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The Gospel is Not an Event of the Past but of the Present.
Actualization of the Sacred Scripture
in the Homiletic Preaching of Pope Francis

Ewangelia nie jest wydarzeniem z przeszłości,
ale teraźniejszości.

Aktualizacja Pisma Świętego
w przepowiadaniu homilijnym papieża Franciszka

Abstract. Pope Francis treats the Sacred Scriptures as an experience rather than merely doctrine, striving through his ministry of the word to make listeners contemporaries of Jesus. The actualization of God's word in Francis' preaching involves adapting the salvific message to the current situation of the community, which requires the use of language that corresponds to the mentality and issues of the listeners. The aim of this article is to present, using selected homilies of the Pope as examples, the use of simple and understandable language that highlights the past deeds of God (*signum memorativum*), their present significance (*signum representativum*), and the future awaiting the faithful (*signum prognosticum*). This is essential for an authentic witness of faith, underscoring the truthfulness of homiletic preaching and the relevance of God's word in the daily lives of believers.

Streszczenie. Papież Franciszek traktuje Pismo Święte jako doświadczenie, a nie tylko doktrynę, starając się przez posługę słowa uczynić słuchaczy współczesnymi Jezusowi. Aktualizacja słowa Bożego w przepowiadaniu Franciszka polega na dostosowaniu zbawczego orędzia do obecnej sytuacji wspólnoty, co wymaga użycia języka odpowiadającego mentalności i problemom słuchaczy. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie na przykładzie wybranych homilii Papieża swego rodzaju *exemplum* zastosowania języka prostego, zrozumiałego, który w swoich homiliach podkreśla przeszłe czyny Boga (*signum memorativum*), ich obecne znaczenie (*signum representativum*) oraz przyszłość, która czeka wiernych (*signum prognosticum*). Jest to niezbędne dla autentycznego świadectwa wiary, co podkreśla prawdziwość przepowiadania homilijnego i aktualność słowa Bożego w życiu codziennym wiernych.

Keywords: Pope Francis, homiletic preaching, actualization, Sacred Scripture, language of preaching.

Słowa kluczowe: papież Franciszek, przepowiadanie homilijne, aktualizacja, Pismo Święte, język przepowiadania.

Introduction

Stanisław Dyk explains that the crisis in preaching, which has been discussed for many years, largely stems from an insufficient addressing of the community's life issues. Preachers are criticized for using terms that are too general, for employing language that seems to be "beyond" the reality of the community's life, and above all, for failing to demonstrate the existential weight that the word of God also holds for our times (Dyk 2022, 5). As Zabrocki argues, "in the Sacred Scriptures, we find the same or very similar existential problems that we struggle with" (Zabrocki 2015, 302).

Preaching the word of God, detached from the problems of human life, results not only in the loss of the listeners' attention—for the principle "*mea res agitur*" always applies—but it may also hinder the encounter between God and man. If preaching does not show the real and salvific impact that the Gospel has on human life, then consequently, the Gospel itself may appear to the listeners as irrelevant and useless (Dyk 2022, 6).

Preaching without actualization also contrasts with contemporary culture, which places human affairs at the center of its interest. Hence, the conciliar Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* states: "In order that it might more effectively move men's minds, the word of God ought not to be explained in a general and abstract way, but rather by applying the lasting truth of the Gospel to the particular circumstances of life" (PO 4). This statement emphasizes the need for the actualization of the word of God, which involves not only finding a language adequate to the mentality and problems of the listeners but also being able to place the biblical kerygma within the existential reality of the listeners (Dyk 2022, 6).¹

¹ The latest Church documents indicate the necessity of actualizing the word of God in the process of creating and delivering a given homiletic unit. See VD 59; EG 147, 149, 154.

Pope Francis [...] in preaching the Gospel, treats it not as a text to be explained, but as one to be encountered. For him, the Sacred Scriptures are not doctrine, but experience. Therefore, according to Francis, the task of the preacher is to lead the listener in such a way that they feel contemporary to Jesus and hear Jesus speaking to them (Spadaro 2017, 22–3; Kowalski 2021, 74; Kasper 2015, 43–4). There is no doubt that actualization involves “incarnating” the salvific message of the sacred text into the current situation of the community so that the events of salvation history, witnessed in the Sacred Scriptures, become once again an “event” in the existential reality of the people of God (Dyk 2022, 24).

