

## NARRATIVE IMPACT IN CHURCH HOMILIES: STORIES, SAYINGS, AND EXPERIENCES

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### Abstract

In the modern era, homilies do not only convey religious doctrine but also address contemporary challenges in religious life. This study aims to analyse the impact of using illustrations—stories, wise sayings, and personal experiences—in homilies on the understanding and reception of God’s Word by the congregation. Descriptive qualitative research was conducted at St. Thomas the Apostle Onan Rihit Station, utilizing in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis to collect data. Findings indicate that the use of illustrations in homilies not only deepens the understanding of the Gospel teachings but also enhances the congregation's engagement with the community and the application of these teachings in daily life. Homilies are effective in enhancing resonance and attention from the congregation, demanding more empathetic and creative approaches in delivery. The results of this study underscore the importance of adaptation and innovation in homiletic practices to respond to contemporary religious life dynamics.

**Keywords:** *Homilies, religiosity, illustrations, spiritual influence*

### Abstrak

Di era modern, homili tidak hanya menyampaikan doktrin agama tetapi juga mengatasi tantangan kontemporer dalam kehidupan beragama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh penggunaan ilustrasi—cerita, kata-kata bijak, dan pengalaman pribadi—dalam homili terhadap pemahaman dan penerimaan Sabda Allah oleh umat. Penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dilakukan di Stasi St. Thomas Rasul Onan Rihit, menggunakan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen untuk mengumpulkan data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan ilustrasi dalam homili tidak hanya memperdalam pemahaman ajaran Injil tetapi juga meningkatkan keterlibatan umat dengan komunitas dan aplikasi ajaran dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Homili efektif dalam meningkatkan resonansi dan perhatian umat, menuntut pendekatan yang lebih empatik dan kreatif dalam penyampaian. Hasil studi ini menekankan pentingnya adaptasi dan inovasi dalam praktik homiletik untuk menjawab dinamika kehidupan beragama kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** *Homili, keagamaan, ilustrasi, pengaruh spiritual*

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### A. Introduction

Homilies, derived from the Greek noun "homilia," signify more than just a conversation; the term denotes unity and intimate gathering within a religious context (Mitchell, 1999). Historically, as articulated by Origen—one of the early theologians to use the term in a Church context—homilies are explanations of Scripture delivered during the Celebration of the Word (Ulummudin & Su'di, 2019). Their purpose is to deepen understanding of spiritual messages and practical conclusions that can be applied not only in daily life but also within a liturgical context (Harrington, 2001; Landry, 2020).

However, facing the complexities of the modern era, the relevance of homilies extends beyond the mere delivery of religious teachings. Homilies are now considered a vital medium for addressing the dynamics and contemporary challenges in religious life. Research indicates that homilies can serve as a tool to connect Scriptural teachings with the everyday realities of the congregation, thereby creating a deeper and more meaningful spiritual experience (Haiva Satriana Zahrah, 2024). In this context, homilies not only function as a means of conveying moral messages and doctrine but also as a medium to address social and ethical issues faced by the congregation in the modern era. Through presentations that touch both heart and mind, homilies provide a rich and meaningful spiritual experience, linking Scriptural teachings with the realities of congregational life (KWI, 2011). Research also shows that adapting homilies to modern contexts can help the congregation more easily internalize the spiritual and moral messages conveyed. Thus, homilies hold significant potential to strengthen the spiritual connection of the congregation with God and each other, and to promote positive behavioral changes.

