

PREACHING: WHO'S LISTENING?

Imagine that you are at the ambo, looking out over your assembly. Whom do you see? Just as we need to know ourselves (last issue) and need to be competent exegetes (next column), we also need to be—at some level—cultural anthropologists, participant-observers, in the community but also somewhat detached from it... in order to see clearly. And, after having learned the story of this community, its history, what it holds to be important (and what it does not speak of), who the members are... we are faced with another challenge: how can we preach so as to be heard... by young and old, men and women, gay and straight? How will those with a vibrant faith hear us – and those for whom faith is an afterthought? Our communities are filled with both introverts and extroverts, sensates and intuiters, thinkers and feelers, judges and perceivers (remember your Myers-Briggs?). There are those who learn by listening, and those who learn by watching... or doing. There are those who are suffering in silence.

The list is endless. As ministers of the Gospel, trying to reach everyone, how do we preach so we can be heard? The following resources offer some insights – not only on how do 'exegete' your community, but what to do with that information. Wisdom argues that every homily should have something for every age group; Jeter suggests that preachers adjust their preaching so as to address everyone over time.

The bottom line is this: we preach how we are comfortable. If I am an extrovert... or a visual learner... or liberal... or an older man... my preaching will reflect that reality. Over time, we may be preaching to a smaller and smaller assembly. So how can I vary my approaches... so as to appeal to the introvert... and the auditory learner... and the conservative... and women or younger members of the parish? What can I do to be better heard?

Resources:

Aden, LeRoy H. and Robert G. Hughes. *Preaching God's Compassion*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002.

Davis, Kenneth G. and Jorge L. Presmanes, eds. *Preaching and Culture in Latino Congregations*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000.

Jeter, Joseph R., Jr. and Ronald J. Allen. *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002.

Nieman, James R. and Thomas G. Rogers. *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Webb, Joseph M. *Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998.

Wisdom, Andrew Carl. *Preaching to a Multi-generational Assembly*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2004.