The aim of this article is to present the actualization of the Sacred Scripture in Pope Francis’s homiletic preaching over the past two years of his preaching ministry.² To achieve this goal, a research method described as text analysis has been employed.

Actualization is a complex process, which always involves linking the word of God to the lives of the listeners of the homily. Its fundamental condition is to point to the presence of Christ, who speaks and acts (*Christus praesens et agens*), embracing with His salvation every human being and the whole world (Twardy 2009, 143). Therefore, Pope Francis, in his homiletic preaching, proclaiming the saving deeds and words of God, draws attention to their past, recalls them (*signum memorativum*), highlights their current significance and emphasizes the action of God (*signum representativum*), and also points to the future, prepared for those who have accepted the word of God (*signum prognosticum*).³ It seems that the above indications will constitute a natural division of this article.

² The article will analyze 45 homilies delivered by Pope Francis between 2023 and 2024. Therefore, we will exclude all kinds of speeches addressed to various individuals and groups, communities, and institutions, as well as written texts, as they do not constitute preaching in the strict sense, which, according to the Code of Canon Law, could be defined as the oral communication of the living word of God. See CIC 762–772. In this context, it is noteworthy that of the 45 homilies analysed, 4 homilies did not refer to the liturgy of the word (see Francis 2023c; 2023a’; 2023d’; 2024b) and 13 homilies lacked didactic references (see Francis 2023c; 2023f; 2023g; 2023i; 2023j; 2023l; 2023w; 2023y; 2023a’; 2023d’; 2023f’; 2024b; 2024j).

³ Schematic presentation of the main concepts highlighting the process of updating the word of God. The Word of God – The process of updating as: explanation-application; contemporization; innovation; accommodation-adaptation; continuation; translation; bridging; confrontation; recognizing similarity; correlation; identification; bisociation; il-

1. *Signum memorativum*

In the analyzed homiletic material, Francis presents the thesis of a close bond between God and humanity, using images of the mother-child relationship to emphasize the durability and depth of this bond. He adopts a positive and comforting tone, mainly directed towards believers seeking spiritual support.

God has a Mother and is thus bound forever to our humanity, like a child to its mother, to the point that our humanity is his humanity. It is an amazing and consoling truth (Francis 2023).

Another homily by the Pope is a reflective description of the experience of the Wise Men, which teaches that faith is born from asking questions and is a gift from God. The text emphasizes the importance of restless searching, which leads to deeper understanding and inspires spiritual growth.

From the experience of the Magi, we learn that the first “place” where he loves to be sought is in *restless questioning*. The exciting adventure of these Wise Men from the East teaches us that faith is not born of our own merits, thoughts and theories. Rather, it is God’s gift. His grace helps us to shake off our apathy and opens our minds to ask the important questions in life. Questions that challenge us to leave behind our presumption that everything is fine, questions that open us to what is beyond us. For the Magi, that was the beginning: the restlessness of those willing to ask questions. Filled with yearning for the infinite, they scan the heavens, find themselves marvelling at the brilliance of a star, and experience the quest for the transcendent that inspires the progress of civilizations and the tireless seeking of the human heart. The star left them with a question: *Where is the child who has been born?* (Francis 2023c).

The next homily is deeply reflective and rich in theological content, highlighting the significance of forgiveness in Christianity. It consists of several complex sentences that use quotes from the Gospels to reinforce the message.

luminating with the word of God; interpreting human experiences in the light of the word of God – Human life (existential situation, problems, questions, existential needs). See Twardy 2009, 143.

Francis emphasizes that forgiveness is a spiritual act connected with suffering and wounds, which is the central theme of the text.

Jesus says to his disciples: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (v. 23). Yet before giving the apostles the power to forgive, he forgives them, not with words but with an act, the first act of the Risen Lord. The Gospel tells us that, “he showed them his hands and his side” (v. 20). Jesus showed them his wounds. He showed them his wounds, because forgiveness is born from wounds (Francis 2023f).

In the homily, Pope Francis analyzes Jesus’ words from the Gospel, which compare Christ’s disciples to salt and light, emphasizing their role in giving life value and flavor. Salt is used as a symbol of wisdom and virtue, which are invisible but essential for the fullness of life.

[...] I would like to reflect, then, on the words of life that our Lord Jesus spoke to us in today’s Gospel: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:13–14). What do these images say to us, as disciples of Christ? First of all, that *we are the salt of the earth*. Salt is used to season food. It is the unseen ingredient that gives flavour to everything. Precisely for this reason, since ancient times, salt has been a symbol of wisdom, a virtue that cannot be seen, but that adds zest to life, which without it becomes insipid, tasteless (Francis 2023g).

