



Presentation

of Synodal Forum I

“Power and separation of powers in the Church
- Joint participation and involvement in the mission”

for the First Reading

at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September - 2 October 2021)

for the action text

“Sermon regulation” (draft file)

The Synodal Assembly is requested to resolve as follows:

The German bishops will revise the current Sermon Code, adopted by the Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference on 24 February 1988, in order to secure the central importance as well as the theological and spiritual quality of sermons, not least in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, given the changed pastoral conditions. It is necessary to emphasise both the significance of the homily, which according to canon law is reserved for the bishop, priest and deacon, as well as permitting other voices to be heard which witness to the faith and interpret the Holy Scripture, both as a *statio* at the beginning of a religious service, and as a sermon after the Eucharist.

The proclamation of God's Word in the sermon is an essential component of Catholic religious services. The expectations of good sermons have increased. Particular demands are made in Liturgy of the Word celebrations, and in Eucharistic celebrations. Both liturgies follow the same lectionary. Both include sermons which help the faithful hear God's Word in the word of the Holy Scripture “today” as Good News (Lk 4:21).

In the Liturgy of the Word, the role of giving the sermon is regularly taken over by non-ordained faithful who are qualified and commissioned to carry out this ministry. A *statio* can be held in the Eucharistic celebration, this being a personal testimony of faith which is usually made at the beginning of the religious service.

Canon law considers the homily, that is the official proclamation in the Eucharistic celebration, to be “reserved to a priest or deacon” (can. 767 § 1 CIC). The Church’s book of law aims not to neglect the service of preaching on Sundays and Holy Days; for “it cannot be omitted except for a grave cause” (can. 767 § 2). The homily may also be entrusted to a priest or a deacon who does not preside over the Eucharist. A dialogue sermon, in which non-ordained persons speak in addition to the deacon or priest, is provided as a possibility (*Ecclesiae de mysterio* 1997, Art. 3 para 3).

Instruction “on certain questions regarding the collaboration of the non-ordained faithful in the Sacred ministry of the priest” (*Ecclesiae de mysterio*) of 15 August 1997 states that the diocesan bishops have no power to “dispense from the canonical norm” (Article 3 para. 1). Thus the possibility, provided for by the Code as a matter of principle, namely of preaching through non-ordained faithful (can. 766 CIC), who can be “called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word” (can. 759 CIC), is restricted to non-Eucharistic or weekday religious services.

It however remains a pastoral task to ensure the significance and quality of the sermon in each Eucharistic celebration, especially on Sundays and feast days. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to make use of the qualifications and gifts of those who are baptised and confirmed but have not received the Sacrament of Holy Orders (*ordo*). It is necessary to examine the charisms of all the faithful (LG 30), and to give them scope for the development of the congregation, in order thus to bring to bear the share of all the baptised in the prophetic functions of Christ (LG 31). First and foremost, it is about the pastoral workers who act as parish and pastoral assistants. They are regularly commissioned by the bishop to proclaim God’s Word. Only in a few other countries is there this group of individuals who are theologically very well trained, have spiritual guidance and share in responsibility for pastoral work. If, as is the case in some places, they are regularly allowed to give an address only at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebrations, an uneasy tension arises both in the celebration of the liturgy as well as in the proclamation ministry, and in the perception of the congregations.

In order to secure the significance and the quality of the sermon, and to make better use of the richness of the manifold charisms, the German bishops are to obtain permission (*indult*) from the Holy See to amend the Sermon regulation in force today in such a way that the preparation and delivery of the sermon can also be taken on in Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and feast days by faithful who are both theologically and spiritually qualified, and who are commissioned by the bishop.

The unity of liturgies of the word and of the celebration of the Eucharistic Feast is thus enhanced because it depends not only on the celebrant, but is carried by the whole *communio* of the Church.

The key motive for the decision of the Synodal Assembly is to also promote evangelisation in the celebration of the Eucharist. The interpretation of the Gospel must be understandable. Germany had good experience with “lay preaching” up to and including the 1980s. Other countries have also had encouraging experiences. People who do not work as priests or deacons have their own approaches to the proclamation of the Gospel on the basis of their experience, and can promote listening to the Word of God in their own way.

An essential aspect is that a renewed Sermon regulation provides women with the opportunity to also make their contribution to the proclamation ministry of the Church in the Eucharistic celebration with the sermon according to the Gospel, and that itself offers the congregations the opportunity to also listen to the voice of women who preach God's Word where it is provided for in the liturgical code for the Liturgies of the Word in the Eucharistic celebration.

The code must ensure that no competition arises between priests, deacons and others who are charged with the sermon ministry of preaching, but that the cohesion of the Church is strengthened in the diversity of ministries.