

# Not the best homily? Here's what to do

*Every now and then, we encounter a homily that doesn't quite speak to us. Here's how we can respond with prayer and love.*

## 1 Whether or not you love the homily, pray for the priest!

One of the best preachers I've ever heard was Fr. Paul Scalia. I was lucky enough to be his parishioner for some years, and his homilies were always impactful and memorable. I would find myself thinking about them all week.

When I reached out to him to ask what he wishes more people knew about homilies, he said:

I think people should pray for their priests while they're preaching. You know, he is the instrument of the Word of God coming to you. You should pray that he's an effective instrument.

His words convicted me. Whenever I've heard not-great homilies, it has never occurred to me to pray for the homilist! I am so grateful for this insight and it will change my response in the future.

## 2 Search for the "scraps" from God's table

Another great homilist is Fr. Mark Bernhard of Notre Dame Parish. He shared a powerful observation drawn from a class he once took with Scripture scholar Scott Hahn.

Somebody asked him about preaching. He had been a Protestant preacher himself, and he could probably give a better homily than most priests. He said that, as somebody in the pews, when he's listening to a homily, he approaches it as something like a beggar looking for scraps from the table. He said there's never been a homily where he couldn't take away even one tiny snippet that the Lord wants to give him. He approached homilies with this humility and an expectation that "The Lord is going to feed me here, even if it's just a tiny little crumb."

Looking for even the smallest spiritual message is a beautiful way to approach homilies that don't quite speak to you.

## 3 Do your own preparation and prayer

Fr. Lee Brokaw of the St. John's Catholic Newman Centre at the University of Illinois is another gifted preacher.

He encourages people to prepare themselves for Mass with reading, learning, and prayer, so that they can get the most out of the Scriptures and homily.

The more that we put in, the more we're going to get out. The more we prepare -- like if we read the readings ahead of time -- the more we're going to be able to draw from the preaching. This goes for both the priest and the people. For the priest, we need to really put in the time in the chapel with Jesus when we prep. But also for the people, you can get in and start praying Lectio Divina yourself and really start to get into the Word during the week, in the same way that a priest would be praying the Scriptures and prepping. And then that's when you'll really start to see how God's Word is living and active.

This suggestion is a great one and can help us draw spiritual insights and benefits from the Mass readings even if we don't get much insight from the homily. If you need a place to get started thinking about the Mass readings, you might check out these [homily podcasts](#).

I never did quite figure out why that priest had so much to say about his birthday party, but I know my response will be different the next time a homily doesn't really speak to me. Instead of getting impatient, I'm going to pray for the homilist speaking, look for a tiny scrap of spiritual insight, and do my own reading outside of Mass.

And most of all, I'll pray for priests everywhere, who work so hard in their reading, writing, and preaching to bring us the truth of the Gospel.