In the continuation of the above homily, the Pope analyzes the role of salt not only as a seasoning but also as a preservative, which was significant in the time of Christ. He highlights the symbolic meaning of salt in the Bible, which reminds us of the need to maintain the covenant with God. The text of the homily has a decidedly didactic and reflective tone.

Salt does not only bring out flavor; it also has another function, which was essential at the time of Christ: it preserves food so that it does not spoil and go bad. The Bible had said that there is one “food”, one essential good that is to be preserved above all others, and that is the covenant with God. So in those days, whenever an offering was made to the Lord, a little salt was added to it. Let us hear what Scripture says about this: “You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (Lev 2:13). Salt thus served as a reminder of our basic need to preserve

our relationship with God, because he is faithful to us, and his covenant with us is incorruptible, inviolable and enduring (cf. *Num* 18:19; 2 *Chr* 13:5) (Francis 2023g).

In the homily, the Pope analyzes the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy that foretold Israel would be a light to the nations. This prophecy was realized through Jesus, who is depicted as the “light of the world.” Francis also emphasizes the role of Jesus’ disciples, who are to continue his mission and be a light for others.

A great prophecy was told of Israel: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (*Is* 49:6). Now that prophecy has been fulfilled, because God the Father has sent his Son, who is the light of the world (cf. *Jn* 8:12), the true light that enlightens every person and every people, the light that shines in the darkness and dispels every cloud of gloom (cf. *Jn* 1:5.9). Jesus, the light of the world, tells his disciples that they, too, are *the light of the world* (Francis 2023g).

In the next homily, Francis analyzes Peter’s relationship with Jesus and his readiness to immediately follow the Lord. He emphasizes that Peter’s response to Jesus’ call can be summed up in one word: “go.” He also conveys that Peter’s faith was the result of a spiritual journey and the experience of following the Lord.

Peter’s answer can be summed up in one word: *follow*. Peter knew what it was to follow the Lord. On that day in Caesarea Philippi, Peter responded to Jesus’ question with a fine profession of faith: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (*Mt* 16:16). An impeccable, precise, exact and, we could even say, perfect “catechetical” answer. Yet that answer was itself the fruit of a journey. For only after the thrilling experience of following the Lord, walking with him and behind him for some time, did Peter arrive at the spiritual maturity that brought him, by grace, by pure grace, to so clear a profession of faith. The same evangelist, Matthew, tells us that it all began one day when, beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus walked by, called Peter and his brother Andrew, “and immediately they left their nets and followed him” (*Mt* 4:20). Peter left everything behind to follow the Lord. The Gospel stresses that he did so “immediately”. Peter did not tell Jesus that he would think it over; he didn’t calculate the pros and cons; he didn’t come up with alibis to postpone the decision. Instead, he left his nets and followed Jesus, without demanding any kind of guarantee beforehand. He was to learn everything *day by day*, as a disciple, a follower of Jesus, walking in his footsteps. It is not by chance that in

the Gospels the last recorded words of Jesus to Peter were: “Follow me” (*Jn* 21:22). *Follow* (Francis 2023p).

In his homily, the Pope analyzes the experience of Saul, who later became Paul, on the road to Damascus, where he encountered the risen Jesus. He discusses his conversion and his dedication to serving Jesus by preaching the Gospel. This part of the homily aims to demonstrate the power of conversion and the dedication of one’s life to Jesus.

On the road to Damascus, as he led a fierce persecution of Christians, barricaded in his religious convictions, the risen Jesus met him and blinded him by his light. Or better, thanks to that light, Paul came to realize how blind he had been: caught up in the pride of his rigid observance, he discovered in Jesus the fulfilment of the mystery of salvation. In comparison with the sublime knowledge of Christ, he came to regard all his former human and religious securities as “rubbish” (cf. *Phil* 3:7–8). Paul then devoted his life to traversing land and sea, cities and towns, heedless of privations and persecutions, for the sake of preaching Jesus Christ. If we look at Paul’s life, it almost seems that the more he preached the Gospel, the more he grew in the knowledge of Jesus. By preaching the Word to others, he was able to peer more deeply into the depths of God’s mystery. Paul could then write: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (*1 Cor* 9:16). He could then confess: “To me, life is Christ” (*Phil* 1:21) (Francis 2023p).

