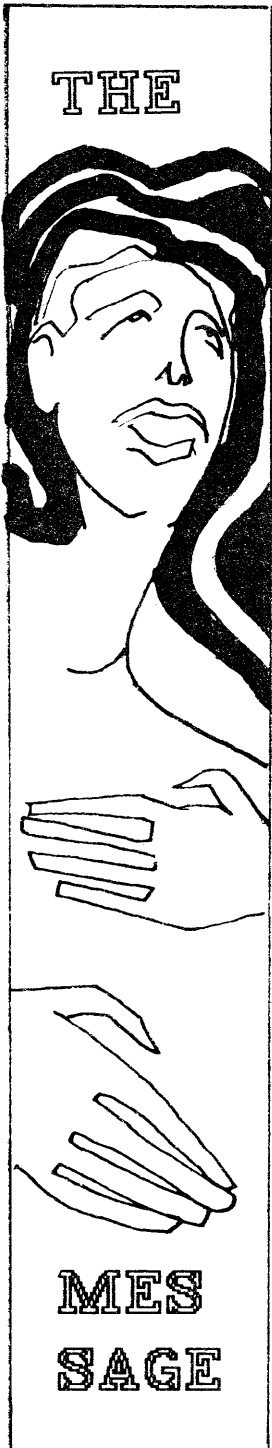


March, 1992

Volume 49, Number 3



It was uncomfortable. Each Sunday, three or four adults with developmental disabilities would sit in front of me while I was trying to preach a homily. This went on for about six months. Here I was drawing on study of the scriptural texts, trying to give the context for these writings, the situation the author was addressing, and then trying to apply these same factors to the present time, and especially to the Eucharist we were celebrating together. They sat patiently. They were never critical. They waited.

Then, one year ago, I made a decision: I must communicate with them - I cannot ignore their presence. These young adults come either alone or with their families. I know that they do not know what I am talking about. Why don't I preach to them first and foremost? If I connect, presumably I will have imparted something to everyone present.

I share with you my experience of both writing and delivering a short "message" for each of the Sundays in this past year. Perhaps, other priests or catechists who preside at a liturgy of the Word, or people simply wanting to pray might find my comments helpful.

WRITING

Remarkably, the craft of writing this "message" is very close to that of writing a "message" at the end of a symbolic session in the Method Vivre. The difference of course is that rather than start with an awareness of my life experience, I begin with the inspired scriptural texts, those experiences of the primitive believing communities, written down and handed on. The Sunday liturgical texts are three readings.

I begin by writing down all the verbs. I want action words, those with an immediacy to them. Usually I fill one sheet of paper with these verbs, noting to whom they are addressed, who is speaking them, and from which reading I lift them, marking them #1, #2, or #3. Sometimes I have to recast a sentence from "this was given to me by my father" to the more active "the father gave me this." When I have mixed myself a good palette of action statements, I am ready to brood.

I make a few preliminary sketches of sentences but all this



is done rather tentatively, not trying to lock myself into anything definite until I begin to get a sense, the direction or aspect of the Mystery present - which seems to me to be something more given than made. Sometimes I work two or three hours to distill the scriptures into these sentences of the "message." My self-imposed guidelines are that the message must be:

Personal. The message phrase always begins with, "Jesus says to you..." I assume the identity of Jesus in the proclamation. This is difficult. I do this with trepidation. It cannot be an abstraction, "He says..." nor can it be conditional "Jesus might say..." If the relationship is to be personal, there is no escape. There has to be all the weight, immediacy and intimacy of a direct encounter between two persons, "Jesus says to you, I... ." The language of scripture is helpful here because it is so straightforward. It has all the seriousness of an eyeball to eyeball exchange. I cannot be professorial, or hide behind a role, or become remote; rather I have to enter the full weight of the role of the Christ and speak with His "authority", that is, not with power but from the wellspring of Being, a deep mysterious conviction. There is a simplicity and candor about this that is precisely what establishes contact with persons with disabilities.

Present Tense. I have to go to verbs gleaned from the text and place them in the present tense, and often the first person. "He was" and "He will" become "I am". The text can no longer be a distant past quote. It is an action begun in the past but operative and continuous and signaling a future. The patterns recounted in scripture are about occurrences in the past, but patterns which speak to the immediate present, the now, and also the future.

