

## *What Motivates and What Demotivates Sermon Listeners?*

### ABSTRACT

The article presents the question of the so-called good sermon and surveys the subjective opinions of lay people on what they believe motivates and demotivates them to listen to sermons. The compilation of facts indicates that it is very good when a sermon moves from biblical pericopes to life. And the call for pastoral renewal through preaching is, as *Verbum Domini* reminds the Church, that there is a need for preachers whose biblical message will be theologically correct, authoritative, and credible. There is a need for witnesses of the word who will be convinced that the content of the Bible is not abstract, overdone, and that it is practicable in life.

*KEYWORDS: homily; motivation to listen; meeting Jesus; Word of God*

### INTRODUCTION

It is traditional for the Roman Catholic Church to have sermons preached at Sunday Mass, Christmas Mass, and on some other

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occasions. Sermons are also ways of reaching out to people whose religious knowledge is limited to that acquired during school catechesis. Therefore, the homily is supposed to lead to an encounter with Jesus in the word of God. Good sermons generally start from Scripture, instruct in the faith, encourage morality, and try to address the problems of the listeners (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020). And any homily that does not aim to strengthen in the faith does not serve the good and salvation of the listeners. This article examines the issue of the so-called good sermon, and presents a study of the subjective opinions of lay people on what they believe motivates and demotivates them to listen to sermons. The goal of this research of these opinions was, among other things, to point out that lay people are many times motivated by trivial, superficial, irrational reasons. Juxtaposed with the substantive values of the sermon, it can be seen that pastoral care through preaching should be oriented towards what constitutes the subjective premises of some people, so that Christ's Church is governed by Christ and His principles, so as not to turn the House of God into a marketplace (Mark 11:15–17), one aspect of which is attempting to secularize homiletics. It is precisely "the supernatural effectiveness of the word that is based on faith, which is why Benedict XVI, in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, calls for a renewal of faith in the word of God. Seized by this call should ... be the preachers of the word first. For they, too, are succumbing to the processes of laicization and trust more in the persuasive power of media 'trick'" than in the supernatural power of the word of God" (Bieliński, 2017, p. 21). Pastoral renewal in preaching needs to rise above the shallow assessments of psychologists, and focus on ensuring that every homily leads the faithful to Christ.

"In *Verbum Domini*, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the word of God in the life and mission of the Church, Pope Benedict XVI expressed the Church's current discernment and conviction that it is necessary today to preach the word of God

with conviction. The Pope indicated that this is today's way to experience the power of the Gospel" (Bieliński, 2017, p. 5). The purpose of preaching is to convey religious and moral content; a sermon is a religious speech that proclaims God's truth to the faithful, or converts to the faith, with all the obligations it imposes on people. The teachings of sermons must be grounded in Scripture (Pilch, 1958; Benedict XVI, 2010; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

Taking into account the pattern and command of the Lord Jesus, who said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), the need to preach the Gospel appears as one of the priestly tasks. This proclamation of the Gospel finds its expression in the preaching of homilies. A well-prepared, well-written, and well-preached sermon gives people the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of their own faith, to apply Catholic morality to their own lives, and enables listeners to discover that God is present in their lives, as close as they themselves come to Him.

The sermon is the best and most effective way to reach people whose religious instruction ended in secondary school. Given the widespread ignorance of religious matters, the sparse reading of theological publications, sermons inform about God, show what the life of Catholics should be, and replace the many times missed religious lessons and other deficiencies in the understanding of one's faith. People have the opportunity to learn about the teachings of the Church. A Priest preaching a Sunday sermon has the opportunity to influence the attitudes toward faith, God, and Catholic morality of his listeners.

The basis of good sermons is theological truthfulness, reliance on Scripture, and proper knowledge of the subject. Good sermons, recognizing the specific situation of the listeners, skillfully tap into the context of biblical and religious solutions (Pilch, 1958; Benedict XVI, 2010; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020). Therefore, the value of a sermon depends on the measure of holiness of the Priest who is speaking, and how mentally prepared he is generally and currently for the sermon (Maliński, 1964, p. 101). The stylistic

qualities of the sermon are also important, i.e., conciseness, communicativeness, emotionality, rapport, and persuasiveness.