Research on homilies within Church liturgy has been extensive, highlighting the importance of homilies as an effective means of spiritual communication. The Homiletic Directory issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments emphasizes the nature and function of homilies within the liturgical context, providing methodological guidelines for preachers (Katekese.id, 2021). Church Document Series No. 113 also offers practical guidance for priests to appreciate and perform homilies effectively (Church Document Series No. 113, 2014). A study at JKI Immanuel Kudus on the influence of guest preachers on the growth of congregational faith shows that variations in homily delivery can enrich the spiritual experiences of the congregation (Asrilita, 2019). Additionally, research on the integration of hymns and contemporary spiritual songs in worship at the Church of Indonesia highlights the importance of liturgical adaptation to remain relevant in a modern context (Sasongko, 2007). Papers on liturgy in the post-modern world also stress the need for liturgical adaptation to meet the challenges of the times, including in homily delivery (Julianto, 2015). These studies demonstrate that homilies not only function as explanations of Scripture but also as a vital medium to respond to the contemporary dynamics and challenges in religious life.

This research aims to analyse the impact of using various types of illustrations in homilies—stories, wise sayings, and personal experiences—on the understanding and reception of God’s Word by the congregation. Employing a qualitative approach, this study examines how narrative elements in homilies, such as introductions, thematic development, resolutions, and epilogues, aid the congregation in internalizing the messages delivered. Furthermore, it evaluates how homilies facilitate profound spiritual experiences, reinforce genuine repentance, and promote positive behavioral changes among the congregation. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights into modern homiletic practices in the Church and their contribution to the spiritual lives of the faithful.

## **B. Method**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand how homilies are delivered and received by the congregation at St. Thomas the Apostle Onan Rihit Station. The primary aim of this approach is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the homily delivery phenomena within a highly specific and personal context. Informant selection was conducted through purposive sampling, with criteria based on active involvement in liturgical activities and their relevance to the research topic, ensuring the information gathered reflects authentic homily practices.

Data was collected using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The in-depth interviews were aimed at exploring informants' perceptions and experiences regarding the delivery and reception of homilies. Participatory observation was conducted during liturgical activities to directly understand the interactions between church administrators and the congregation, as well as the context in which the homilies were delivered. Documentation, including liturgical notes and audio recordings of the homilies, was used to strengthen the results from interviews and observations and add an additional layer of data verification.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings, source and method triangulation was implemented. Source triangulation involved comparing perspectives among different informants to identify similarities and differences in the data collected. Method triangulation utilized various data collection techniques to reduce bias and enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. Furthermore, thematic analysis was conducted to organize and categorize the data into themes relevant to the research objectives.

## **C. Result**

### **1) Homilies Based on Storytelling**

Homilies are sermons delivered by priests or church administrators during mass or the celebration of the Word, aimed at explaining and internalizing the messages of the Gospel. A common method used in delivering homilies is storytelling. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of using stories in homilies on the congregation's

understanding and acceptance of the Gospel messages. A homily typically begins with an introduction that introduces the main theme or message, serving to capture the congregation's attention and set the context. The development of the theme involves further elaboration of the main theme, often by linking the story told to the scriptural text. The resolution in a homily offers practical solutions and applications of the delivered message, providing concrete guidance on how the teachings can be applied in daily life. The epilogue reinforces the main message and gives a final encouragement to implement the teachings. The use of storytelling in homilies is an effective method to build meaning and inspire the congregation. Elements like the introduction, theme development, resolution, and epilogue help the congregation better understand and internalize the message.

## 2) Homilies Based on Wisdom Sayings

Homilies based on wisdom sayings can be a powerful medium for conveying spiritual messages. Choosing appropriate wisdom sayings can add depth and wisdom to the homily, making the conveyed message more stirring and memorable. In homilies, wisdom sayings can be used from the introduction to the conclusion to construct a coherent and inspiring narrative. An engaging introduction might start with a relevant wisdom saying or a parable with profound meaning, aiming to capture the congregation's attention and establish the context and tone of the homily. After introducing the theme, the homily can develop the message by linking it with the scriptural text, using wisdom sayings as a bridge between the sacred text and everyday life.

## 3) Homilies Based on Life Experiences

Homilies based on life experiences often start with a story or personal experience relevant to the theme being discussed. This introduction helps capture the congregation's attention and sets the context for the message to be delivered. Life experiences are used as a tool to develop the theme in the homily. The homilist relates personal or others' experiences to the spiritual teachings found in Scripture. The use of personal life experiences by the homilist enhances the relevance and depth of the message conveyed to the congregation.

