



The Christocentrism of Marian Homilies

STANISŁAW DYK 

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, stanislaw.dyk@kul.pl

Abstract: The aim of this article is to show the Christocentrism of Marian homilies. The starting point is to recall the fundamental function of the homily, which is to introduce the mystery of Christ, “always present and at work in us, especially in liturgical rites” (SC 35,2). This definition was applied to Marian homilies, revealing their three content areas: the proclamation of the mystery of Christ and Mary attested in the Word of God; the leading to participation in the grace of the mystery manifested in Mary and available in the liturgy; the call to conform oneself to Christ in imitation of Mary, his most faithful disciple. Those issues are explained and justified on the basis of Marian teaching of the Church and theological reflection. The analyses were also illustrated with the example of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The analysis carried out in the study showed that the main axes around which the content of Marian homilies should be organised are the Christological, soteriological, liturgical and ecclesiological perspectives. The emphasis should be placed on ecclesiotypical rather than Christotypical Mariology. Such an approach to the Marian homily allows an organic view of Mary’s presence and modality in the history of salvation. It is at the same time an example of a liturgy-mystery-life synthesis integrating what is believed with what is celebrated and what is lived.

Keywords: mystery of Christ, Mary, homily, Christocentrism, liturgy, Immaculate Conception

When indicating the criteria for the correctness of Marian homilies, one should take into account not only the principles worked out by contemporary Mariology,¹ but also the specificity of the homily itself as a strictly liturgical preaching. A homily is not preaching of any kind – it is not a conference, a doctrinal or liturgical catechesis, an exegesis teaching or a sermon (cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2015, no. 6). It is distinguished from those forms by its nature and the function it has in the liturgical celebration (cf. SC 2). The homily is a liturgical act of ministering the word of God as part of a given celebration (cf. Biscontin 1995, 76–79). Its primary function is to involve the faithful in the salvific economy actualised in the liturgy, fulfilled in Christ’s Paschal mystery. The homily introduces the liturgy so that its participants, submitting themselves to the salvific action of God the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, respond to this sanctifying action with praise and adoration and bear witness to it in the world (cf. CCC 1066–69).

¹ It is worth recalling here, for example, the basic principles of Marian devotion outlined by Paul VI, that is, the Trinitarian and Christological principle, the pneumatological principle, the ecclesiological principle, to which four practical norms are subordinated: biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological. (Cf. MC 25–37). In Poland, those principles were applied to preaching in the following studies, among others: Siwak 2011; 2007; Zadrozny 2020, 25–29.

The homily focuses on Christ, who is the fundamental reality and subject of the liturgical celebration, the fulfilment of Scripture and the overarching criterion that organises the whole liturgical celebration and Christian life (cf. Dyk 2016, 32).²

The Marian homily should also be seen in this perspective. It is to be focused on the mystery of Christ, and by presenting the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is to present her together with Christ, who through the liturgy “continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church” (CCC 1069). The content dynamic of liturgical preaching, which consists in combining the three realities in which the mystery of Christ is revealed, present and acting: the word of God, the liturgical celebration and the Christian life, must also be applied to the Marian homily (cf. SC 35,2).³ Thus, if the homily reveals the mystery of Christ attested in the word of God, in the Marian homily also the Mother of the Lord is included in this mystery. If the homily introduces the salvific mystery of Christ realised in the liturgy, the Marian homily introduces the liturgy in such a way that its participants are sanctified in imitation of Mary. If the homily presents how the mystery of Christ is extended in the lives of believers, the Marian homily points to the life of the Church, which finds in Mary the most faithful disciple of Christ and his Mother.

The above dynamics of the content of the Marian homily will be further explained and justified based on the Church documents and in the light of contemporary theological thought. At various stages, those analyses will be illustrated by exemplary references to the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – the first Marian celebration in the liturgical year. The analyses contained in the study will refer to the homily in the celebration of the Eucharist, in which Mary finds her place at the very heart – in the Eucharistic prayer.⁴ The study will disregard the formal aspects of preaching.