The brevity of the sermon is due to the fact that Sunday Mass must include it, but it should not be too long, because it can, while being interesting and well-crafted, create some problems, such as preventing the reading of the memorial intentions. A homily should be of sufficient length, so that it can be adapted to the circumstances, time, place, and customs of the parish; in this way, it should be neither too short nor too long. A sermon that is too long can become tedious or cease to focus attention on God. Here, brevity is combined with one of the aspects of communicativeness, as it is also sometimes important how the sermon is spoken, taking into account the entire spatial and temporal context of the homily message (peripheral aspects). Listeners take into account the source (the preacher himself), the emitter (the way he speaks), the channel (if it's too cold in the church, for example, people want the sermon to end before it starts), the receptor (audibility), and the target (the sermon aimed at specific people). The Priest's voice can be drowned out not only by external noise, but also by internal noise, e.g. in a flurry of thoughts, where people sometimes use the sermon time to mull over their daily thoughts, unrelated to the sermon topic, or even unrelated to God. To get them away from this internal noise, the sermon must not last too long, sometimes the manner of speech is enough, which, instead of the monotony of a read sermon (like a radio in the background), gives the impression of being spoken, that is, as if directly addressed personally to each person listening, although the listeners are very different (Miller, 1951). And here, thanks to the writing down of the sermon, it is easy to modify it later, to pen a model sermon, for average lay Catholics, and adapt it, for example, to nuns, children, and so on.

The dialogical nature of the sermon is to make the listeners feel that the Priest is speaking to them. In this case, in favor of the written formulation of the text of the sermon is the fact that the

text prepared in written form becomes a condition for the correct flow of thought, and the correctness of the language used (Pilch, 1928; Günthör, 1962; Ireson, 1982; Wilk, 1988), which prevents making many mistakes, causing people to stop listening. If one uses someone else's sermon (e.g., from a book), one should adapt it to the place and circumstances so that mistakes do not occur, so that, for example, a young Priest will not say: "As I remember from the communist times...", or in the Diocese of Gniezno the Priest does not say: "St. John of Dukla, the patron of our diocese", because people will either be surprised or inadvertently misled, get upset, or stop listening. One's own sermon, when built on recurrent words of Scripture, quoting, repeating in the language of a poet, historian, archaeologist, or even an exegete, should furthermore explain, give guidance, advice, or tell a story (Świerzawski, 1964). This means adding explanations to the paraphrase of the Gospel, such as how the attitude of the Pharisees relates to the attitudes of the listeners, or to explain who the Pharisees were (few people know that they were mostly laymen, and Jewish priests were a minority among them (VanderKam, 2006)). To build a homily with a great deal of dialogicity, it is necessary to consider the motivation to listen at the beginning of the homily. Arousing interest, or motivation to listen, can be served by starting with a reference to the experiences, expectations, or problems of the listeners, or by using rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions, and any asking and answering of questions, while they may not meet with immediate interest because of the subject matter, often result in at least listening because of curiosity ("What's next?") as to what the answer to the question posed is, what the solution to the problem given is, etc. (Stroba, 1964).

The communicativeness of a sermon refers to the words that the Priest speaks, and the written text prepared becomes the foundation for the correct formulation of the thoughts conveyed, and the correctness of the language used (Pilch, 1928; Günthör, 1962, 1982; Wilk, 1988). For a sermon to be communicative it must be

imbued with the theological message in a clear manner. The homily should be based on the sources of Scripture and the liturgy (Vatican II, 1963); however, in a sermon one can refer to literature, not only religious literature, and even films, if it is done well, writing down the content beforehand. A variety of literature can inspire homilies, especially for its diversity, and the richness of its subject matter, as literature supports in a person the formation of a critical mind, and the development of proper judgment. In addition to theological books, many other publications, including articles, can be used to enhance sermons referring to the Bible. Also, some films can be useful in this regard, also in the apostolic activity of the Church (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1971), an example of which is the well-known film *God Is Not Dead*. Many examples can be drawn from this film, evidence of God's creation of the world, or His very existence, but also of God's providence, which, among other things, puts Priests where they are needed, sometimes directing the course of events in peculiar ways.

