vision of how to be the Body of Christ together. It is grounded in practices of respectful listening and sincere dialogue, centering the importance of shared baptismal dignity, and trusting that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist that guides discernment.

And synodality is more than just a three-year process involving the hierarchy. It invites all Catholics - clerical and lay, men and women, young and old, lifelong Catholics to new converts - to recognize the co-responsibility that all the baptized share for the Church's mission. If synodality is what God expects from the Church in the third millennium, as Pope Francis has said, then it must take root at every level of the Church. Becoming an authentically synodal Church will require education, formation, encouragement, and skill building. It will require unlearning and relearning as well as reconsidering certain practices or attitudes in the light of the challenge to become a missionary synodal Church.

*Preaching is one area that can and must be informed by this invitation to synodality.* Catholic Women Preach offers this Synodal Preaching Guide as a resource for communities to practice synodality, nurturing it to take root locally. It is our hope that it will serve preachers and community leaders and members who break open the Word of God in their communities.



# Introduction

## What is synodality? What is preaching? What is synodal preaching?

### What is Synodality?

The word synodality comes from two Greek words, *Syn* which means “with” and *hodos* which means “path” or “road.” Synodality means journeying together.

“Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together,”<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis said in his homily at the opening of the Synod on Synodality in October 2021.

Synodality has been a commonly-used word in Catholic circles since the opening of the Synod on Synodality in October 2021. But the idea and the practices of synodality are not at all new. Ecclesiologist Kristin Colberg describes how synodality has been practiced since the earliest Church councils.<sup>3</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople and early Church Father who lived in the fourth century stated that “Synodality is a constitutive element of the church.”<sup>4</sup>

While synodality is an ancient practice, Pope Francis’ opening of a Synod on Synodality challenges Catholics to reflect more deeply on communion, participation, and mission in the 21st century. “It is not enough to have a synod; you must be a synod. The Church needs intense internal sharing: a living dialogue between the Pastors and between the Pastors and the faithful.”<sup>5</sup>

We may think of synods as gatherings on a certain theme, such as the Synod on the Amazon or the

Synod on the Family convened by Pope Francis in past years, but the Synod on Synodality is bigger than that. Rather than a synod on a particular topic or area of focus, the Synod on Synodality is how all the baptized are sharing the road and becoming a people together. The focus of this Synod is how the People of God, amid myriad tensions and challenges, can more fully share in communion, participation, and mission.

The primary acts of synodality are thoughtful listening and bold speaking. The *Vademecum*, the document that served as a handbook for the first phase of the Synod, states that, “Synodality requires patient and respectful listening to all persons, whether those in power or those on the periphery.”<sup>6</sup> The Synod has particularly emphasized the need to listen for the voices of those who are on the margins in various ways and who may often be the most overlooked or ignored.

“Synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute,”<sup>7</sup> said Pope Francis in the homily for the opening Mass of the Synod.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* is the working

document that guided the October 2023 assembly gathering, primarily made up of fifteen worksheets on the themes of communion, participation, and mission. It is strikingly different from previous *instrumenta laboris* which are typically preliminary drafts of a final document. The very format of an *instrumentum laboris* that is a series of worksheets with questions for ongoing dialogue and discernment models synodality.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* lists the following characteristics of a synodal church:

- a listening Church
- desires to be humble, and knows that it must ask forgiveness and has much to learn
- a Church of encounter and dialogue
- is not afraid of the variety it bears, but values it without forcing it into uniformity
- promotes the passage from “I” to “we”
- is open, welcoming and embraces all
- confronts honestly and fearlessly the call to a deeper understanding of the relationship between love and truth
- Can manage tensions without being crushed by them
- through walking together, is brought into contact with the healthy restlessness of incompleteness
- unceasingly nourishes itself at the source of the mystery it celebrates in the liturgy
- a Church of discernment

In short, a synodal Church is one where all are protagonists and share co-responsibility in mission, one marked by *parrhesia* (bold speech) and generous listening, one that seeks to engage the margins/peripheries, and one that is humble and attentive to the call of ongoing conversion. The purpose of the Synod on Synodality is not administrative but rather profoundly evangelical. In the words of the document on the spirituality of synodality: “We recall that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant

dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”<sup>8</sup>

## What is Preaching?

Though preaching can be broadly understood as any act of public professing and witnessing to one’s faith, for the purposes of this guide, “preaching” is defined as speaking from the Scriptures to a particular assembly in such a way that those gathered worship God and are sent forth on mission to love God and neighbor.