² The mystery of Christ “celebrated” in a given celebration determined the choice of particular readings of the Lectionary Readings or euchologistic texts. It is also the basis for demonstrating the lifelong attitudes that the celebrated mystery demands of the participants in the liturgical celebration. It also becomes the inspiration for the thanksgiving that forms the first part of the Eucharistic Prayer. This is also the aspect of the saving grace of the mystery of Christ that the faithful acquire in Holy Communion. The mystery of Christ also applies to the mystery of the Eucharist, which is the anamnesis of the Lord’s Passover. Cf. Czerwik 2004, 55.

³ According to the authors of the *Homiletic Directory* (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2015, nos. 12–14), in the homily, the aim of the homily – while maintaining the paschal focus inherent in the liturgical celebration – is: to explain the sacred texts through “the death and Resurrection of the Lord”; “[p]repar[ing] the community to celebrate the Eucharist, and to recognize that in this celebration they truly share in the mystery of the Lord’s death and Resurrection”; and “[s]uggest[ing] how the members of the community, transformed by the Eucharist, can carry the Gospel into the world in their daily lives.”

⁴ Marian themes can also be the content of homilies in the celebration of other sacraments or sacramentals. On Marian themes associated with the celebration of the sacraments see Kumala 2020, 47–64. A Marian homily can be preached in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, especially at Vespers, in which the Church along with Mary sings her Magnificat. Marian aspects can also appear in the homily in the celebration of a Christian funeral, in the rites of professed religious or the consecration of virgins.

1. Preaching the Mystery of Christ and Mary Attested in the Word of God

The basic material of every homily is the Word of God. It is the “the supreme rule of faith” and thus the norm and source of all preaching (cf. *DV* 21–23). In the homily, however, the word of God is proclaimed within the liturgical celebration.⁵ Hence, “the liturgical setting is an essential key to interpreting the biblical passages proclaimed in a celebration” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2015, no. 15). This context is primarily the mystery of Christ and the actualising history of salvation.

This way of interpreting the Word of God also applies to Marian celebrations. Indeed, the basic principle of Mary’s commemoration in the liturgy is her connection with the mystery of Christ and its liturgical celebration (cf. *SC* 103). The Marian homily looks at Mary through the prism of Christ’s saving work and through the prism of the Church, which in Her “holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be” (*SC* 103). It is emphasised that Mary’s holiness comes entirely from her Son.⁶ It is in the light of the mysteries of Christ that the Church believes in Mary, celebrates her mysteries and imitates her life.⁷ “In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father from all eternity chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the Spirit granted to no one else” (*MC* 25).

This unity can be seen in the arrangement of the liturgical year, which is “in a more organic and closely-knit fashion to include the commemoration of Christ’s Mother in the annual cycle of the mysteries of her Son.”⁸ The significance of Marian celebrations (solemnity, feast, commemoration) is determined by the degree to which Mary is linked to the mysteries of Christ being celebrated (Augé 2013, 262–63).

Mary’s presence in the mystery of Christ is also perceived when one considers the liturgical hermeneutics of the Mass lectionary. The interpretation of the Mass readings does not involve only their historical and critical exegesis. They find their full understanding in the light of the euchologion, which is a prayerful and updating

⁵ “It is a distinctive genre, since it is preaching situated within the framework of a liturgical celebration” (*EG* 138).

⁶ “The ‘splendour of an entirely unique holiness’ by which Mary is ‘enriched from the first instant of her conception’ comes wholly from Christ: she is ‘redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son’. The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person ‘in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 1:3) and chose her ‘in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love’” (*CCC* 492).

⁷ In the liturgy “The Church above all celebrates God’s wonderful deeds in Christ’s paschal mystery and in this celebration finds Mary intimately joined to her Son” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 10).

⁸ Paul VI in a more organic and closely-knit fashion (*MC* 2).

reading of the Word of God in the liturgy (cf. De Zan 2008, 127–31; Ferraris 2008, 122–79). It is also an expression of how, down through the centuries, the Church has professed faith in Mary's presence in the mystery of Christ and the Church, according to the principle: *lex orandi – lex credendi* (cf. Augé 2013, 270–72).