In the next homily, Francis analyzes the second parable of Jesus, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, which initially seems small but grows and becomes a source of good for others. The Pope then compares this to human life, which also develops from a small beginning, becoming a source of good for others as hopes, plans, and dreams are fulfilled. The text of the homily aims to illustrate the analogy between the parable and human life.

Let us now turn to the second parable. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is the work of God acting silently in the course of history, to the point of seeming small and invisible, like a tiny mustard seed. Yet, when this seed grows, “it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (*Mt* 13:32). Brothers and sisters, our lives are like this too, for we come into the world so small; we become adults, then grow old. At the beginning we are like a small seed; then we are nourished by hopes, and our plans and dreams come to fruition, the most beautiful of which become like the tree that

does not live for itself but gives shade to all who desire it and offers space to those who wish to build a nest there. Thus those who *grow together* in this parable are ultimately the mature tree and the little birds (Francis 2023q).

In the analyzed homily text, the Pope depicts the tragic situation of the leper, who is rejected by society due to fear, prejudice, and false religiosity. The author criticizes these attitudes, revealing their irrationality and harmfulness to both the individual and society as a whole.

That leper was forced to live outside the city. Weakened by his illness, rather than being helped by his fellow citizens, he finds himself forsaken and indeed further wounded by ostracism and rejection. Why? First, because of fear, fear of catching the disease and meeting the same end: “God forbid that it happen also to us! Let us not take a risk, but keep our distance!” Fear. Then, prejudice: “If he has this terrible illness” – for so people thought – “surely it is because God is punishing him for some sin he committed; so he deserves it after all!” This is prejudice. And finally, because of false religiosity: in those days it was thought that touching a dead person made one ritually impure, and lepers were like the walking dead. It was thought that even slight contact with them made one impure like them. A case of distorted religiosity, one that erects barriers and buries pity (Francis 2024f).

2. *Signum representativum*

The analyzed excerpt of Pope Francis’ homily is deeply theological yet accessible, using rich symbolism, contrasts, and simple language. It conveys a strong message about the love of God, which is real and tangible, rooted in human reality and experience.

God does not love us in words but in deeds; not from “on high”, but “up close”, precisely from “within” our flesh, because in Mary the Word became flesh, because Christ continues to have a heart of flesh that beats for each and every of us! (Francis 2023).

The fragment of the papal homily is a thoughtful reflection on the journey of faith, which requires openness, readiness to ask questions, and confrontation with life’s challenges. The use of stylistic devices such as anaphora, enumeration, and rhetorical questions gives it rhythm and emotional depth. The

text emphasizes the importance of God's grace and inner restlessness as drivers of spiritual seeking.

[...] the journey of faith begins whenever, by God's grace, we make room for the restlessness that keeps us awake and alert. It begins when we are willing to ask questions, when we are dissatisfied with our daily routine and take seriously the challenges of each new day. When we step out of our comfort zone and decide to confront the uncomfortable aspects of life: our relationships with others, unexpected events, projects needing to be undertaken, dreams to be realized, fears to be faced, physical and mental sufferings. At such times, deep in our hearts, we find ourselves before the irrepressible questions that lead us to seek the Lord: Where do I find happiness? Where do I find that fullness of life to which I aspire? Where do I find a love that does not fade away, a love that endures even in the face of frailty, failure and betrayal? (Francis 2023b).

In the next homily, the Pope engages in a profound reflection on the transformation of pain and weakness into opportunities for openness towards others and forgiveness. The use of stylistic devices such as contrast, metaphor, and symbolism lends it emotional and spiritual depth. The excerpt emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, mercy, and openness of heart, drawing from the example set by Jesus. The simple yet powerful expressions and logically constructed narrative make this text poignant and inspiring.

It is born when our wounds do not leave scars of hatred, but become the means by which we make room for others and accept their weaknesses. Our weakness becomes an opportunity, and forgiveness becomes the path to peace. This does not mean that we turn around and act as if nothing is changed; instead, we open our hearts in love to others. That is what Jesus does: faced with the sadness and shame of those who had denied him and fled, he shows his wounds and opens up the wellspring of mercy. He does not multiply words, but opens wide his wounded heart, in order to tell us that he is always wounded with love for us (Francis 2023f).

The excerpt from the papal homily reflects on Jesus' teachings, particularly on the Beatitudes and their role in Christian life. The use of stylistic devices such as metaphors, contrasts, and enumerations adds depth and clarity. The Pope's text emphasizes the revolutionary nature of the Beatitudes, which bring heavenly wisdom to earth, changing the standards of the world and the

mindset of believers. The simplicity of language and logical structure make this text accessible.