This definition draws on the description of the preacher’s task in the 1982 US Conference of Catholic Bishops document *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*: “to speak from the Scriptures (those inspired documents of our tradition that hand down to us the way the first believers interpreted the world) to a gathered congregation in such a way that those assembled will be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

Most often, liturgical preaching is thought of as homily offered in the context of Sunday Mass. However, liturgical preaching is not limited only to the homily offered during celebrations of the Eucharist. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, a homily “means an explanation, pertinent to the mystery celebrated and the special needs of the listeners, of some point in either the readings from sacred Scripture or in another text from the Ordinary or Proper of the day’s Mass.”<sup>10</sup>

Preaching occurs at non-Eucharistic liturgies like Good Friday Liturgy of the Lord’s Passion, preached vespers, and is also present in non-liturgical events such as parish missions, retreats, prayer gatherings, and days of recollection. This guide uses the term “preaching” rather than “homily” to include the range of spaces where the Word of God is proclaimed and broken open, including but not limited to Sunday and weekday celebrations of the Eucharist.



The three major elements of liturgical preaching are “the preacher, the word drawn from the Scriptures, and the gathered community. Each element is essential and each must be considered carefully if we are to understand the challenge and the possibilities of liturgical preaching.” The element of the assembly is particularly key in the consideration of preaching synodally.

**“The assembly is the first  
minister of preaching.**

**They are the ones receiving it  
and doing something with it.**

**If there is no assembly,  
there is no preaching.”**

**- Fr. Greg Heille, OP -**

Director, Doctor of Ministry Program  
Aquinas Institute of Theology

## **Current Homiletical Context**

Pope Francis has paid particular attention to preaching throughout his papacy. In his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), he writes at length about the importance of preaching. He describes the possibility of the homily as “an intense and happy experience of the Spirit, a consoling encounter with God’s word, a constant source of renewal and growth.”<sup>11</sup> He calls for a renewal of “confidence in preaching, based on the conviction that it is God who seeks to reach out to others through the preacher.”<sup>12</sup>

However, Pope Francis has also written and spoken frankly about his concern for this ministry in the church. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he notes that homilies can be an occasion of suffering for both listeners and preachers. More recently,

in January 2023, Pope Francis said to diocesan liturgical directors that “in general, homilies are a disaster.”<sup>13</sup> He went on to recommend that homilies be no longer than ten minutes and include “a thought, a feeling and an image.”

Pope Francis’ concern about the quality of preaching is echoed by many of those who participated in listening sessions during the Diocesan Phase of the Global Synod. “The quality of homilies is a major, major universal feedback across the Church – people lamenting, either sermons that are just too hurriedly prepared or sermons that are too abstract and intellectual, or sermons that lack any kind of real meat and content to them. So there’s a kind of lament from across the world that we would like better homilies that genuinely feed us spiritually,”<sup>14</sup> said Anna Rowlands, a professor at Durham University, and also a member of the team that read and synthesized listening session reports.

As these statements make clear, there is an opportunity for preaching in Catholic liturgies to better speak to, resonate with, and nourish those who assemble for worship. The Church’s current emphasis on synodality invites us to consider how the synodal practices might inform how preaching is developed, offered, and received to deepen everyone’s experience of the proclamation and preaching of the Word.

## **What is Synodal Preaching?**

Synodal preaching draws on our previously shared definition of preaching and incorporates the principles of synodality: speaking from the Scriptures to a particular assembly, informed by the assembly’s joys, griefs, struggles, and hopes in such a way that the preacher and assembly are drawn into more worship of God and are sent forth with renewed commitment to the shared mission to love God and neighbor.

This definition resonates with Pope Francis’ words in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren.”<sup>15</sup>

Pope Francis has made it clear that listening is a core component of synodality. “Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the ‘hearing’ of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged? Participating in a Synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with the words of others.”<sup>16</sup>

In synodal preaching, the content is shaped by a shared experience of prayerful listening to Scripture by the preacher and members of the assembly. It is rooted in the belief that the entire People of God, all the baptized - regardless of age, education level, state of life, gender, or any other identity marker - are capable of offering reflections and insights that build a bridge between their lives and sacred Scripture.

