CATHOLIC FAITH & AI

Resources for technology, pastoral practice, and lived discipleship

Forming Hearts and Voices for the Word: AI and Preaching

Formation Guide

Pauline
MEDIA STUDIES

Forming Hearts and Voices for the Word: AI and Preaching

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CORE INSIGHTS
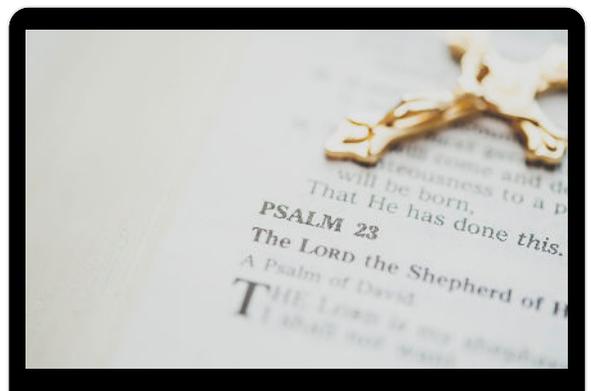
Preaching in Spirit and Truth

Preaching has always adapted to new frontiers of communication, from the printing press to microphones, from pulpits to livestreams. Today, artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how words are written, delivered, and heard. For the Church, this moment is not about replacing the preacher's voice but discerning how digital tools might serve the proclamation of the Word in today's ever-evolving context.

AI invites preachers to ask:

How can this technology assist me in preparing, proclaiming, and connecting with my people, without losing the authenticity of the Spirit's inspiration?

Used wisely, AI can expand access to resources, free more time for prayer and presence, and deepen engagement with Scripture. Technology can shape words, but only the Spirit can breathe new life into the human heart.

In the sections that follow, you will find sample "prompts"—simple questions or instructions you might pose to an AI tool (such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini) to assist with homily preparation. These prompts are not meant to replace prayer, study, or pastoral discernment, but to model practical ways AI can support reflection, research, and communication when used thoughtfully and responsibly.

Preaching from the Heart of the Liturgy

The homily begins not on a screen, but with the Word of God. The preacher's first task is to pray with the liturgy—to listen for the Word

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that is already being proclaimed in Scripture, song, and sacrament. The Lectionary readings, presidential prayers, prefaces, music, art and ritual actions reveal layers of theological meaning that shape the assembly's encounter with Christ.

A word about timing: The use of AI in homily preparation requires discernment not only about how it is used, but when. Before turning to the tools and prompts below, the preacher should first dwell with the Word through prayer, silence, and personal reflection. Only then can AI serve fruitfully—as a companion to deepen insight, rather than a shortcut that bypasses spiritual formation.

AI can assist this process as a supportive study companion:

- Summarizing biblical passages and highlighting recurring themes.
- Identifying scriptural and thematic links among the readings, prayers, music, art, and socio-cultural context.
- Offering insights from Church teachings, as well as historical and theological sources.

Prompt Examples:

- Summarize Pope Leo XIV's 2025 apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te: On Love for the Poor,* and identify its central themes.
- List scriptural resonances between Eucharistic Prayer II and the lectionary readings for the Second Sunday of Lent.
- Explain how the hymn *Gift of Finest Wheat* reflects the theology of self-offering in the Mass.

Listening with the Ear of the Heart

To preach well is to listen well. Every assembly brings unique experiences of faith, culture, joy, and struggle. The preacher stands not above but among the people, interpreting the Word in dialogue with real lives. Contextual preaching honors the joys and wounds of the community, ensuring that the Word speaks into today's social, cultural, and spiritual realities.
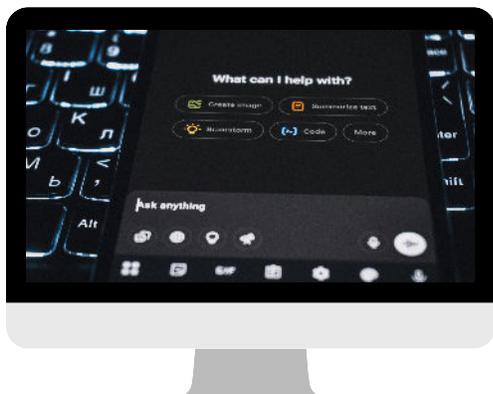
AI can enhance pastoral awareness by:

- Offering summaries of local or global events that may shape parish life.
- Suggesting alternative phrasing for multilingual or multicultural assemblies.