Considering the content of the message, mistakes should be avoided regarding the formulation and transmission of the content of the homily. One should not recount one's own memories, which are the reproach of one's own misdeeds. When a Priest speaks about himself in a sermon, he represents the priestly state, and the laity often hold past mistakes against the Priest, resorting to slander and gossip. They do not rejoice with converted sinners, but seem to deny their transformation. Priests should avoid talking about themselves; instead, they should talk about their experience as if about someone else's. The most important thing is to avoid making the homily excessively secular, without reference to the Bible. If the preacher refers to poetry unrelated to the faith, or books, articles or films that contribute nothing to the religious and moral life of the listeners, or without reference to God and theology deals with some other field of knowledge, then the homily ceases to be one. Sometimes a homily may even

be very thoroughly developed, but in a field of knowledge other than theology, and if no reference is made to any biblical quotations at all, the sermon will remain detached from God. As a result, although the topic of the homily was supposed to be an existential question based on an analysis of the Mass readings and the needs of the listeners (Kuc, 1972), the theory did not find sufficient resonance in practice, i.e. the listeners heard a secular lecture, like one from a pharmacist on contraception, instead of a homily. Meanwhile, the preacher should use the arguments of faith, the fact that the Church aims at the salvation and perfection of people; so he can, for example, support his homily with arguments from pharmaceutical and psychological publications about the effects of contraception, if he does not forget to add to them a theological explanation, combine them with an interpretation of Church teaching, give an answer to the question of why contraception is a sin. When the Priest quotes famous people, tells facts, refers to the wisdom of sages, theologians, philosophers and even non-believers, whose thinking is profoundly relevant, and teaches the truth, then he grasps the listeners' interest. Interest makes people listen, and this in turn makes it possible to effectively get a message across to them. When, for example, a Priest says "a man who wants to fly must first of all learn to walk," thus adding to this a theological dimension, such a quotation from Nietzsche can make a good impression even on non-believers.

The emotionality of a sermon refers to the feelings aroused by it. In favor of the written formulation of the text of the sermon is the fact that the edited text becomes the foundation of correct thinking, the preacher's not giving in to emotions, and the correctness of the language used (Pilch, 1928; Günthör, 1962, 1982; Wilk, 1988), which allows for a balanced, calm, tasteful speech. The sermon is actually the only form of speech that a Priest can address to most parishioners, covering many topics, and explaining many issues. These matters sometimes arouse great emotions either among Priests or among some parishioners. A factual sermon will

prevent phrases that would not change attitudes. For example, a sermon can touch on the topic of preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation, to responsibly receive the sacrament in maturity. It can also explain the need for donations to the parish, such as for the heating of the church. A little bit of life problems added to the theological theory can make listeners realize a lot. People, unfortunately, often prefer to accuse than listen; however, the sermon can provide explanations conveyed in a way that is safe for the priest, citing the position of the Church. Priests can form people through their sermons into people with a mature Catholic take on many issues, explaining usually not as specialists in secular professions, but as specialists in spiritual life, matters of faith, God, religion, morality, etc. Preachers can also tactfully criticize, rebuke, question something; for example, a sermon can be devoted to the issue of euthanasia on the Day of the Sick. Writing down the sermon will allow them to subtly, yet clearly enough, draw attention to a sin, present rational arguments, explain the essence of this sin, and see its conditions. Writing down a sermon allows Priests to use arguments efficiently, find the causes and present the possibility of changing, with an equivalent discussion of all important aspects. In order to take care of the proper emotionality of the homily, it is necessary to take care of the experiential aspect of the listeners and the preacher, in addition to the proper theological content. A good sermon must also maintain proper balance between experience and the content, which is important, but must not outweigh the content (Stroba, 1964). Writing down a sermon will certainly help that.