Synodal preaching shifts the weight of the responsibility for the message preached. Members of assembly have the responsibility and challenge to share their insights, challenges, points of resonance and points of dissonance. Preachers have the responsibility and challenge to listen deeply to what members of the assembly offer. Synodal preaching likely feels more vulnerable for both preachers and members of the assembly. Giving feedback with clarity, specificity, and generosity isn’t easy, and receiving feedback with grace, thoughtfulness, and curiosity isn’t easy, either! Moving in the direction of synodal preaching would require a shift in the culture of many Catholic communities, but would likely very much improve an assembly’s experience of the preaching.

Though challenging, moving in the direction of synodal preaching helps to actualize the vision laid out by the US Bishops in *Fulfilled In Your Hearing*: “The proclamation of the word of God is the responsibility of the entire Christian community by virtue of the sacrament of baptism.”<sup>17</sup> What might this look like concretely in the life of a community where the Word of God is preached?

**“To be a synodal preacher is to believe that your people have something to say about the Word of God, and to build in practices of listening into your life.”**

**- Casey Stanton -**

Co-Director of Discerning Deacons



# How do we practice synodal preaching?

**“The homily should be part of an active relationship between preacher and parish. None of us, speaking or listening, should stop trying to improve the experience.”<sup>22</sup>**

**- Fr. Terrance Klein -**

Diocese of Dodge City

The US Bishops wrote that, “Preachers are called to a prayerful dwelling with their people and to a prayerful dwelling with the texts of Scripture.”<sup>18</sup> Such a “prayerful dwelling” with the people can happen through a regular practice of listening to the listeners and reflecting on Scripture together.

Pope Francis alludes to just such a gathering in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “How good it is when priests, deacons and the laity gather periodically to discover resources which can make preaching more attractive!”<sup>19</sup>

Both these statements point to the reality that synodal preaching necessitates some kind of feedback loop to create circularity. Ideally, there is an intentional process of the preacher hearing feedback from listeners who are consistently reflecting thoughtfully on their inner lives, the Scriptures themselves, and on the preaching they receive.

Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* that “The homily will be effective in enabling a community to worship God with praise and thanksgiving only

if individuals in that community recognize there a word that responds to implicit or explicit questions of their lives.”<sup>20</sup> Synodal preaching practices that create a feedback loop help listeners to articulate and be conscious of the questions of their lives and help preachers to become more aware of those questions.

For many assemblies, the question may be a daunting one because there isn’t a practice of engaging in giving and receiving feedback in Catholic communities, especially around the content and delivery of preaching. According to Karla Bellinger, Executive Director of the Institute for Homiletics at the University of Dallas, “There is a culture of silence with regard to feedback in most parish cultures.”<sup>21</sup>

Some level of a “pray, pay, and obey” attitude can be present among people in the pews who don’t feel empowered to give feedback on preaching beyond a polite, “Nice homily today, Father,” with a handshake on the way out of Mass. Moreover, preachers are often not accustomed to inviting specific, constructive feedback from members of the assembly. This disconnect goes both ways and does a significant disservice to the experience of preaching for both preachers and listeners.

Assembly members may not be sure how they might offer a response - or even if they should - and preachers may not be sure how to draw out a meaningful response from listeners to gauge how their message landed. This reality exists in spite of Vatican II’s teaching on the universal call to holiness and the renewed emphasis on the significance of baptism in calling all to actively participate in Christ’s shared mission. Improving the experience is both the work of the preacher and the assembly.



# A practical guide for preachers and communities

Perhaps the most powerful witness we have in the Scripture of Jesus modeling synodality is the Road to Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35. Jesus comes alongside Cleopas and his companion. He asks them a question, listens to their response, then breaks open the Word as they continue to share the road. At their encouragement, Jesus stays with them and shares a meal and their eyes are open. They reflect together on their response to the message they had heard: "Were not our hearts burning within us?" And "that same hour" they set out for Jerusalem to bear witness to their experience of the Risen Lord. In just twenty-two verses, we witness synodal preaching that leads to profound transformation and the two listeners naming God's presence and responding with action to share the good news.

## Movement 1: Dialogue & Listening

The story begins with an encounter - "Jesus came near and walked with them" - that leads to dialogue and listening. Luke notes that Cleopas and his companion were sad. Into their sadness, Jesus offers a question: "what are you discussing?"

For preachers, the first movement is "coming near" to the assembly, noticing their context, and offering an invitational question. For the assembly, the first movement is receiving the preacher's closeness, allowing themselves to be seen, and entering into dialogue. This step requires openness and vulnerability for both the preacher and the assembly.