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- Helping imagine how a homily might be heard by parishioners of different backgrounds or generations.

These functions can help preachers hear more deeply—but they cannot replace personal encounter, pastoral listening, or empathy. Algorithms—digital tools that identify patterns and trends—can offer insights; only human compassion perceives hearts.

A pastoral caution:

Because AI tools generate responses based on patterns rather than lived understanding, they may sometimes produce information that is inaccurate or overly confident, commonly called "hallucinations." Preachers should therefore treat all AI-generated contextual insights as provisional, verifying claims through reputable sources, parish knowledge, and personal encounter. Especially when addressing social wounds or communal tensions, such verification is essential to preserving trust.

Prompt Examples:

- From the perspective of Generation Z Catholics navigating doubt and faith, how might this homily pasted here [insert homily] be heard?
- Review the provided resources on local social conditions in our neighborhood or city, identify three issues currently affecting families in the community, and suggest pastoral approaches for addressing them in the homily that follows [insert homily].
- Translate the homily text below from Spanish into English, then generate clear bullet-point summaries in both Spanish and English for publication on our website [insert homily].

Crafting the Word with Prudence

Every homily benefits from refinement—clarity, pacing, and pastoral tone. AI tools can serve as a kind of digital "second reader," helping preachers assess readability, estimate delivery time, or translate key sections for broader understanding. But prudence is essential. The preacher must remain the primary author, editor, and moral conscience of the message.

Prudent use of AI means:

- Treating all AI outputs as drafts, not final texts.
- Preserving the preacher's unique pastoral voice and theological integrity.
- Reviewing every generated line for accuracy, tone, and doctrinal soundness.
- Avoiding confidential information or unpublished texts in AI systems.

Prompt Examples:

- Estimate how long the homily provided below [insert homily] would take to deliver aloud at an average preaching pace in a large cathedral space.
- Translate the English homily provided below [insert homily] into a bilingual version, inserting brief one- to two-sentence Spanish summaries between sections for a mostly English-speaking assembly.

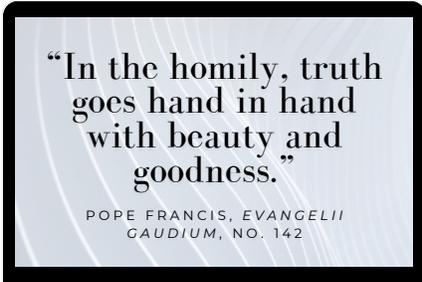**A Final Discernment for Proclamation**

Unlike earlier stages of preparation, this final moment is less about revising the text and more about discerning readiness for proclamation. Before a homily is proclaimed, many preachers benefit

from stepping back from the text to listen for its clarity, focus, and pastoral coherence. This is not a substitute for prayer or preparation, but a final moment of pastoral and spiritual discernment that helps ensure the homily is communicated as faithfully and clearly as possible.

AI may assist by:

- Identifying the central theme of the homily and where it is most clearly expressed.
- Noting sections that may be overly abstract, lengthy, or unclear for a general assembly.
- Assessing whether Scripture, lived experience, and pastoral invitation are balanced.
- Highlighting whether the homily concludes with a clear sense of hope, mission, or response.

As always, these observations require human and spiritual discernment. AI cannot judge tone of delivery, the movement of the Spirit in proclamation, or the lived reception of the assembly. Prayer, silence, and pastoral intuition remain the final guides before delivery.

"In the homily, truth goes hand in hand with beauty and goodness."

POPE FRANCIS, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, NO. 142

The Word Made Flesh in Every Age

The Gospel must be proclaimed anew in every generation—and now, in a world of algorithms and automation, that call endures. The preacher's task is not to master machines, but to reveal the face of Christ through human words shaped by grace, prayer, and lived faith. The Spirit of truth guides those who preach, inspiring wisdom and discernment in an age of digital abundance; AI may assist preparation, but it cannot replace the slow work of listening, the courage of proclamation, or the trust required to speak God's Word to real people in real time.

Every homily is ultimately an act of faith: that the eternal Word who became flesh still speaks through human voices, so that the people of God hear not technology, but the living voice of Christ.

FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- How might AI serve the preaching ministry in ways that deepen, rather than diminish, prayerful and personal encounter with the people of God?

- In what ways can AI help preachers better understand and speak to the diverse realities of everyday life, faith, and culture within their communities, while remaining attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit?

- What habits of discernment and formation—both personal and institutional—are needed for preachers to integrate technology faithfully, wisely, and responsibly, now and in the future?

TO THINK ABOUT

"[A]ccess to data—however extensive—must not be confused with intelligence, which necessarily 'involves the person's openness to the ultimate questions of life and reflects an orientation toward the True and the Good' (Antiqua et Nova, no. 29). In the end, authentic wisdom has more to do with recognizing the true meaning of life, than with the availability of data."

—Pope Leo XIV, message to participants in the Second Annual Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Corporate Governance.

PASTORAL TOOLBOX

The Discernment Check. Before using an AI tool in homily preparation, pause to ask:
- What part of the preaching process am I entering—listening, studying, crafting, or proclaiming?
- Am I using this tool to deepen prayer and understanding, or to bypass them?
- Does this use support my responsibility as a preacher, or risk dulling it?

If AI is being used too early, too quickly, or without prayerful engagement with the Word, its use should be delayed or reconsidered.

- **Example:** *Before asking an AI tool to generate ideas, spend time praying with the readings and naming—without typing—what most unsettles, challenges, or consoles you.*

The Voice and Accountability Check. Because AI generates text based on patterns rather than lived faith, preachers should regularly ask:

- Does this language sound like my pastoral voice?
- Can I stand behind every claim, image, and implication as my own?
- Would I preach this without hesitation if asked where it came from?

The preacher remains morally and pastorally accountable for every word proclaimed, regardless of how it was prepared.

- **Example:** *If AI-generated phrasing is helpful, rewrite it in your own voice before retaining it—out loud, not just on the page.*

Reclaiming Time for the People of God. When AI tools assist with research, drafting, or organization, intentionally reclaim the time saved for:

- prayerful rehearsal and silence,
- listening to parishioners' stories,
- attending to the concrete joys and wounds of the community.

The measure of AI's usefulness in preaching is not efficiency, but whether it creates more space for presence, encounter, and pastoral care

- **Example:** *If AI shortens preparation time, use the margin gained to walk the neighborhood, visit the sick, or sit with the assembly you will soon address.*
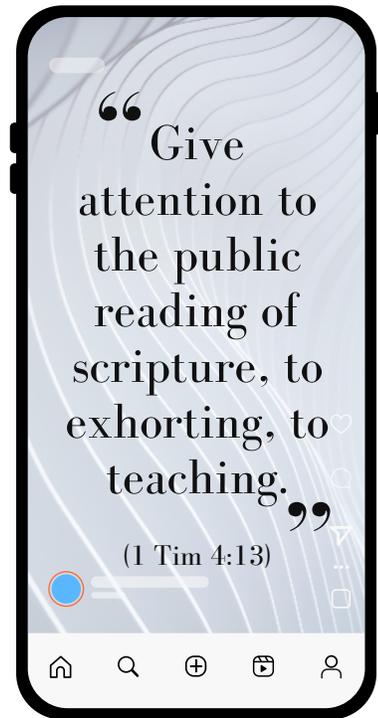
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Prayer for Preachers

God of the living Word,
you speak to your people
in Scripture,
in sacrament,
and in the quiet movements
of the heart.

Before I seek insight,
before I turn to tools or texts,
teach me first to listen.
Still my restlessness,
attune my heart to your Spirit,
and open my ears to the cries,
hopes, and faith of your people.

Grant me wisdom to discern
what serves the Gospel
and humility to recognize
what does not.
May every aid I use deepen,
not replace,
prayer, compassion, and
pastoral care.

Let the words I prepare
be shaped by truth,
tested by love,
and spoken with reverence,
so that through my voice
your saving truth
may be made present
for the life of the world.

We ask this through Christ,
the Word made flesh,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever. Amen.

> "Give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching."
>
> (1 Tim 4:13)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Edward Foley, ed., *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016.

Ricky Manalo, "Artificial Intelligence and Liturgy: Eight Exploratory Trajectories." *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy,* 2025.

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *The Homiletic Directory: A Guide for Catholic Preaching*, Vatican City, 2015.

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