The Marian homily, drawing its content from the sacred texts, should be part of that Christological and actualising perspective. Its first aim is to proclaim the salvific mystery of Christ, in which Mary is present. Mary's proclamation does not exempt her from proclaiming Christ. Mary does not obscure Christ, but leads towards him. Thus she leads to the essence of the Eucharist (cf. *RMat* 44). This remark is important because, as research has shown, as late as in the 1990s, Polish Marian preaching took little account of this Christocentric dimension (see Lewandowski 2000, 39–57; Szewczyk 2015, 276–87). Even today there are many examples of maximalist Mariology in preaching (see Wiśniewski 2021, 77–95).

The Christological focus is clearly seen in the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary was preserved from original sin because of the foreseen, redemptive death of Christ. Hence, this paschal mystery announced in the Immaculate Conception should stand at the centre of the homily of this feast (cf. *RMat* 2). The sacred texts of the celebration show clearly how the saving work of Christ accomplished for the good of all the sons of Adam focused on the person of Mary from the very beginning of her existence. It is Christ who, from the moment of the incarnation, gives meaning to her whole life. In the Gospel (Luke 1:26–38), one can see this movement from Christ to Mary – from “the Holy One” to “favoured one and blessed” (cf. Maggioni 1998, 891). This dynamic can also be seen in the Collect of the Mass, which emphasises that Mary was chosen because of Christ's salvific incarnation: “O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw [...]” (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1013; cf. CCC 491).

When the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy speaks of the homily, it equates the history of salvation with the mystery of Christ, emphasising that liturgical preaching is the “proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation” (SC 35,2). Those works become available now (in the time of the Church) to all believers through the word of God and the sacraments (cf. SC 5–7). The liturgy, therefore, “with good reason may be called the final age in the history of salvation” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 11). In a Marian homily, this historico-salvific perspective cannot be absent. It is necessary to show the salvific action of God, of which Mary is the most perfect expression. It is necessary to remind that Mary, by entering into the history of salvation (cf. *LG* 65) is present in the plan of salvation announced in the Old Covenant, fulfilled in Christ and realised in the Church (cf. *LG* 57). As the authors of the introduction to the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*: emphasise: “the

Church commemorates the role of the Mother of the Lord in the work of redemption or honors her privileges, it is above all celebrating the events of salvation in which, by God's salvific plan, the Blessed Virgin was involved in view of the mystery of Christ" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 6). By submitting to God's salvific action, Mary opens up the history of the new people of grace in which the promises of the Old Covenant are fulfilled (cf. Lewandowski 2017, 239). The history of salvation is seen in Marian celebrations through Marian figures or types, which help to understand special dignity of Mary. The richness of these Marian figures, titles and spirituality is presented in the biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments.⁹ In their light, Mary is seen as the new Eve, the mother of the living, the ark of the covenant, the Daughter of Zion, the temple of God, the capital of Wisdom, the handmaid of the Lord, the hearer and enactor of the word of God, the disciple of Christ, the bearer of Christ, etc. In the course of the liturgical year, Mary is worshipped because she is joined by "an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son" (SC 103) at all stages of his life (cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, nos. 7–10). This is why the Mass readings and the euchologistic texts present Mary not in isolation and with her privileges, but in union with the salvific event of Christ and the Church (Augé 2013, 270).

In the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Mary is presented as present in God's plan of salvation from the very beginning of man's existence (cf. first reading – Gen 3:9–15, 20). The Gospel greeting of the angel: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" sounds like an abrogation of the judgment which, as a result of original sin, hung over the sons of Adam incapable of living in relationship with God. In the Blessed Virgin Mary, human longing for lost life meets God's desire for eternal intimacy with humanity: "The Lord is with you." Born of Mary, the Son of God, through his death and resurrection, accomplishes the turning of history and leads humanity to the fulfilment in it of God's original design (cf. Maggioni 1998, 891). In Her, "after a long expectation of the promise, the times are fulfilled and the new Economy established" (LG 55). This truth is directly expressed in the Mass preface: "She, the most pure Virgin, was to bring forth a Son, the innocent Lamb who would wipe away our offenses" (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1016).

⁹ A particularly comprehensive set of Mass readings is contained in the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Lectionary. (See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 39).