Christocentric. It is Jesus as the Christ who speaks. I try to reflect a pneumatological Christology (to borrow a phrase of Yves Congar) i.e. it is the man Jesus now anointed who leads, directs, acts and conveys by and through the action of the Spirit, and His mission is to impart the Spirit to us. He is the one whom the Old Testament texts hauntingly long for; the one who does not see himself apart from the anointer, the Father. He knows where He comes from and where He is going, and why He is here.

Theocentric. Jesus is always acknowledging His absolute relationship with the Father. The Father is dominant to his consciousness. Jesus is either receiving from the Father, giving something from the Father, or leading to the Father. He does not see Himself apart from the dynamism of this relationship. It is that "magnificent obsession" which I try to have pervade any sculpted statement.

Kerygmatic. I am surprised continuously by this exercise, trying to grasp the essential intentionality involved within the texts. Sometimes I am successful, sometimes I am not. It is a poetic form and slips through my mental fingers at times. I give an example of my failure and my later correction. The occasion was the 32nd Sunday of

Ordinary time (B cycle). My moralistic effort is on the left and a more appropriately kerygmatic effort is on the right.

Prepare something for the Father not from your surplus but from your want All that you have to live on. And with and through me, offer it to Him to bring salvation. And then eat my cake So as not be empty or run dry.	The Father prepares something for you, not from His surplus but from His want All that He has to live on. He (the Father) offers Me to you to take away sin to bring salvation. Come, eat this cake (Me) lest you be empty or run dry.
--	--

Eucharistic. I want the message of Jesus to speak always to the ritual we celebrate together now. What He is saying, is being enacted now, under these signs of bread and wine offered and consumed by this assembly, "Come, eat... .

Synthetic. The statements of the message are not analytic, not breaking things apart but linking components together in a whole. I find myself slashing adjectives, dropping verbs, scratching for the essences of sentences, tying sentences together which I never thought of doing initially. Finally, something starts to emerge - and it has to be lean, frugal, sparse, direct. My goal is no more than 40 words that directly connect to the readings of the day.

Dramatically Ironic. To place incongruous images side by side brings about a clash of opposites, and frequently there comes about an insightful harmony. Somehow, strangely, these contrasts fit together and the new unity that happens brings a freshness of perception, such as in the reading above, "prepare something, not from surplus but from want", or "eat lest you be empty."

DELIVERY

I say the message three times, turning to three sections of the assembly. This repetition allows for absorption and savoring. This is akin to reciting poetry or oral interpretation. I practice beforehand until I am satisfied with the cadence, the rhythm, the music of the line. All this helps me to speak the text by heart. Gestures support the words. These gestures are stylized in the use of the head, face, eyes, arms, legs and bodily posture.

What are the results of this past year? I am comfortable with whomever is present. I am especially comfortable with those who have a developmental disability. I address them directly in the name of Jesus. I know they feel addressed. Underneath the words uttered, there is a quality of presence that I have to them and that they have to me that moves me. This form of preaching ties together the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist in a ritual-like way that allows the assembly to rest in a sacred symbolic mentality open to prayer.

Rev. James H. McCarthy, Director, Spred Chicago



Training

Introduction to Special Religious Education

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and Activity Catechists. 1-6 p.m. 2-1

Role Orientation

for Parish Chairpersons, Leaders and Activity Catechists. 1-6 p.m. 3-1

Location

Spred Center, 2956 So. Lowe Ave. Exit 31st from Lake Shore Drive or Dan Ryan, west to Lowe, north to 30th. Center at the corner of 30th and Lowe.

Observation

Tuesdays (B), age 11-16 7:00,
Wednesdays (D), age 22+ 7:30
Spred Center, Call (312) 842-1039
for reservations.

Planning

Area meetings for parish chairpersons (Z)

Spred Family Liturgy

Spred Center Chapel,
First Sundays, 11:00 a.m.

May 3 Mamre/Spred Dinner Dance

at the Martinique, 95th and Western.

Mass Intentions

May be sent to Fr. James H. McCarthy,
Spred Center
2956 So Lowe Ave, Chicago, IL 60616

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Spred

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