He uses the image of salt immediately after teaching his disciples the Beatitudes. We see, then, that the Beatitudes are the salt of the Christian life, because they bring the wisdom of heaven down to earth. They revolutionize the standards of this world and our usual way of thinking. And what do they say? In a word, they tell us that to be blessed, to be happy and fulfilled, we must not aim to be strong, rich and powerful, but humble, meek, merciful; to do no evil to anyone, but to be peacemakers for everyone. This, Jesus says, is the wisdom of a disciple; it is what gives flavor to the world around us (Francis 2023g).

In his homily, Pope Francis reflects on the role of Jesus' disciples as the "salt of the earth" and the significance of God's covenant. The metaphors, enumerations, and contrasts used by the Pope add depth and clarity to the homily. The text emphasizes that Jesus' disciples are to testify to a new, eternal, and indestructible covenant, celebrated during every Holy Mass, as well as to God's unwavering love, which endures despite human infidelity. Complex sentences and logical structure reinforce the argumentation and clarity of the message.

It follows that every disciple of Jesus, as the salt of the earth, is a witness to the covenant that God has made and that we celebrate in every Mass: a new, eternal and unbreakable covenant (cf. *1 Cor* 11:25; *Heb* 9), and a love for us that cannot be shaken even by our infidelity (Francis 2023g).

The Holy Father engages in a profound reflection on the personal experience of faith and the immediate response to Jesus' call. The use of quotation, contrasts, repetitions, and direct address strengthens the message about the necessity of practically imitating Jesus. The Pope emphasizes that theoretical knowledge about Jesus is insufficient; what is crucial is personal experience, which leads to spiritual transformation and a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Peter tells us that it is not enough to respond to the question – "Who is Jesus for me" – with a faultless doctrinal formula or a set of preconceived notions. No. It is only by following the Lord that we come to know him each day, only by becoming his disciples and listening to his words that we become his friends and experience his transforming love. That word "immediately" is also meaningful for us. Many

other things can be postponed in life, but not following Jesus; where he is concerned, we cannot hesitate or come up with excuses (Francis 2023p).

In the next excerpt, the Pope reflects on the teachings of St. Paul in the context of evangelization and spiritual growth. The use of contrasts, repetitions, and quotations strengthens the message about the importance of actively sharing one's faith. The text emphasizes that authentic faith is not merely private devotion but involves actively proclaiming the Gospel. The process of evangelization is a mutual act that leads to spiritual growth for both the evangelizer and the evangelized. The simplicity of language and logical structure make the text accessible and inspiring.

Paul tells us that our answer to the question – “Who is Jesus for me?” – is not a privatized piety that leaves us peaceful and unconcerned about bringing the Gospel to others. The Apostle teaches us that we grow in faith and in knowledge of the mystery of Christ when we preach and bear witness to him before others. This is always the case: *whenever we evangelize, we are ourselves evangelized*. It is an everyday experience: whenever we evangelize, we are ourselves evangelized. The word that we bring to others comes back to us, for however much we give to others, we ourselves receive much more (cf. *Lk 6:38*) (Francis 2023p).

The next excerpt from Francis's homily emphasizes the theme of family relationships and the role of grandparents in family life. Using the metaphor of a growing tree, the Pope expresses the beauty and durability of intergenerational relationships. Repetitions and imagery-rich vocabulary add emotional depth to the text, highlighting the strength of familial bonds and shared growth. Simple grammar and vivid syntax make the text accessible to listeners.

Here I think of our grandparents: how beautiful are these thriving trees, in whose “branches” children and grandchildren build their own “nests”, learning the warmth of home and experiencing the tenderness of an embrace. This is about growing together: the verdant tree and the little ones who need a nest, grandparents with their children and grandchildren, the elderly with the youngest (Francis 2023q).

The fragment of the Holy Father's homily is a profound reflection on the actions and love of Jesus towards suffering humanity, as well as His close-

ness to human sin and suffering. Francis, using comparisons, metaphors, and repetitions, conveys the depth and drama of the described event, emphasizing both human misery and divine mercy. Simple grammar and vivid syntax make the text communicative and deeply moving.