2. Leading to Participation in the Mystery Grace Manifested in Mary and Available in the Liturgy

The homily is the proclamation of the saving works of God attested in the Scripture and working with all their efficacy in the liturgy (cf. Sobieraj 1977, 199–200). In the homily, it is necessary to link the word of God with the liturgical celebration, remembering that “in the liturgical action too, we encounter his word which accomplishes what it says” (VD 53). An important point of the homily is to emphasise that the liturgy is the place of the transmission of grace, it is the sacramental making present of the salvific events in the particular moment of its actualisation for the life of believers (cf. CCC 1084).¹⁰ The homily introduces the mystery of Christ in such a way as to ensure that “what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence” (RVM 13). In order to fulfil these aims, at least the following points should be emphasised in the Marian homily: the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy, the need for the proper disposition of the hearts of the participants in the liturgical assembly, and the intercession of Mary in the salvific mediation of Christ.

2.1. The Sanctifying Action of the Holy Spirit in Mary and in the Liturgy

In the liturgy, God the Father forms in believers the image of his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasises it is “the desire and work of the Spirit in the heart of the Church is that we may live from the life of the risen Christ” (CCC 1091). This takes place throughout the Eucharistic celebration (see Triacca 1999, 24–46). The moments worthy of special emphasis in the homily are the hearing of the Word of God, the consecration epiclesis and communion. Receiving the Word is already receiving the Spirit. The first of the epicleses points to the making present of the Lord’s Passover and therefore the sending of the Holy Spirit. The second emphasises the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit causing the spiritual growth of the faithful according to the optics of the mystery celebrated – a reminder that during Holy Communion, the same things that were accomplished in Christ are realised in the participants of the liturgical assembly by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹²

¹⁰ Sacraments are “a sacred cultic action in which the fact of salvation becomes a presence in the rite; the community of worship, by performing this rite, participates in the saving act and thereby achieves salvation.” (Pałęcki 2008, 343).

¹¹ In the liturgy, it is God himself who enables the faithful to follow him in their daily lives: “for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father shapes the image of Christ in liturgical participants: “We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father.” (CCC 2825).

¹² “The epikletic anamnesis is that moment through which the same thing is to be accomplished in the participants of the liturgical assembly with the help of the Holy Spirit as was accomplished in Christ. It is in

In this way, the faithful have access to the grace specific to the celebration, which helps them to achieve the purpose of the Eucharistic mystery. Announcing this to the faithful is a very important part of the homily reminding them of the necessity and primacy of grace in the Christian imitation of Christ. The homily then appears, in the words of Francis, as a “mediation of the grace which Christ pours out during the celebration” (*EG* 138).

Here the way is opened to remind the faithful in the Marian homily that “all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present” in the Eucharist “Consequently all that Christ did with regard to his Mother for our sake is also present” (*EE* 57). What the Triune God has accomplished in Mary – “the All-Holy,” “as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature” (*CCC* 493) – He can also fulfil to a certain extent in the faithful, in the “here and now” of the liturgy. This is justified by the liturgy itself when, in some epicleses, a parallelism is shown between the descent of the Holy Spirit into Mary’s womb and his descent on the sacrificial offerings. Similarly, one can recall the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and Mary at Pentecost and the descent of the Spirit on the liturgical participants at the moment of Eucharistic communion (cf. Castellano 1976, 54–61). In the liturgy, the Church asks and receives the Holy Spirit analogously to the way Mary received him at Nazareth and in the Cenacle (cf. Królikowski 1999, 154–55).

At the same time, this is an opportunity to emphasise the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit in Mary, which Paul VI regards as the climax of his action in salvation history (cf. *MC* 27; *RMat* 18). Mary is “as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature” (*LG* 56). Her life was fully animated and guided by the Holy Spirit (cf. *MC* 26) to the extent that there was no resistance in her to accepting God’s will. In the homily – depending on the wording of the sacred texts of a given celebration – it is possible to show the manifold action of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s life: as the Spirit of holiness, the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, the Spirit of sacrifice, the Spirit of transforming love, the Spirit of strength of mind, the Spirit of prayer, the Spirit of unity, etc. (cf. Lewandowski 2000, 251–52; Siwak 2011, 283).