## **Output of Homilies Based on Illustrations for the Congregation**

### 1) Understanding the Word of God for Life

Homilies are not just explanations of church doctrine but also pious moral advice based on scriptural testimonies. The homilist plays a crucial role in guiding the congregation to understand and apply the Word of God in daily life. Understanding the Word of God for life comes not only through theological knowledge but also through the practice of prayer and active participation in church activities. Activities like community prayer, devotion, and church environment care are ways to foster a closer relationship with God and apply His teachings in daily life. Active participation in church celebrations, including listening to homilies and engaging in community prayer, helps the congregation deepen their understanding and

appreciation of the Word of God. Congregants actively involved in church activities tend to pay more attention to the messages delivered in homilies and strive to implement them in their daily lives. Understanding the Word of God for life is reflected in the actions of the congregation after leaving the church. Congregants who truly understand and internalize the homily's message tend to make positive changes in their behavior and lifestyle in response to the spiritual teachings they receive.

2) **Experiencing the Living Presence of God**

Homilies in the Church aim beyond just conveying spiritual teachings. Another goal is to build a sense of love and community among the congregation and foster awareness of God's presence in daily life. The experience of God's living presence is reflected in strengthened feelings of gratitude and love towards God and fellow beings. Through prayer and tangible actions, the congregation expresses gratitude for all blessings received from God and extends love to others.

3) **Transforming Life through True Repentance**

True repentance is a spiritual process where an individual acknowledges their sins, abandons incorrect lifestyles, and turns towards God. Homilies help the congregation understand the importance of true repentance in their lives. Through explanations and examples provided in homilies, the congregation gains insight into the importance of acknowledging faults, repenting, and living according to church teachings. Homilies encourage a transformation of behavior and attitudes. Congregants are urged to abandon negative behaviors such as selfishness, arrogance, and deceit, and replace them with behaviors aligned with religious teachings, such as humility, generosity, and kindness. Homily messages not only inspire true spiritual repentance but also encourage implementation in real actions. Congregants are encouraged to engage in the sacrament of repentance, reconcile with others, and perform acts of kindness as evidence of true repentance.

## **D. Discussion**

### **1) Homilies Based on Illustrations by Church Administrators to Facilitate Understanding of God's Word**

Homilies can be likened to narratives that build meaning and inspire listeners. This includes elements that help illustrate the homily as a story. Homilies begin with an introduction that presents the main theme or message, similar to the opening of a story. According to observations from Observer 1 and Observer 2, using stories in homilies helps the congregation understand God's Word and apply it in daily life. The results from Observer 1 and Observer 2 show that the introduction, which introduces the theme at the beginning of the homily, effectively engages the congregation. As stated by Informant 8, "To introduce the theme during the homily, I previously read the Gospel of the day and then choose a part that resonates deeply with both the homilist and the congregation, which garners great enthusiasm. That chosen part becomes the theme of the homily" (interview on March 24, 2024). Similarly, Informants 8 and 9 noted, "To link the message

of the Scriptures with the homily, I first read the Scriptures and then create a story that aligns with the content of the Scriptures. From this story, I extract messages that resonate with the Scriptures” (interview on March 24, 2024). They consistently craft stories first to derive resolutions and solutions that align with the Scriptures, enhancing the congregation's understanding of the homily's content. As Informants 8 and 9 expressed, “In delivering resolutions and solutions, I create stories that relate to life in this station, making it easier to formulate solutions and resolutions that are consistent with the Scriptures” (interview on March 24, 2024). The interviews and observations reveal that church administrators use storytelling in their Sunday homilies to enhance engagement and understanding.