The first thing: *he touches* the man. Jesus responds to his cry for help (cf. v. 40); he feels compassion, he halts, he reaches out and touches him (cf. v. 41), knowing full well that in doing so he will in turn become a “pariah”. Oddly enough, the roles are now reversed: once healed, the sick person will be able to go to the priests and be readmitted to the community; Jesus, on the other hand, will no longer be able to enter any town (cf. v. 45). The Lord could have avoided touching that man; it would have been enough to perform a “distance healing”. Yet that is not the way of Christ. His way is that of a love that draws near to those who suffer, enters into contact with them and touches their wounds. The closeness of God; Jesus is close to us, God is close to us. Our God, dear brothers and sisters, did not remain distant in heaven, but in Jesus, he became man in order to touch our poverty. And before the worst case of “leprosy”, which is sin, he did not hesitate to die on the cross, outside the walls of the city, rejected like a sinner, like a leper, in order to touch the depths of our human reality. A saint once wrote: “He became a leper for us” (Francis 2024f).

The author of the homily reflects on how Jesus acts and what characteristics are attributed to Him—depicting Him as an embodiment of divine closeness, compassion, and gentleness. Through the use of metaphor, repetitions, and affirmations, the author conveys the profound meaning and essence of God’s love for humanity. The text is characterized by simple grammar and vivid syntax, making it inspiring and easy to understand.

Here we are helped by the second thing that Jesus does: he *heals* (cf. v. 42). His “touch” is not only a sign of closeness, but also the beginning of the process of healing. Closeness is God’s style: God is always close, compassionate and tender. Closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is God’s style (Francis 2024f).

3. *Signum prognosticum*

The papal homily is a reflective call to focus attention on important values, such as relationships with God and other people, instead of succumbing to the

temptations and fleeting allure of the world. Francis employs various stylistic devices, such as comparisons, metaphors, contrasts, and repetitions, as well as simple grammar, to convey a profound message and its significance for the spiritual development of the reader.

At the beginning of this year, among all the other things that we would like to do and experience, let us devote some time to seeing, to opening our eyes and to keeping them open before what really matters: God and our brothers and sisters. Let us have the courage to experience the wonder of encounter, which is God's style. That is something very different from the world's seductions, which seem to calm us. The wonder of God and of encounter gives us peace; the world can only anesthetize us and give peace of mind (Francis 2023).

The following excerpt from the homily is a brief yet powerful appeal, encouraging the listener to open their heart to new experiences, have courage in continuing life's journey, and worship God as the way of life. Francis, through the use of repetitions, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and inspiring vocabulary (simple grammar and syntax of the homily text), conveys a profound message of spiritual values.

[...] let us open our hearts to restlessness, let us ask for the courage to continue our journey, and let us finish in worship! Let us not be afraid, for this is the path of the Magi, the path of all the saints throughout history: to welcome our restlessness, to set out and to worship (Francis 2023b).

Another excerpt from the papal homily is a deep spiritual reflection on consolation and healing through a relationship with Jesus. The Pope, using various stylistic devices, conveys the richness and significance of God's mercy, as well as the importance of forgiveness and relationship with God for spiritual healing. The simplicity of language and clear syntax make the text accessible and engaging for the listener.

[...] when guilt and sadness overwhelm us, when things do not go well, we know where to look: to the wounds of Jesus, who is ever ready to forgive us with his infinite, wounded love. He knows your wounds; he knows the wounds of your country, your people, your land! They are wounds that ache, continually infected by hatred and violence, while the medicine of justice and the balm of hope never seem to arrive. My brother, my sister, Jesus suffers with you. He sees the

wounds you carry within, and he desires to console and heal you; he offers you his wounded heart. To your heart, God repeats the words he spoke today through the prophet Isaiah: “I will heal them; I will lead them and repay them with comfort” (*Is* 57:18). Together, we believe that Jesus always gives us the possibility of being forgiven and starting over, but also the strength to forgive ourselves, others and history! That is what Christ wants. He wants to anoint us with his forgiveness, to give us peace and the courage to forgive others in turn, the courage to grant others a great *amnesty of the heart*. What great good it does us to cleanse our hearts of anger and remorse, of every trace of resentment and hostility! (Francis 2023f).

The text of the papal homily constitutes a compelling call to apply the religious principles and wisdom of Christ, accentuating their beneficial impact on both the individual and society as a whole. Pope Francis employs repetitions, metaphors, and rhetorical negations to convey the profound sense of practicing religion for society. The homily features a clear syntax, making the text easily understandable for the listener.

Let us remember this: if we put the Beatitudes into practice, if we embody the wisdom of Christ, we will give savour not only to our own lives, but also to the life of society and of the country in which we live (Francis 2023g).