This sanctifying action of God in the Holy Spirit is clearly present in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From the moment of her Conception, “[God] filled her with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and continued to shelter her with his love, doing great things for her (see Luke 1:29) for the sake of our salvation” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 7). Thanks to being filled with the Holy Spirit, Mary is affirmed in grace and steps into a new quality of life – she is completely united with God, free from sin and all satanic influences (cf. Chmielewski 2004, 315–16). The soteriological

the transition from the objective achievements of Christ to the internalising consummations of the Spirit that spiritual progress, the spiritual evolution of Christians, consists in.” (Świerzawski 2012, 142).

privilege of the Immaculate Conception also has an ecclesial dimension (cf. *LG* 53; Misztal 2004, 30). Hence, it is important to recall in the homily that the participants in the liturgical assembly enter into an analogous process of deification. The grace of this celebration is first and foremost an empowerment against sin (cf. *The Roman Missal* 2011, 1013). Such grace is directly indicated by the Collect and the Prayer over the Offerings. This is also emphasised by St Paul in the second Mass reading (Eph 1:3–6; 1:11–12). When he speaks of God's salvific plan being fulfilled in the Church he defines it as the "chosen" in Christ and saved by him. What is promised here to the Church was accomplished fully and completely in Mary, who was conceived as the All-Holy.¹³ As John Paul II points out, "It is a spiritual blessing which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality ('every blessing'). It flows from that love which, in the Holy Spirit, unites the consubstantial Son to the Father" (*RMat* 8). This truth is underlined by the entrance antiphon, which puts into Mary's mouth the words of the prophet Isaiah: "I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bride adorned with her jewels" (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1013). These words also allude to another passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in which St Paul writes about the election and sanctification of the Church, the Bride of the Lord: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, [...] so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25–27).

Indeed, only Mary has the privilege of being conceived without original sin. However, the grace of sanctification is promised to the entire Church. For there are no differences between God's action in the Immaculate One and his action in the Church in terms of merit, the nature of grace or its source. Both Mary and the Church are gratuitously redeemed by Christ (cf. Maggioni 1998, 891). Therefore, the participants in the liturgical assembly enter "here and now" into the same process of sanctification as Mary. The celebration's grace is also specified in the Prayer after Communion: "May the Sacrament we have received, O Lord our God, heal in us the wounds of that fault from which in a singular way you preserved Blessed Mary in her Immaculate Conception" (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1016). The fruit of God's salvific action in Holy Communion is also indicated in the preface: "She, the most pure Virgin, was to bring forth a Son, the innocent Lamb who would wipe away our offences" (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1016).

¹³ "... she ... bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that 'glory of grace' which the Father 'has bestowed on us in his beloved Son,' and this grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being. Mary thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in Paul's letter: 'in Christ ... he chose us ... before the foundation of the world, ... he destined us ... to be his sons' (Eph. 1:4, 5)" (*RMat* 11).

2.2. Mary as the Teacher of Fruitful Participation in the Liturgy

The Marian homily should also emphasise that one does not experience God's sanctifying action automatically. Human effort in opening oneself to the salvific mystery is needed to touch the essence of the Eucharist. As John Paul II reminds, "[w]e are constantly tempted to reduce the Eucharist to our own dimensions, while in reality it is we who must open ourselves up to the dimensions of the Mystery" (*MND* 14). In order to experience the fruitfulness of the liturgy, one requires appropriate spiritual "dispositions" (cf. *CCC* 1098–101). It is primarily about inner participation in the Eucharist – about capturing the essence of the liturgy, which is the life of the Father given by Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for the faithful to "make their interior dispositions correspond to their gestures and words. Otherwise, however carefully planned and executed our liturgies may be, they would risk falling into a certain ritualism" (*SCar* 64). The teacher of active and full participation in the liturgy is Mary. The wealth of sacred texts used in Marian celebrations, especially concerning Mary's evangelical attitudes, offers the opportunity to learn Eucharistic spirituality from her.¹⁴ The Church celebrates the divine mysteries by emulating Mary's spirit of devotion (cf. *MC* 16–20). Thus, the celebration of the Eucharist is a school of Marian spirituality and authentic Marianism (see Kumala 2013, 83–97; De Fiores 2013, 18–21).