The persuasiveness of a sermon is its impactfulness, the authority of which comes from the tabernacle. A written sermon makes it possible to edit its text, which becomes a clear communication of some truth of faith, pattern of conduct, etc., framed in a theologically correct, linguistic way (Pilch 1928; Günthör, 1962, 1982; Wilk, 1988), and at the same time not using psycho-manipulation (persuasiveness of the sermon is an attempt to



influence people in order to form valuable attitudes and behavior, but preserving the full freedom of choice of those listening). One should avoid mistakes resulting from the use of irrelevant themes when changing the subject, as this causes ambiguity. One should avoid speaking in shallow, ambiguous terms, or too general terms, in a stereotypical, oversimplified manner; using too sophisticated words, in a register inappropriate for the place, or slang inappropriate for the audience; excessive neutrality, i.e., trying to please everyone, so that instead of clearly specifying what is a sin and what is not, one tells a story without a moral. Excessive neutrality can also overlook issues of bearing the consequences of one's choices, which fails to make people aware that their sins entail greater or lesser negative consequences, and that justice is not always the same as equality. If the sermon loses its moral point, if the theological message gets diluted, then even if the listeners listen to it attentively, it will benefit them nothing, it will not illuminate their reality with faith, or give them anything for salvation.

In order for a homily to become a successful attempt to influence people, in order to instill valuable attitudes and behaviors in them, it is necessary to plan it well, and write it down to stick to the correct order of the issues discussed. First, it is important to clarify or specify a problem, a biblical theme, or one that the listeners may have. Then you need to provide examples of experiences, solutions, arguments, or an answer to the question posed earlier. They should be relevant, unambiguous, and real, that is, potentially accessible to the listeners. This response should include the word of God, as bringing solutions to human problems. However, it should be remembered that only someone who is convinced can convince others. A Priest should understand what he is saying. In addition, he should say what he has thought through, so that he can say with conviction "this is wrong". Ultimately, it is necessary to point out to the listeners the possibilities they have to change their behavior, or ways to solve a problem in their

daily lives. The preacher encourages them to use the solution he proposes or change their behavior in a particular situation (Pilch, 1928; Rzeszewski, 1958; Śliwiński, 2008).

The Priest lectures on knowledge, views on life and morality, which should convey the views of the Church, as if conveying the words of God Himself. The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle next to him enables the preacher to show the listeners where, or rather who the authority of his words comes from. Further, the more secular the life of the listeners, the more attentively he is listened to by “Sunday Catholics”, the more he becomes the only communicator of faith and God’s truths. The Priest has the opportunity to positively influence their spiritual development and their moral conduct. The preparation of such a speech requires taking time to develop and write down the homily; however, this is the time when the Priest becomes a steward of God’s truths. Aside from a little time, intelligence, and consistency of one’s own beliefs with what is being preached, a Priest’s greatest expertise is his personal holiness (Maliński, 1964). Then, when a holy Priest speaks to the people, one can sense that the Church does not resort to secularization or liberal innovations, but the Church represented by the Priest, while remaining on the heights of its values, and proximity to God, only leans to give a hand to lost people, and uplift. Writing down homilies helps to keep their content within the framework of some method (such as a three-part composition: life experience, so says the Lord, and Christian life). In addition, there are two main “sources of failure in building sermons: too much methodology or no method at all. The latter is unforgivable, because entering the pulpit without methodical preparation is an insult to God and people” (Rzeszewski, 1957, p. 171).

In order to see the Holy Spirit’s action as working from within, as a desire to receive the word and respond to it (Benedict XVI, 2010; Czaja, 2008), consider this:

The thundering of chaotic words must be replaced by the quiet and effective word of the living God. It requires study, scholarly deepening, theological reflection, liturgical proclamation, prayerful reading and, above all, missionary witness in the Church and to the world. It is a difficult, prophetic task that must be undertaken with all responsibility, with the awareness of an undertaking that presupposes listening in faith and the courage to set out, the ability to look beyond the present (De Virgilio, 2011, p. 261).

