



DICASTERIUM DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 276/26

Vatican City, 17 June 2026

Your Excellency,

I have received your letter of 30 March 2026, by which, on behalf of the German Bishops' Conference, Your Excellency submitted to this Dicastery, for examination, a request for the granting of an indult which would permit, in exceptional circumstances, a homiletic address by a lay member of the faithful immediately following the proclamation of the Gospel during the celebration of the Eucharist.

At the outset, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the pastoral concern underlying this request and for the desire to ensure appropriate spiritual care for the communities entrusted to your pastoral responsibility.

The requested indult concerns the provision of can. 767 §1 of the Code of Canon Law, according to which the homily, as an integral part of the liturgy, is reserved to a priest or deacon. This norm has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Church's Magisterium, particularly in the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (Nos. 64–66), which expressly excludes the possibility that lay members of the faithful may deliver the homily during the celebration of Mass, even under another designation.

This norm is not merely disciplinary in character, but reflects a reality intrinsically connected with the theological and liturgical nature of the homily. As a distinct act within the Liturgy of the Word, it is inseparably linked to the proclamation of the Gospel and to the presidency of the celebration, and constitutes a specific exercise of the *munus docendi* entrusted to the ordained minister.

This responsibility of the ordained minister is rooted in the very nature of the sacred liturgy, which is not simply an occasion for instruction, but the privileged place in which the faithful are drawn into the mystery of salvation. As Pope Leo XIV recently observed during the General Audience of 20 May 2026:

"The liturgy sustains the faithful by continually immersing them in the Lord's Passover; thus, through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

sacraments, and common prayer, they are refreshed, strengthened, and renewed in the zeal of their faith and mission."

Since the reservation of the homily to the ordained minister belongs to the sacramental and liturgical structure of the Eucharistic celebration itself, no dispensation by way of indult may be granted from the norm established in can. 767 §1, even where serious pastoral considerations are present.

The preaching of the Word of God within the liturgical assembly is inseparably linked to a mission received within the Church (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 875). This ecclesial mission is expressed sacramentally through Sacred Orders. Canon 1009 §3, as amended by Pope Benedict XVI in the *Motu Proprio Omnium in mentem*, provides: "Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or the presbyterate receive the mission and the faculty to act in the person of Christ the Head, whereas deacons are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word, and charity." This distinction does not establish inequality among the baptised, but rather reflects the diversity of gifts and ministries within the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:18–19).

Word and Sacrament are inseparably united in the celebration of the Eucharist. Consequently, the proclamation of the Word within the liturgical action, and above all the homily, belongs by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to the ordained minister and cannot be delegated. For this reason, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* clearly states: "The homily should ordinarily be given by the Priest Celebrant himself or entrusted by him to a concelebrating Priest or, occasionally, if appropriate, to a Deacon, but never to a lay person." (GIRM, No. 66)

Accordingly, criteria such as a lay member of the faithful possessing superior theological formation or greater communicative ability, valuable though these may be in themselves, cannot justify entrusting the homily to such a person, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 766. Nor is this merely a question of theological competence. For the priest, the preparation and delivery of the homily form an integral part of his priestly ministry and spirituality and cannot be separated from them.

In this regard, it is significant that Pope Francis, in *Desiderio Desideravi*, No. 36, describes the ministry of ordained pastors precisely as leading the faithful, "Sunday after Sunday", into the mystery celebrated in the liturgy: "Ordained ministers perform an act of primary pastoral importance when they take the baptised faithful by the hand in order to lead them into the repeated experience of the Paschal Mystery."

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the real challenges that often affect the quality of homiletic preaching. These should encourage a renewed

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

commitment to both initial and ongoing formation, so that the homily may fully manifest its "quasi-sacramental character" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 142).

In light of these considerations, the proposed distinction between a "homily", reserved to the ordained minister, and a possible "sermon" entrusted to a lay member of the faithful cannot be accepted, since the proposed place — immediately after the Gospel — and the function exercised substantially coincide with those of the homily itself.

Moreover, it is not evident that the present circumstances constitute such an emergency or genuine pastoral necessity as would justify a departure from a norm so closely connected with the very nature of the liturgical act. Indeed, wherever a priest is present to celebrate the Eucharist, he is likewise present to exercise the ministry of preaching the homily entrusted to him by virtue of his ordination. Situations in which the celebrant is impeded — for example, because of a temporary physical disability — represent only occasional and time-limited circumstances and cannot be regarded as establishing a permanent pastoral necessity. Conversely, where no priest is available, no Eucharistic celebration takes place; rather, provision is made, in accordance with the norms of the Church, for celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word, within which appropriate forms of preaching or explanation of Sacred Scripture may be entrusted to lay members of the faithful without the need for any special indult.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the current discipline already provides for forms of preaching which may be entrusted to lay members of the faithful outside the homily and outside the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. can. 766 CIC), and which may be fostered according to the pastoral needs of the particular Churches.

In this regard, it may be helpful to recall that, although the Code of Canon Law does not provide an exhaustive catalogue of such forms of preaching, both its structure and the Church's practice clearly envisage a wide range of possibilities already fruitfully present in the life of the Church. These include, for example, catechesis (cf. can. 774 §1), religious instruction, spiritual conferences and theological meetings, days of recollection and retreats, as well as testimonies and various pastoral gatherings. Likewise, forms of preaching such as reflections, exhortations or catechetical instructions, when given within celebrations consisting solely of the Liturgy of the Word (for example, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, celebrations of the Word of God, penitential celebrations or similar gatherings), do not constitute an exception to the discipline governing the homily, but rather represent an application of the broader canonical provisions concerning the ministry of preaching.

Within this framework, the diocesan Bishop may, in accordance with can. 772 §1, determine suitable circumstances for such forms of preaching. He may not, however, dispense from the norm reserving the homily to the ordained minister (cf. can. 767 §1;

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, 26 May 1987, *AAS* 79 [1987], p. 1249). Lay members of the faithful may not preach during the celebration of the Eucharist in the place reserved for the homily.

Lay members of the faithful are able to make a valuable contribution to the life of the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel in many ways, including by assisting in the preparation of homilies and in other forms of catechesis and evangelisation. Such collaboration, when appropriately fostered, enriches the ordained ministers themselves, while fully respecting the distinct roles proper to each state of life.

The foregoing considerations confirm that the reservation of the homily to the ordained minister within the celebration of the Eucharist derives from the sacramental and liturgical nature of the act itself, as well as from the particular responsibility for the preaching of the Word in the sacred liturgy conferred through Sacred Orders. For this reason, no dispensation by way of indult may be granted from the norm established in can. 767 §1.

Assuring Your Excellency of my highest esteem, I remain,

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Arthur Cardinal Roche
Prefect