As far as the disposition towards the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit in the liturgy is concerned, it is mainly an attitude of sincere faith, silent concentration, open listening, earnest desire, expectation, openness and submission to the Spirit. It is a disposition of the epicletic dimension of the heart – asking for the descent of the Holy Spirit. As Janusz Królikowski emphasises, "this is the fundamental disposition of Mary's heart, through which from the beginning she cooperated with the Holy Spirit in the mystery of salvation" (Królikowski 1999, 155). The motif of awaiting God's salvation is present in all the Mass readings of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It comes to the fore in a distinctive way in the responsorial psalm, which speaks of "the salvation of our God," of "the victory of the Right Hand of God," of God's justice. The emphasis that this is the salvation of "our" God even suggests that the faithful expect this salvation in the "here and now" of the liturgy. In this perspective, Mary's evangelical *fiat* can be read as follows: "yes,

¹⁴ The faithful should be encouraged to celebrate the liturgy with the same spirit of devotion with which Mary participated in the mysteries of her Son "In particular, Mary's example urges the faithful: to treasure the word of God in their hearts and dwell upon it assiduously; to praise God exultantly and thank him joyously; to serve God and neighbor faithfully and offer themselves generously; to pray with perseverance and make their petitions with confidence; to act in all things with mercy and humility; to cherish the law of God and embrace it with love; to love God in everything and above everything else; to be ready to meet Christ when he comes" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 17; see *EE* 53–58).

I desire and submit to the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit.” A proper disposition of heart resulting from faith in the ongoing salvation will also be an attitude of praise to God “for the ‘great things’ he did for his lowly servant” (CCC 2675). This disposition of heart is indicated even by the entrance antiphon and the refrain of the responsorial psalm “Sing to the Lord a New Song, for He Has Done Marvellous Things.”

2.3. Communion with Mary in the Liturgy

An important aspect of the Marian homily is to remind the faithful that by participating in the Eucharist, “we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem” (CCC 1090). Thereby they achieve fellowship with Mary, the saints and the hosts of angels (cf. CCC 1090).¹⁵ For Mary, with the Church and as his mother, is present in every Eucharistic celebration (cf. EE 57).¹⁶ In the Eucharist, Mary is remembered not only as a person “of the past,” but as “actively present” in a sacramental event – in the liturgy today (Królikowski 1999, 147). In the liturgy she collaborates with Christ for the spiritual growth of the Church. In a special way, therefore, the participants in the liturgical assembly can experience Mary’s motherhood in the order of grace (cf. CCC 969). In the homily, therefore, it is worth encouraging the faithful to “above all [have] recourse to the Virgin’s intercession in order to obtain from the Spirit the capacity for engendering Christ in their own soul” (MC 26), the intercession of Her who “taken up to heaven [...] did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation” (CCC 969).¹⁷ This truth is emphasised in the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: “O God, [...] through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence” (collect; *The Roman Missal* 2011, 1013); “you placed her above all others to be for your people an advocate of grace and a model of holiness” (preface; *The Roman Missal* 2011, 1016). Drawing on these texts, it is possible to teach the faithful how Mary

15 “By its very nature the liturgy wonderfully fosters, effects, and expresses not only the communion existing between the particular Churches throughout the world, but also the communion between the Church on earth and the angels and saints in heaven, above all the glorious Mother of God.” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 13).

16 “The Church joins its voice to Mary’s and praises God with her song of thanksgiving. The Church wishes to hear the word of God as she did and to dwell upon it. With Mary it desires to become a sharer in Christ’s Paschal Mystery, and to join in his redeeming work. In imitation of Mary at prayer in the upper room with the apostles, the Church ceaselessly implores the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Church invokes her intercession, flies to her protection, prays that she visit the faithful people and fill them with the gifts of grace, and, under her watchful and gracious gaze upon its progress, goes confidently forward with her to meet Christ.” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 13).

17 “Because of its bonds with Mary, the Church wishes ‘to live the mystery of Christ’ with her and like her and, above all in the liturgy, continually finds that the Blessed Virgin is ever present as the Mother of the Church and its advocate.” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 12).

participates in Christ's salvific mediation and how she carries out her maternal functions in and for the Church (cf. Lewandowski 2017, 253–54).