Writing a sermon can also serve the Priests themselves, as deepening the topic allows them to extend their knowledge. In addition, writing serves as a kind of “therapy” for professional burnout of various kinds, the realization that with your words you can convert or improve someone, be a cure for depression; and by reading books they can eliminate possible tendencies of vocation crisis. Writing can also be a cure for feelings of loneliness (Noworol, 2020).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD

The study of people’s motivation to listen to sermons was conducted based on our online survey. The questionnaire consisted of 59 items. The first six concern the characteristics of the respondent, Question 4 referred to the selection of respondents. All respondents were Roman Catholics (the questionnaire was based on the premise that people of other faiths should not fill out the survey). A total of 57 questions were considered because the discriminant analysis showed that Questions 10 and 38 were undiagnostic given the purpose of the survey. Therefore, the two questions were not considered for further analyses. The survey contained closed and open-ended questions, which prevents full statistical analyses of some questions and does not qualify the

method as a psychometric tool (for which reliability and validity could be determined). However, as a survey, excluding Questions 10 and 38, it meets the requirements for survey design as a research tool in this form.

The research sample included 243 people, who responded to the survey, 74% women and 26% men. The average age was 42 (16–77). The majority (70%) had a university degree, and others were educated as follows: secondary (23%), primary (4%), vocational (2%), and junior high school (1%). All were Roman Catholics: 91% were practitioners and 9% were partial practitioners. Our analysis of the survey results should be based on the answers given by the practicing believers who listen to sermons in church (86%). However, the survey was aimed to find out not only about sensible but also irrational motivations, so the responses of partial practicing who do not listen to sermons in church, but made comments about them, were not excluded (Question 6).

## STUDY RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Indicating the subjectivity and diversity of interpretations, the survey began with questions about sermon length (Table 1).

Table 1. Subjective assessment of sermon length.

7. Which sermon do you consider long?		
	%	<i>n</i>
> 10 min.	16	38
15 min.	14	34
20 min.	34	81
25 min.	12	30
30 min.	24	59

As you can see, not only the answers but even the way the questions are understood reflect that opinions about the Church vary greatly. It seems that the majority of the subjects consider sermons short (78%), while the rest think that a sermon should not be too short (Question 8). However, considering the results in Table 1 (Question 7), the answer depends on what the person understands as “short sermon” and “long sermon”.

Most people believe (88%) that the homily is an important part of Sunday Mass (Question 9). Although, as studies have shown, most people do not listen to sermons (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

78% say they know Christian truths, but need motivation to put them into practice (Question 12).

More than half (51%) of the respondents believe that the preacher should instruct, because not everyone knows what to do or how to act (Question 16). It is worth noting that St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, writes about the aspect of the effectiveness of God’s word, its faith-forming function (Benedict XVI, 2010; Czaja, 2008): “Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

92% of the faithful expect the sermon to deepen their religious knowledge (Question 11). However, members of the congregation in a typical church vary in terms of age, education and religious knowledge, degree of piety, and many other characteristics and attitudes that affect whether content is new to them or not (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

96% expect that the content of the sermon will stimulate them to reflect on their own behavior and mobilize them to establish a deeper relationship with God (Question 13). However, attitudes are relatively stable, so a possible change in attitude is usually a complex and lengthy process, and while a single message could affect a change in attitude, to objectively assess such a change one would need to assess a person’s attitude on an issue both before the message and after the message (i.e., before and after listening

to the sermon). In addition, memorization of arguments, understanding of the sermon, and assimilation of content are generally concerned with long-term memory if they involve application of the sermon to one's life. Studies of these factors would require a large time interval and a method comparing a given aspect of a person's life before and after hearing the sermon. It seems that such research could only be reliably conducted using a case study method (Aronson et al., 1997; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

80% expect the preacher to give specific instructions on how to live, abide in good, fight evil (Question 15). It is worth taking into account that concrete indications on how to fight evil include warning against religious syncretism, liberalism, extreme feminism, anti-clericalism, and other spiritual threats (Noworol, 2020).

87% expect the preacher to give them encouragement in difficulties by inspiring hope (Question 14).

Almost all respondents (94%) are eager to listen when a homily is based on the Bible (Question 17). Indeed, there is God speaking through the word preached in the Church when a homily is based on Scripture, and it is His word that is made effective by the inner work of the Holy Spirit, who makes it work in the hearts of the faithful. Therefore, a good homily is an interpretation of biblical texts (Benedict XVI, 2010).

92% of respondents say that explaining the truths and mysteries of the Christian faith encourages them to listen (Question 18).