Homilies based on wisdom sayings can be a potent means to convey spiritual messages. Selecting the right wisdom sayings can add depth and insight to the homily. Homilies begin with an engaging introduction, possibly quoting relevant wisdom sayings or starting with a parable of deep meaning. According to observations from Observer 1 and Observer 3, wisdom sayings are used effectively in homilies. In contrast, Observer 9 utilizes stories and life experiences. During the interview on March 24, 2024, the introduction that evokes emotions like joy, concern, or hope can make the congregation connect more emotionally with the homily. Informants 8 and 10 explained, “I choose wisdom sayings that align with the Scriptures, and often use traditional phrases from the Toba Batak community, translated into Indonesian to ensure understanding. For example, a common saying I use is ‘Tubu sitata di buarbuaran, molo manumpak Debata, santetek marabur do hangoluan,’ which means ‘God is the source of all life’” (interview on March 24, 2024). The interviews and observations indicate that church administrators use wisdom sayings in their homilies, incorporating local languages and Indonesian to enhance relevance and understanding.

Homilies based on life experiences can be a very personal and authentic means to share spiritual teachings. In this case, the homilist uses their own life experiences or those of others as a foundation to convey spiritual messages. Homilies start with a story or personal experience relevant to the theme being discussed. Church administrators share with the congregation how their life experiences have led to a deeper understanding of spiritual teachings. According to observations from Observer 2 and Observer 3, life experiences are utilized during homilies. Observer 1 does not use personal experiences during the observation period. However, in an interview on March 24, 2024, Informant 8 mentioned using personal experiences in homilies: “To relate stories, wisdom sayings, and life experiences in the homily, I first read the gospel of the day. I often use personal experiences because they frequently align with both life and the content of the Scriptures. This also allows me to share life experiences that resonate with the Scriptures” (interview on March 24, 2024). When linking the homily with life experiences, Informant 9 stated, “The Scripture verses I use, taken from the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—always relate to human life. For example, this Easter, the good shepherd with his sheep. The good shepherd is Christ himself, who embraces and sacrifices for the salvation

of his flock. I explain that the shepherd is Jesus himself and we are his flock. Then, after creating a story about the shepherd and the sheep, I relate it to the life situations of the congregation or human life. Just as sheep stray when they leave their shepherd, so too can our lives go astray” (interview on March 24, 2024). Similarly, Informant 10 starts by reading the Scriptures and selects a verse that can be linked with the life experiences of the congregation. Through interviews and observations, using life experiences as a source enriches the Sunday homilies.

## **2) The Role of Homilies in the Lives of the Faithful**

The role of homilies is to emphasize the message of God's Word, which is read during the liturgy of the word according to the liturgical context and the life context of the congregation. Scripture readings cannot be neglected in homilies; thus, the homily is part of the celebration of the Word that the Church provides to help its members grow in faith. Ideally, a homily should truly stir the hearts of people and serve as a real example for others to follow.

A homily is not merely an explanation of Church doctrine but also pious moral advice. Rather, it is a declaration of the presence and saving action of God based on the testimony in Scripture. It is conveyed not only in words but also through deeds, as stated by Informant 1, "The practice of prayer has an impact on his family life. With active participation in Church activities, community prayers, devotions, church environment cleanliness, and many more" (interview on March 23, 2024). Some rarely participate in church, but when they are in church, especially during the homily, they do not miss what is said by the church administrators. As stated by Informant 6, "I am quite active in the church even though I rarely serve, but I am active in listening to the Word of God through homilies delivered by church administrators in community prayers as well. I always internalize what is conveyed by the church administrators. Because I know what is spoken by the church administrators is not just made up but also taken from Scripture" (interview on March 23, 2023).

