

Gregory Heille, OP. *The Preaching of Pope Francis*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015. 84 pages. \$12.95.

Gregory Heille, OP provides his readers with a brief, thoughtful introduction to the principle themes, textures, and tone of Pope Francis's preaching. While that is the primary stated goal of the work, the secondary purpose of the author is to invite pastors and preachers to appreciate, whether for the first time, or once again that "The authentic preaching life is a labor of love and a lifelong commitment" (xi). To fulfill this important aim he points to a preacher who lives this love and lifelong commitment, Pope Francis. While many of this journal's readers may be most familiar with Pope Francis as "rock star" drawing crowds by the tens of thousands, Heille would like to move beyond the grandstand and into the pulpit.

Since his election people have spoken of Francis as the "pope of surprises." They have pointed to and explored "The Francis Factor." Who is this pope who lives in the Vatican dormitory rather than palace? Who is driven to visit presidents in a small Fiat? Heille would suggest that one way to understand Francis is by his "smell." John Paul II and Benedict, Francis's successors, processed the odor of the classroom and library. As philosophers and theologians, they came to their papacies as academics. Francis, on the other hand came with the smell of the subways he rode to work in Buenos Aires. In his first chrism Mass the new pope Francis began to give his priests and the larger church an idea of how he understood the ministry, "This I ask you: be shepherds, with the '[odor] of the sheep,' make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men" (11). Make it real—this is also, according to Heille, Francis's understanding of preaching.

Heille points out in the opening chapter that Pope Francis preaches daily. The opening chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the preaching life and the continuity of daily preaching. In the opening chapter Heille also introduces a significant third theme prominent in the preaching of Francis and therefore prominent in the volume. Echoing Cicero and Augustine, Francis wishes all, lay and ordained, to know that we are through our baptisms missionary disciples and evangelists.

According to Heille's analysis, Francis's pastoral preaching style primarily consists of sermons seven to eight minutes in length. He moves directly from one of the daily scripture passages, "paint[s] a mental picture of Jesus, and ask[s] questions that engage a dialogue with the lives of ordinary parishioners" (8). The preaching demonstrated by Francis is preaching understood to be conversation, listening, and dialogue.

Francis teaches and preaches that "'Faith is passed on, we might say, by contact, from one person to another, just as one candle is lighted from another'" (16). With that understanding, Heille, in the second chapter examines the way the church is called to reflective practice. The preacher and congregation that are seeking to be missionary disciples must "see-judge-act". And this will be a "*graced and messy dialogue with experience*" (22).

Heille also reviews for his readers the 1982 document on preaching, "*Fulfilled in your Hearing: the Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, prepared by the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as an effort to incorporate the teachings of Vatican II. The document lifts up the image of the preacher as the one " 'called to point to the signs of God's presence in the lives of his people' " (36). Heille argues that while he has no evidence

that Pope Francis had read the document, “he proves himself consistently to be aligned with its priorities and insights” (37). In one of the Pope’s first documents, *Evangelii Gaudium*, there is an extensive examination of preaching. The homily, according to Francis, is “ ‘the touchstone for judging the pastor’s closeness and ability to communicate to his people . . . a mother’s conversation’ ” (39).

Heille closes this examination of Francis’s preaching with a deep and thoughtful examination of his own understanding of preaching and the preaching life. It is his testimony of how he came to believe that central to the priesthood must be “a lifelong commitment . . . practice, . . . labor of love” to the preaching vocation (65). And he explores this because he has found in Pope Francis one who lives, confirms, and encourages that vocation. Whatever one’s location in the Body of Christ, the preacher will be equally encouraged by this examination of Pope Francis.

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