85% believe that they are motivated to listen when the preacher explains the meaning of the feasts celebrated and the liturgy celebrated (Question 19).

46% are willing to listen when a preacher talks about the action of evil spirits (Question 21). Meanwhile, it is important when in the modern world to talk about the action of evil spirits, which are real, and are the cause of all evil. And it is very important for human faith to be aware that God never does evil, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, never does evil. Evil

is done by evil spirits and people listening to them (Noworol, 2020; Kochel, 2007).

60% believe that preachers should mention the issues of death, God's judgment, heaven, purgatory, and hell more often (Question 20). This earthly life is not everything, because there is eternity (Ratzinger, 2008).

54% think that preachers talk more often about mercy, forgetting about God's justice (Question 22). However, sermons should emphasize that if a person does not recognize the gravity of the evil he does and does not acknowledge his sin, he or she will not find a way to renounce evil, go to confession, apologize, and receive forgiveness of guilt (Noworol, 2020).

45% think they are more motivated to listen to content in which preachers firmly and decisively admonish the faithful about keeping God's commandments (Question 23). Also, *Verbum Domini* specifically calls for speaking anew today, fearlessly, with conviction, about the effectiveness of God's word (Benedict XVI, 2010).

72% find it interesting when the preacher cites examples from the lives of saints (Question 24).

65% find it motivating when the preacher refers to Church documents (Question 25).

32% find it demotivating to cite quotes from poetry and (secular) literature, or intriguing statements from famous people (Question 26). It is true that such sermons, which are built on mere repetition of words, quoting a poet, historian, archaeologist, or even an exegete, lose their religious essence, and give people nothing – neither guidance nor advice; nor do they tell a Bible story (Świerzawski, 1964; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

85% think it is interesting to see examples taken from everyday life (Question 27).

39% are willing to listen when the preacher touches on patriotism (Question 28).

52% think it is right when a preacher addresses social issues (Question 29).

8% think that a preacher should address political issues (Question 30).

74% believe that a sermon should not be a commentary on current media events (Question 31). Meanwhile, it is very important that if a sermon contains too little religious content, it is actually a secular speech, which cannot quite be called a sermon. If the religious content is missing, the speech loses the character of a sermon (Pilch, 1958; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

30% feel that jokes, humor, and anecdotes in the homily do not encourage listening to the sermon, and do not color the message (Question 32).

38% perceive negatively when the preacher gets out from behind the pulpit and walks around the church (Question 33).

42% perceive negatively when the preacher uses various types of symbols, signs, OHP slides (Question 34).

82% feel disturbed by a screaming and noisy child during the homily (Question 35). Respect for people obliges caregivers to keep their child quiet in the church. The survey did not include a fairly obvious similar question about external conditions beyond one's control, but in general, everyone is also disturbed by rumbling echoes, noise (bad sound system), glaring sun, and when it is too cold, which has some bearing on the audience, i.e. demotivates, distracts, and disturbs in an obvious way.

66% find it annoying when the preacher shouts and raises his voice during the homily (Question 36).

93% perceive it negatively when the preacher speaks monotonously (Question 37). Although it should be kept in mind that the word "monotonously" is sometimes understood very differently.

66% think it bothers them when the preacher uses dialectal expressions (Question 41).

74% think they are demotivated when the preacher (noticeably) reads the sermon (Question 39). However, such statements come from those who apparently are unable to put themselves in the preacher's shoes. The truth is that a lot depends on how one



reads. And the advantage of a good sermon is to have it written down beforehand. A written down and well-prepared sermon does the job, as the faithful will be more willing to listen to it (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

92% of people think they are disturbed when a preacher speaks in pathetic (exalted, pompous) language (Question 40). However, for example, the “Holy Cross Sermons” used a solemn form, due to the highly educated audience. And similarly, when sermons are preached to a special group, such as seminarians, the language can be more sophisticated.

44% think that the content of a sermon usually evokes positive feelings for them (Question 42).