3. The Call to Conform Oneself to Christ in Imitation of Mary, His Most Faithful Disciple

Homily is the proclamation of the mystery of Christ in such a way that it can envelop the lives of the listeners until Christ is “fully formed in them” (cf. Gal 4:19). By referring to the grace experienced in the liturgy, the homily stimulates the listeners to become more like Christ and develop various aspects of the ethos of his mystery in their personal and communal history.¹⁸ Participation in the celebrated mystery becomes the principle of daily resurrection and Christification of believers.

The paraenesis of the Marian homily should also be seen in this perspective. The exhortation to imitate Mary present in it stems from the fact that she is the model of the perfect disciple of Christ (see Wojtczak 2005, 251–60), and thus the ideal of all Christian virtues. If, therefore, the homily calls for the imitation of Mary it also emphasises that it is a call to become more like Christ: “The powerful example of Mary that shines out in the celebration of the liturgy urges the faithful to become like the Mother, in order that they might be fashioned more completely in the likeness of her Son” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, no. 17). This ecclesial orientation of Marian paraenesis applies to the whole Church as well as to its individual members. Mary appears as a personal model for the Church: she is its Mother and member, figure and ideal, first fruit and perfect icon of the community of the saved (cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 1992, nos. 14–16). Mary's relationship with the Church can be described as one of communion and exemplarity: with Mary and like Mary, the Church believes, hopes, loves, celebrates, and lives the mysteries of Christ until full participation in the heavenly kingdom (cf. Maggioni 1998, 891). Mary teaches how to work together with God's grace through faith and love so that God, by cooperating with our converted will, completes what he has initiated by the grace received in the liturgy (cf. CCC 2001). The paraenesis of a Marian homily should be clear and concrete and bear in mind the particular needs of the listeners. At the same time, general and abstract exhortations should be avoided. Otherwise it will be difficult to place Mary at the centre of Christian life.

¹⁸ By participating in the grace of the celebrated mystery, the believer “receives the spiritual power to align his inner life with the God-human life of Christ, to transform his own life according to the prototype of Christ. The new life of the Saviour is imparted to the participants of the liturgy, enabling them to act in a new way, to witness to the newness and power of the Gospel.” (Twardy 2011, 575).

This ecclesiological perspective in its concrete dimension is easily seen in the celebration of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary's exemplarity is highlighted in the Mass preface: "you might prepare a worthy Mother for your Son and signify the beginning of the Church, his beautiful Bride without spot or wrinkle" (*The Roman Missal* 2011, 1016). The homily can therefore refer to the moral qualities mentioned in the second reading – holiness and purity – which are required of the baptised (cf. Eph 5:27). The faithful gazing upon Mary who is pure, holy, meek, humble, etc. thus learn to faithfully imitate Jesus, who is "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt 5:8). In the context of the first reading, in turn, the participants in the liturgical assembly find that what the first human beings lost through distrust of God, the temptation to self-salvation and the rupture of communion with God, Mary – the New Eve – regains by God's grace through sincere faith, obedience to the word of God, submission of mind and will (cf. *RMat* 13), entrusting herself to God and being open to his salvific action. In this way, she had already become spiritually the Mother of the Lord (cf. Matt 12:48–50). Thus shaped by the Holy Spirit, she reflects the radiance of Jesus' holiness – his oneness with the Father and his obedience. She who devotes herself entirely to God and his salvific work called herself "the handmaiden of the Lord" and appears as a faithful disciple of her Son – the heralded "Servant of the Lord" (cf. Isa 42:1–7). She thus becomes the beginning of a new creation (cf. *LG* 56). Participants in the liturgical assembly are invited to embark on such a path of the new People of God. Adorned with God's love through baptism and the Eucharist, and obedient to his will, they become "adopted sons" – members of God's family (cf. Eph 2:4–5). In the homily paraenesis, reference can also be made to the effects of original sin mentioned in the prayer after communion, which most defile the beauty of the Church, the Bride of the Lord. First of all, it is worth mentioning the "darkening" of the heart and failure to recognise God (cf. Rom 1:21), the foolishness of sin (cf. Rom 1:28–32) and the fear of death, which creates attitudes that contradict Christian love (cf. Bolewski 2012, 436–37): selfishness, division and discord, etc. The faithful are thus to imitate the love of Mary who, as free from all sin and especially from the fear of death by which all "were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb 2:15), is united with the love of her Son and walks with him in the way of the cross and participates in his death. Mary thus appears as a model of freedom in love and an image of the goodness of Christ – "the most beautiful of human sons" (cf. Ps 45:3).