In ministry - whether in parishes, schools, universities, religious communities, or other settings - there are many opportunities for listening and encounter, in both formal and informal ways in ministry. These may take the shape of conversations over lunch among students and campus ministers in the campus ministry kitchen, discussions during dinners out between a pastor or deacon with parishioners, or faith sharing at the beginning of a pastoral council meeting. Formal pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, and the sacrament of reconciliation, are some of the more intentional spaces of encounter and dialogue where listeners might share the questions of their lives.

All of these spaces are opportunities for preachers to "listen to their listeners," entering into their concerns, struggles, joys, hopes, questions, and insights. The more that preachers can listen with spacious curiosity and the more that community members can speak with honesty, the richer the exchange will be.

## Movement 2: Delivery of & Reception of Preaching

Next comes the moment of preaching - whether at Sunday Eucharist, Word and Communion service, a retreat witness talk, preached vespers, or some other occasion. As Jesus did with Cleopas and his companion, the preacher seeks to interpret the Scriptures in light of the listeners' questions and concerns. Now the assembly is in the listening role, seeking to receive in their hearts and minds the message that is offered, noticing within them what is stirred by the preacher's message and recognizing points of resonance, confusion, connection, and disconnection.

### Movement 3: Receiving Feedback & Going on Mission

While Luke's account does not depict Jesus explicitly seeking a response from Cleopas and his companion, it is clear from their urging for him to stay in their home that the message he shared resonated. Cleopas and his companion reflect together on how Jesus' words landed for them as they articulate their own internal response of their hearts burning within them. And their actions most clearly show the impact of the message they receive from Jesus: they turn around and walk the road they just walked in the other direction to bear witness to the Gospel.

For the preacher, this is a time to invite and take note of helpful feedback from the assembly. For the assembly, it's a time to reflect on what was heard, to notice how it lands, and to make the preacher aware of the effect the preaching has had on one's life of faith. How can a preacher know what impact their preaching is having for their listeners?

In ministry, preachers can seek feedback from assemblies in different ways, though this is often challenging. In his experience of 27 years at Our Lady of the Lake parish, Fr. James Mongelluzzo described the challenge of helping parishioners feel comfortable with offering feedback. "Sometimes people are afraid of that, afraid of getting in trouble," he said, sharing that he has a regular practice of passing out a questionnaire two or three times a year to about ten people in the assembly, a practice to which parishioners are now accustomed. "I do it when I feel my preaching is getting dry," he said. "And they say, 'wow, I've actually been asked to give preacher feedback.' Their responses give me so much to think about."

**"Communications experts say that feedback is composed of appreciation, evaluation, and coaching. Appreciation is like a pat on the back or an encouraging comment. Preachers can ask for evaluation when they actually want to know how they're doing, both strengths and weaknesses. Coaching answers the question 'What could I do to get better?' You can use them together or use each at a different time. To be effective, homiletically trained conversation partners, we must learn to be adept at each feedback type and know when to use each one."** <sup>23</sup>

**- Dr. Karla Bellinger -**

Dr. Karla Bellinger,  
Executive Director, Institute of Homiletics

## **Building a synodal preaching habitus of parrhesia (bold speaking) and generous listening through a preaching preparation group**

**“When I think of synodal preaching, I think of dialogue. Preaching is counterintuitively dialogical. It’s a monologue from the pulpit, but that voice can be formed in advance in dialogue with the people.”<sup>27</sup>**

**- Fr. Greg Heille, OP -**

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**“Preaching the word of God is a relational event. It can be enhanced through the insights of others.”<sup>25</sup>**

**- Dr. Karla Bellinger -**

In addition to seeking feedback on preaching from members of the assembly, a regular (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) gathering between preachers and assembly members can create a synodal preaching habitus. “Preparation for preaching requires love,”<sup>24</sup> wrote Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Implementing a weekly or monthly gathering for preachers to hear from assembly members can serve as a concrete act of love and care for the community, improving the experience of preaching for everyone.

Building a synodal preaching habitus requires a change in culture in many Catholic communities - whether they are parishes, campus ministries, or some other space. There is often a power differential present, particularly when the preacher is ordained. A clerical culture leads to the people in the pews passively sitting and receiving, and the preacher playing the sole active role as speaker. A shift in culture is part of deepening our living out of Vatican II’s challenge to embrace the universal call to holiness and synodality’s invitation to see all as protagonists who are co-responsible in mission, agents of the Gospel by virtue of baptism.