In the further part of his homily, the Pope encourages reflection on the role of Christians in society, emphasizing their task in bringing values and combating evil. Through the use of comparisons, metaphors, and descriptive expressions, Francis conveys the essence of the relationship with God, ethical norms, and social engagement in building a better society.

As the salt of the earth, we are called to bear witness to the covenant with God with joy and gratitude, and thus show that we are people capable of creating bonds of friendship and fraternal living. People capable of building good human relationships as a way of curbing the corruption of evil, the disease of division, the filth of fraudulent business dealings and the plague of injustice (Francis 2023g).

In the next part of his homily, Pope Francis calls for reflection on the role of Christians as the “light of the world,” encouraging the spreading of goodness and love through personal involvement and positive actions. The Holy Father employs comparisons, metaphors, and rhetorical negations to

underscore the importance of spreading light in combating evil and injustice in society.

[...] it is clear what Jesus means by asking us to be the light of the world: we, who are his disciples, are called to shine forth like a city set on a hill, like a lamp whose flame may never be extinguished. In other words, before we worry about the darkness surrounding us, before we hope that the shadows around us will lighten, we are called to radiate light, to give brightness to our cities, our villages and homes, our acquaintances and all our daily activities by our lives and good works. The Lord will give us strength, the strength to be light in him, so that everyone will see our good works, and seeing them, as Jesus reminds us, they will rejoice in God and give him glory. If we live like sons and daughters, brothers and sisters on earth, people will come to know that all of us have a Father in heaven. We are being asked, then, to burn with love, never to let our light be extinguished, never to let the oxygen of charity fade from our lives so that the works of evil can take away the pure air of our witness. This country, so beautiful yet ravaged by violence, needs the light that each one of you has, or better, the light that each one of you is (Francis 2023g).

The papal homily is centered around the idea of obedience to Jesus and the role of the Church as a place of encounter with both God and other people. It is also a call to action towards opening up to others and creating an atmosphere of closeness and hope. The language used in the text is clear and understandable, and the rhetoric points to the need for actively engaging in spiritual and social life.

To detach ourselves from all earthly forms of security, “immediately”, and to follow Jesus anew each day: such is the charge that Peter sets before us today. He invites us to be a “Church that follows”. A Church that strives to be a disciple of the Lord, a lowly servant of the Gospel. Only in this way will the Church be capable of dialoguing with everyone and becoming a place of accompaniment, closeness and hope for the men and women of our time. Only in this way will those farthest from us, those who often regard us with diffidence or indifference, come to realize, in the words of Pope Benedict, that “the Church is the place of our encounter with the Son of the living God and thus the place for our encounter with one another” (*Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent*, 10 December 2006) (Francis 2023p).

Pope Francis emphasizes in his homily the significance of preaching and evangelization for the contemporary Church, suggesting that it is essential for spiritual life. He also expresses a profound need to share God's love and the joy of the Gospel with others. The language used in the analyzed excerpt of the homily is evocative and dynamic.

This is something necessary also for the Church in our day: to put preaching at the centre, to be a Church that never tires of repeating: "To me, life is Christ" and "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel"! A Church that needs to preach, even as we need oxygen to breath. A Church that cannot live without sharing with others the embrace of God's love and the joy of the Gospel (Francis 2023p).

In the analyzed homiletic material, the Pope emphasizes the importance of dialogue and cooperation between different generations. He expresses the need for mutual learning and sharing life experiences, which can lead to building a better society and stronger bonds within the Church. In the homily, Francis employs vivid imagery and evocative phrases to underscore the essence of harmonious collaboration between different age groups.

[...] how much we need a new bond between young and old, so that the sap of those who have a long experience of life behind them will nourish the shoots of hope of those who are growing. In this fruitful exchange we can learn the beauty of life, build a fraternal society, and in the Church be enabled to encounter one another and dialogue between tradition and the newness of the Spirit (Francis 2023q).

In his homily, the Pope analyzes our ability to emulate Jesus' attitude in our relationships with others. Francis underscores the difficulty of this task and warns against behaviors contradictory to the attitude of love and compassion. Through the metaphor of the "leprosy of the soul," he illustrates the negative consequences of selfishness and intolerance. The homily excerpt contains a clear and readable appeal directed to the listener.