The sacred texts of this feast also point to the necessity of liturgical asceticism – a spiritual effort to confront the effects of original sin, to cooperation with the Holy Spirit and to the hard spiritual struggle that fills the history of all mankind (cf. *RMat* 11). St Paul alludes to this theme in the second reading when he speaks of the election of the Christian and his adoption to sonship, which he received upon baptism. Thus, implicit in the text is a call to spiritual effort so that the grace of baptism may bear ever more abundant fruit. In this spiritual struggle, the faithful are assisted by Mary, the victorious Woman of the Apocalypse (cf. Rev 12:1–17, who rejoices in

sharing Christ's victory over the "ruler of this world," accomplished once and for all at Golgotha (cf. CCC 2853). At the same time, hidden here is a call to hope based on the fact that the grace of God and his elects are more powerful than evil: "[t]his election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that 'enmity' which marks the history of man" (*RMat* 11). In the second reading, St Paul emphasises that in the believers in Christ have already been made heirs to God's plan of redemption – they are already chosen as "holy and blameless" (second reading). The baptised, in spite of the remnants of sin, can already exist as a "new creation" and experience the presence – *parousia* – of the kingdom of God. This possibility promised at the beginning of the history of salvation is being realised now, in the time of the Church (cf. Bolewski 2012, 329–32). St Paul makes this point clearly in his Letter to the Colossians: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:11–14).

The prototype of this glory of the Church is Mary: "The Immaculate Conception is a victory over sin and one of the greatest that can ever occur in temporal life. It is even already a certain presence in the temporal 'now' of the eschatological triumph, of the final sanctification: a presence that shapes temporal life" (Misztal 2004, 28).

Naturally, in the paraenesis of Marian homilies – in addition to the above-mentioned appeals to imitate Mary and the encouragement to invoke her intercession – there must also be calls to give her deep reverence and love, to adopt an attitude of hope, wonder and affection at seeing in her "that which she herself wholly desires and hopes to be" (cf. *MC* 22, 28). In the light of the texts of the sacred Marian celebrations, one finds in Mary not only the model of a disciple of the Lord, but also the model of a woman, a virgin and a mother. The mystery of Mary also helps to understand important contemporary anthropological problems such as: the value of the inner life, the meaning of transcendence, the mystery of suffering, the drama of death, etc. (see Twardy 2007, 216–36; Siwak 2011, 284; Zadrożny 2020, 28).

Conclusions

The specificity of the Marian homily lies in its close connection with the liturgy. Its content is to be organised in Christological, soteriological and ecclesiological perspectives. In this way, this preaching becomes part of the liturgy understood as the work of Christ and the Church. It thus shapes Marian devotion in a spirit appropriate to the liturgy, which is "the golden norm for Christian piety" (*MC* 23). The dynamics of the content of the Marian homily shown in the above article can

be considered an example of theological synthesis. It provides an organic view of Mary by showing her presence and exemplarity in the history of salvation attested in the Word of God, actualised in liturgical celebration and Christian life. It performs a liturgy-mystery-life synthesis, integrating what is believed with what is celebrated and what is lived. It forms the faithful so that they have an integral understanding of Christian holiness in its source, ontological and theological-moral application. Such an approach to the Marian homily is also a way to know God through experiencing his saving power and wisdom according to the optics of grace and faith, accomplished in Mary. The aim of preaching then is not only the intellectual formation of the faithful, but above all the intensification of their spiritual life until they reach the full maturity of life in Christ (cf. Eph 4:13). At the centre of the Marian homily stands the mystery of Christ. For in the liturgy, access to redemption is gained first and foremost “in,” “with,” and “through” Christ. His mother, who is the first fruit of redemption, is included in this mystery. She is also the teacher of fruitful participation in the liturgical celebration. In the Marian homily, the emphasis is placed on ecclesiotypical rather than Christotypical Mariology. Mary is presented as the most perfect disciple of Christ so that the faithful, transformed in the Eucharist, imitate Christ following her example. In this way, it is possible to prevent errors and abuses in the proclamation of Mary, such as Mariocentrism, Marian isolationism, sentimentalism, etc.

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