The following model is adapted from the homily preparation group process that lays out on a model for a weekly gathering of one hour for a preacher and four or five members the assembly. This mode can be found in pages 36-38 in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*. The following model also is informed by the [Spiritual Conversations](#) model used in the Synod on Synodality, [restorative justice circle practice](#), and the Benedictine practice of [lectio divina](#). Preachers and assemblies are encouraged to take this synodal preaching model and adapt it to suit the particular needs and circumstances of a particular preacher and assembly.

Before convening, it’s helpful to think about what can create a space where all members will feel at ease and free to share. The tools of restorative justice circle practice may be helpful in creating a group where members feel comfortable and able to speak honestly and transparently. While restorative justice circles were developed to respond to a harm done interpersonally or in community, the structure of the circles can be helpful more generally in developing a strong and healthy group dynamic and building a sense of community. A talking piece may be a useful tool for groups where some members tend to speak often or at length and while others tend not to speak. The initial convener may want to consider inviting members to create collective agreements about shared convening of the circle and of how members will interact during their time together.



**Gather:**

Ask five to ten members of the assembly to share in a weekly one-hour commitment to assist the preacher(s) in preparation. Ideally, these members will reflect the diversity of a given community in age, race/ethnicity, gender, and background. Stress that they are simply invited to come share the Scriptures and that there is no “homework” or expectations of preparation besides showing up with an open heart, mind, and spirit. Fr James Mongelluzzo, who participated in such a group for many years in parish ministry, recommends rotating two or three members off periodically and inviting new members so that there are both fresh voices and a sense of continuity in the group.

Pay attention to the gathering space: place chairs in a circle and seek to minimize distractions. A table in the center with an icon, crucifix, lit candle, open Bible, or some other faith symbol can serve as a focal point.

**Check in:**

Invite each person to share how they are internally as they arrive at the gathering - tired, peaceful, distracted, energized, etc. What is their “internal weather report?” This helps people to settle in, become aware of their own inner landscape, and begin to attune to one another. It also provides context for how people participate. The check-in can be one word or one sentence, or perhaps longer (60-90 seconds) as time allows.

**Pray:**

Take two or three minutes of communal silent prayer, bearing in mind what people shared, and asking the Holy Spirit to be present.

**Proclaim  
the Scriptures:**

One member of the group proclaims the readings for the upcoming liturgy, allowing a brief pause after each one. This gives the preacher the opportunity to hear the Scripture as the listeners will hear it in the assembly. It may be helpful to have printed copies for each member available, or to encourage people to bring a missalette or access the readings digitally through a smartphone. Some people are able to enter in more deeply by following the written text while it is being proclaimed.

**1<sup>st</sup> Round  
of Sharing:**

Each group member, except for the preacher, is invited to respond to the following questions, without crosstalk: What is a word or image that stood out to you? What thoughts or feelings were evoked? During this time, the preacher listens and takes notes on what they hear in the sharing.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Round  
of Sharing:**

Each group member is invited to respond to the following questions without crosstalk: what do these readings stir for you at this moment in your life, in our parish community, in our global church, in our nation and world?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Round of Sharing:**

There has been no cross talk up to this point with the first two rounds of sharing, but now members are invited to respond to one another, offering what resonated from one another's sharing. This is not a time to critique someone else's response or offer advice, but to let members' sharing build on one another for the benefit of the community and the preacher who will seek to craft a message. Participants are encouraged to respond from a posture of "yes, and..." during this third round of sharing.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Closing prayer - A member of the assembly or the preacher offers a brief closing prayer to thank God for the time together and the insights, ideas, and images that were shared.

*Refreshments may be served before or after the gathering as time and circumstances permit to allow time for informal socialization and relationship building among participants.*

With the model described above, it's important to be flexible and avoid making the perfect the enemy of the good. Perhaps the group ends up being smaller because unexpected commitments came up or someone had to leave the group during a gathering to take an important phone call. As in all things, life happens and the preachers and group members should strive to maintain a balance between full, engaged participation and the need for flexibility.. Any movement towards inviting listeners to gather and share their responses to the readings and towards preachers hearing how the Word of God lands with members of their assemblies is a positive movement towards developing a synodal preaching habitus.