Are we, who love and follow Jesus, capable of imitating his "touch"? That is not easy to do, and we must be on guard lest our hearts harbour instincts contrary to his attitude of "drawing near" and "being a gift" to others. As, for example, when we withdraw from others and think only of ourselves; when we reduce the world around us to the limits of our own "comfort zone"; when we believe that the

problem is always and only other people... In such cases, we need to be attentive, for the diagnosis is clear: a *“leprosy of the soul”*: a sickness that blinds us to love and compassion, one that destroys us by the “cankers” of selfishness, prejudice, indifference and intolerance. Let us also be attentive, brothers and sisters, since, as with the first signs of leprosy that appear on the skin, if we do not intervene immediately, the infection will grow and become devastating. In the face of this danger, this possible sickness in our souls, we ask ourselves if there is a cure? (Francis 2024f).

In the next part of his homily, the Holy Father employs complex sentences and varied grammar to convey deep spiritual reflections. Francis utilizes numerous sentence structures, verb forms, and moods to clearly present his ideas and engage the reader. The use of both plural and singular forms indicates a dialogue with the audience, while numerous adjectives and personal pronouns reinforce the personal nature of the text. Overall, there is a careful balance of syntax and grammar, resulting in readability and a convincing message.

Are we open to it? Once we let ourselves be touched by Jesus, we start to heal within, in our hearts. If we let ourselves be touched by him in prayer and adoration, if we permit him to act in us through his Word and his sacraments, that contact truly changes us. It heals us of sin, sets us free from our self-absorption, and transforms us beyond anything we could possibly achieve by ourselves and our own efforts. Our wounds – those of the heart and soul –, our sicknesses of the soul, need to be brought to Jesus. Prayer accomplishes this: not prayer as an abstract and repetitive set of formulas, but a heartfelt and living prayer that places at the feet of Christ our miseries, our frailties, our failings and our fears. Let us think about it and ask ourselves: Do I allow Jesus to touch my “leprosy” in order to heal me? At the “touch” of Jesus, the very best of ourselves is born anew: the tissues of our heart regenerate; the blood of our creative impulses, charged with love, begins once more to flow; the wounds of our past mistakes heal and the skin of our relationships becomes fresh and healthy. The beauty that we possess, the beauty that we are, is restored. Thanks to the love of Christ, we rediscover the joy of giving ourselves to others, without fears and prejudices, leaving behind a dull and disembodied religiosity and experiencing a renewed ability to love others in a generous and disinterested way (Francis. 2024f).

Conclusions

In the Sacred Scriptures, the primary goal is to lead man to faith, to recognize in the described mysteries the saving God (DV 7). A homily shares this same objective, as it should naturally be an extension, interpretation, and actualization of the word of God (Dyk 2009, 119).

Analyzing the homilies of Pope Francis, we notice that the ability to communicate of the Holy Father has its roots in pastoral experience, which fosters the establishment of mutual relationships. In this context, both the use of “ordinary language,” opposed to theological language associated with official discourse, and the mental closeness of the Pope to his listeners seem justified (Spadaro 2017, 14; Kowalski 2018, 186). The actualization itself is expressed in existential and contemporary language, developed in a compositional scheme appropriate to the type of biblical text and the mentality of the listeners, and carried out with respect for communication principles (Dyk 2022, 24).

In a brief analysis of Pope Francis’s preaching success, we find it lies precisely in a language full of images, metaphors, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, neologisms, a language close to people, often free from stylistic rules, and thereby sometimes leading to misunderstandings, but above all to encounter and establishing a relationship with the listener (Spadaro 2017, 13–21; Kowalski 2018, 186). Fruitful actualization requires an appropriate language, which contemporary theology defines as existential language – when the preacher speaks about the listener’s real problems, and contemporary language – when the language is adapted to the listener’s perceptual abilities and mentality (communicative language)⁴.

Using the example of the actualization of the Sacred Scripture in Pope Francis’s homiletic preaching, it’s easy to see that the process of actualizing the word of God is complex and multi-faceted. It’s not purely an intellectual process but always has an existential dimension. It can be approached from many angles and on various levels, but the goal is always to emphasize the relevance of God’s word and to help listeners embody its message in their lives (Twardy

⁴ It’s worth adding that the language of preaching ceases to be communicative if the homilist uses abstraction, generality, theological jargon, or invokes many biblical quotations that themselves sometimes require detailed interpretation. See Dyk 2022, 23.

2009, 144). Pope Francis will say that it is about being able to relate the message of the biblical text “to a human situation, to an experience which cries out for the light of God’s word” (Francis 2013, EG 154).

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