Similarly, Informants 5 and 7 said, "Besides, after returning from church, whether the congregation implements the content of the homilies they heard. These two aspects are fundamental to understanding the meaning of God's Word" (interview on March 23, 2024). The researcher observed that there are community prayers after returning from Church. An active OMK member, Informant 5, stated, "So for myself, I am quite active in practical prayer activities like community prayers, in which I sometimes serve, such as leading songs and prayers of petition. And in the recent pre-Easter period, there were Stations of the Cross activities where I also served, like carrying candles. Especially in the OMK community prayers, I also actively participate; we have an OMK app where I also serve in leading songs and conducting the worship" (interview on March 23, 2024). All informants are actively involved in celebrations at Church and in the community. Through observations, interviews, and documentation, it can be said that through the role of homilies, the faithful are able to experience the presence of God, especially those who

are always grateful for all the blessings and gifts that God has given them. By implementing the messages of the homilies, the faithful can experience the presence of God in their lives.

As demonstrated in the early Church homilies, another purpose of homilies is to foster a sense of community love by praying that people in the community grow in greater love for God and one another daily. Since the work of God's salvation is proclaimed through homilies, and the faith of people in these saving events can be awakened. Interview results from March 23, 2024, by Informant 5 indicate that expressing gratitude for everything one has can be done through "In my own opinion, it is through praying. Perhaps one of the blessings from our Lord we must be grateful for, we offer prayers of thanks to God and not just receiving blessings but also during sorrow we must remain grateful. Because whatever has been given to us has been planned by God and certainly, it is for the best" (interview on March 23, 2024). Similarly, Informant 7 said, "We express thanks in prayer but it is not enough just to pray. Everything we have is from God. God is present in our lives and gives us what we desire. So, whatever I enjoy to the extent possible, I also give to those less fortunate. Thus, I am grateful for all that God has given by helping others and praying. It is not sufficient just to pray but also to act" (interview on March 23, 2024). From the research results, it is no different from others that all informant express gratitude for all they enjoy through prayer, thanking God, and taking action to help those in need.

True repentance is a process where selfishness, deceit, arrogance, and corrupted character within us are purified and changed, reborn into a new person. Through the homilies heard, the faithful are increasingly willing to move towards repentance. Observations from Observer 1, Observer 2, and Observer 3 state that through homilies, the faithful are able to behave well in the community. As stated by Informants 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7, "if there is something to give, certainly it will be given, but if not, then we pray for them. Not only in terms of material but in behavior towards others. And to make peace with people, if indeed wrong, one must first apologize, and living peacefully with others feels very beautiful" (interview on March 24, 2024). Unlike Informants 3 and 4, who stated, "Always acknowledge shortcomings, if you make a mistake then just admit it. Besides, often introspect oneself and also do good among peers without discriminating based on religion or race" (interview on March 24, 2024). Through observations, interviews, and documentation, it can be said that through the role of homilies, the faithful are able to reach true repentance. This can be seen from the level of care among peers and making peace with one another. The faithful always strive to reach repentance.

## **E. Conclusion**

This study explores the delivery methods of homilies by the administrators of St. Thomas the Apostle Onan Rihit Station and assesses their effectiveness in influencing and inspiring the congregation. The findings indicate that the use of stories, wise sayings, and personal experiences not only deepens the congregation's understanding of the



Gospel teachings but also enhances their engagement with the community and the application of these teachings in daily life. The success of homilies in capturing attention and resonating with the congregation underscores the importance of innovation and more empathetic and creative approaches in homily delivery. This challenges church administrators to convey messages that are not only informative but also inspirational, ensuring greater relevance and impact on the congregation's life.

This study presents several limitations, including limited geographical scope and a lack of demographic diversity among informants. Future research could expand this approach by involving more locations and demographic variations, and possibly integrating modern technology in homily delivery to attract a broader and more diverse audience. Overall, homilies play a crucial role in the liturgical and communal life of the church, strengthening the congregation's connection with the teachings and divine presence. Homilies support the congregation on their spiritual journey in a more dynamic and responsive manner. Through continuous adjustments in homily approaches, the church can more effectively meet its congregation's spiritual needs, build a stronger community, and more efficiently respond to contemporary challenges.

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