Fr. James Mongelluzzo, STL, STD, who teaches preaching at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, participated in such a group for many years at Our Lady of the Lake parish where he served. "Many [parishioners] were afraid of it when we invited them to participate - they said, 'I'm not a Bible or liturgy expert.' But that's not the point. It's about hearing how scriptures touch you," he said, recalling his experience.

Fr. James recalled that parishioners learned to trust that it was okay for them simply to say what they heard, and noted that after four or five weeks of participating, self confidence increased as they learned together how to listen to Scripture. The biggest challenge is for "for preachers to be quiet and just listen," Fr. James said.

Fr. Jim Radde, SJ participated in a similar group at Cabrini Catholic Community in Minneapolis. "What helps me most is to talk about [the homily] ahead of time with the assembly and to test for applicability. I'm asking the question, 'Does this land?'"

In the words of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, "When the preacher spends time with the congregation, struggling with how the Word touches real life, the possibility of the homily striking the listener as 'talking to me' increases."

**"Preaching is a communal act. As we strive to connect the message of the Gospel with the people we serve, we got together."<sup>26</sup>**

**- Dr. Karla Bellinger -**

## Tips for Busy Preachers

*Ministry is busy, and the time set aside for prayer, study, and preparation with the best of intentions seems to dissipate. Here are some smaller steps to move in the direction of synodal preaching:*

- Pray for your assembly.
- Start small. If convening every week feels like too much of a commitment, assemble groups only for special liturgies like Christmas, Easter, or First Communion.
- Consider every meeting, gathering, or exchange as an opportunity to encounter and draw near to your assembly. Without programming a session, notice what struggles, hopes, and yearnings are present in members of your community. What patterns emerge, and how might God's Word speak into that reality?
- If assembling a new group to reflect on Scripture together seems daunting, take advantage of pre-existing commitments in your calendar such as staff meetings, club/group meetings, pastoral council or finance council meetings, or classroom encounters to invite a few minutes of sharing on the Gospel for the coming Sunday.
- Use a feedback form with the option to submit it online or on paper or both, whichever makes sense for your parish community. This will give you a sense of what is being heard. Fr Greg Heille, OP recommends doing this "once a month as part of 'preaching hygiene.'" The three questions that Fr. Heille uses are: How did you experience hearing the preaching today? How did the preaching speak to you - your joys and struggles in life and faith? Are there ways today's preacher might have improved in communicating the message? Another example of a feedback form can be found in Appendix 2 of *Remembering Why We Preach* by Karla J. Bellinger and Michael E. Connors, CSC.



## Tips for Those Who Participate through Listening

*The responsibility for effective preaching doesn't fall solely on the shoulders of the preacher. Those in the assembly can also take concrete steps to better prepare for and receive preaching:*

- Pray for the preacher, and pray for the grace to listen well and receive what Jesus desires you to hear through the liturgy.
- Read and spend time with the readings before you come to Mass. The weekday and weekend readings are easy to access on USCCB website and in missalettes like Magnificat or Give Us This Day. Engage in lectio divina on one or all of the readings, asking for your heart and mind to be open to the movement of God through the Scriptures.
- As time permits, read commentaries on the readings, as well. Study Bibles include notes that serve readers to better understand the context of the readings and how they relate to other passages. [www.liturgy.slu.edu](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu) is a free online resource.
- Eliminate distractions as much as possible - putting down the bulletin, turning off and stowing your phone.
- Make a habit of asking yourself after hearing preaching: what inspired or affirmed me? What challenged me? What practical application or next step am I called to?
- Be mindful of your identity as a missionary disciple and protagonist, your inclusion in the universal call to holiness, and your co-responsibility in the mission of the Church.



# Conclusion & Resources

**“I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have:  
to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together  
with their Lord who walks among us!**

**We are not alone; we do not walk alone.**

**We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together.”<sup>29</sup>**

**- Pope Francis -**

## Conclusion

In a synodal Church, all are co-responsible and share in the mission by virtue of their baptism. All are called to bold speech and thoughtful listening. The movement towards synodality at every level of the Church has required and will continue to require a willingness for all to be somewhat uncomfortable, accept change, and be willing to try something new.

Movement towards synodal preaching where circularity is embraced can create a more meaningful, nourishing, and fulfilling experience of preaching for the preacher and assembly alike. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis encourages preachers with these words: “We are not asked to be flawless, but to keep growing and wanting to grow as we advance along the path of the Gospel.”<sup>28</sup> Synodal preaching practice will serve both preachers and listeners as they keep growing. Like Cleopas and his companion, preachers and their assembly members who walk the road together, speaking boldly and listening generously, will find their hearts burning within them, aware of God’s loving and transformative presence.

## Resources for Further Study

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## Online Resources

Catholic Women Preach: <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org>

Center for Excellence in Preaching: <https://cepreaching.org>

Preacher Exchange: <https://www.preacherexchange.com>



## Endnotes:

1. [Developing the Voice of the Laity | Commonweal Magazine](#)
2. [Pope Francis' homily at the opening Mass for the synod on synodality | Salt + Light Media \(slmedia.org\)](#)
3. Kristin Colberg, keynote. Collegeville, Minnesota, 19 July, 2023.
4. *Just Church: Catholic Social Teaching, Synodality, and Women*, Phyllis Zagano, p 30
5. Francis, Address for the Audience with the Major Archbishop, the Metropolitans and the Permanent Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, 5 July, 2019
6. [For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality \(vatican.va\)](#)
7. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Preparatory Document, Sept 7, 2021. para 9
8. [TOWARDS A SPIRITUALITY FOR SYNODALITY](#)
9. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, page 19
10. GIRM, Paragraph 54
11. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 135.
12. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 136
13. [Pope Francis: Long homilies are 'a disaster'—keep it under 10 minutes | America Magazine](#)
14. ['Give us better homilies' – the worldwide Church's plea to the Pope \(thetablet.co.uk\)](#)
15. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 137
16. [Pope Francis' homily at the opening Mass for the synod on synodality | Salt + Light Media \(slmedia.org\)](#)
17. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, page 2
18. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, page 11
19. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 159
20. *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, paragraph 22
21. Bellinger, *Remembering Why We Preach*, page 74
22. <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/08/08/catholic-homily-tips-243386>
23. [Karla J. Bellinger on Lay Contributions to Compelling Preaching \(calvin.edu\)](#)
24. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 146
25. *Remembering Why We Preach*, xii
26. *Remembering Why We Preach*, page 43
27. Fr Greg Heille, OP, 10 August, 2023.
28. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 151
29. Pope Francis. Address of Pope Francis, Cathedral of San Rufino, Assisi. 4 October 2013. Paragraph 2 [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20131004\\_clero-assisi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/october/documents/papa-francesco_20131004_clero-assisi.html) quoted in “Towards a Spirituality for Synodality”



# About Catholic Women Preach

Catholic Women Preach (CWP) is a deeply faithful, hopeful and joyful project intended to build up the Church that we love and encourage all the faithful as we carry out the mission of the Gospel.

A project of global reach, CWP brings the wisdom and witness of diverse Catholic women to the proclamation of the Gospel through web-based homilies and resources. Following the liturgical year, Catholic women reflect on how the texts relate to all Catholics today with a special emphasis on the lives of women, their apostolic call, and their roles in the Church and the world.

Preaching highlights women who have traditionally been misrepresented or omitted from our lectionary and opens the Scripture texts to deepen our understanding of God's saving presence in the world.

All who view and use these reflections will see the deep spirituality and untapped potential of Catholic women. CWP offers the theologically informed perspectives of Catholic women preachers to: a) serve as an inspirational resource for priests, deacons and all those who preach in the Catholic Church, b) encourage Catholics, especially younger adults, with messages of hope

that renew and strengthen our faith for our mission in the world and, c) provide a global platform for women's voices and faith-filled reflections so that the fullness of their giftedness can be accessed by all Catholics.

Since launching on All Saints Day 2016, **371 remarkable Catholic women from around the globe have offered 452 inspiring and challenging reflections.** Week in and week out, they have helped us mourn, celebrate, confront, and find hope in our lived realities.

**Catholic Women Preach videos have been viewed more than 560,000 times engaging a community of more than 20,000 subscribers and followers in nearly 3 million minutes experiencing Catholic women preach!**

We express our warmest gratitude to **Rhonda Miska**, a member of the Catholic Women Preach Advisory Board and contributor to the website, who compiled this guide with bounteous input from expert preaching scholars and practitioners as well as contributors to the Catholic Women preach website.



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CWP PROVIDES  
preaching by gifted Catholic  
women, diverse in age,  
ethnicity and nationality.

CWP HIGHLIGHTS  
the women of salvation  
history who are traditionally  
misrepresented in the Sunday  
and weekday lectionary texts.

CWP PRESENTS  
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