36% believe that sermon content usually convinces and motivates them (Question 43). Meanwhile, most people listen to the middle part of the sermon; sermons are listened to most attentively by those in the age group of 30 to 49 (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020). Listening is crucial for remembering and translating into concrete aspects of one’s own life. Pope Francis’ words apply to listeners as listeners who not only hear a sermon, but after hearing it are able to apply it in their own life; the art of listening is more than hearing something. To hear, in communication with others, is a capacity of the heart that enables closeness, without which there is no true spiritual encounter (Francis, 2013; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

58% think that the examples cited in sermons are usually relevant and timely (Question 44).

21% believe that the content of sermons is usually not too general, contains specific life lessons, and should be formulated in terms of general advice: “be good, avoid sins, love God and your neighbor” (Question 45). As for the other respondents, it is worth remembering that the evaluation of a sermon is a very subjective matter, which may not coincide with either the quality of the sermon (the evaluation of this aspect objectively depends, among other things, on knowledge of theology), or its message

(the evaluation depends, among other things, on the state of life, piety), or even the listenability (e.g., listeners say “I liked it” but they don’t know what the sermon was about; it should be noted that if this happens after a long time, e.g., a few days after listening to the sermon, this applies only to memory issues, but if listeners speak this way immediately after Mass, inattentive listening, or lack thereof, can usually be inferred) (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

15% believe that preachers should not speak with more fervor, emotional involvement, vocal expression, as they are comfortable with the current manner of speaking (Question 46).

73% think that sometimes the preacher establishes an “inner dialogue” with them (Question 47). However, a sermon should influence listeners at the cognitive level (they learn new information, religious and moral knowledge), behavioral level (they transfer the content they heard into their own practical actions), and emotional level (Schwarz, 1993; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020). Emotions influence, among other things, the attention of listeners (e.g., someone bored or upset by mistakes stops listening), and the motivation to listen (e.g., people are not inclined to listen to someone they don’t like, and if they did listen, their evaluation will be more critical). Emotions are important because affect (emotions and mood) have an effect on perceptual and memory accessibility, and emotions are both a result of processing (people stop or start listening) and influence information processing (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020; Clore, 1998). Emotional reactions of listeners can affect the listenability of a sermon (“on” or “off”), but similarly, other factors can cause listening from a certain point (“on”), or up to a certain point (“off”), such as fatigue, length, incomprehensibility, thoughtfulness, etc. (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020). In addition, the understanding between the preacher and listeners depends greatly on the language used in the sermon (Matuszczyk, 2003; Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

57% believe that sometimes the content of a sermon can relate directly to themselves (Question 48). However, it will never be the case that a sermon is tailored to everyone. It is worth noting that one of the dimensions of the effectiveness of God's word is its ecclesiality (Czaja, 2008; Bieliński, 2017), in conformance to the words of Christ: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it" (Luke 8:21). The word of God is capable of attracting people to the faith, but also of creating empathy, a bond uniting believers, being a word that allows one to understand others (Czaja, 2008; Bieliński, 2017).

65% believe that sometimes sermons motivate them to take specific actions and reflections (Question 50).

66% think that sometimes words linger with them after a sermon, which force them to reflect (Question 49). Much has been written about how God's word affects listeners, transforms them and their lives (Witczyk, 2006). However, God speaks through His Word, the Holy Spirit introduces the faithful to all truth (Benedict XVI, 2010), but man's response depends on what the soil of his heart is (Mark 4:1–20).

44% think that some sermons are too shallow, obvious, trivial, while others are not (Question 51).

68% believe that they occasionally "switch off" and stop listening to the sermon (Question 52). Here it is worth noting that sermon listening surveys show that Catholics in Poland most often inaccurately listen to sermons (Noworol & Ostafiński, 2020).

52% state that the preacher's dress and appearance are irrelevant (Question 55).

69% believe that the preacher's attitude and gestures are important to them (Question 54). However, lay people are many times guided by trivial, superficial, irrational considerations that should not be taken into account in pastoral care as guidance.

92% think that diction during a sermon is important to them (Question 53).

86% believe that linguistic correctness during homilies is important (Question 56).

Moreover, people's expectations are very different. But it can be deduced that, in principle, a sermon should talk about God, and the truths of the Roman Catholic faith, referring to Mass readings. Valuable, among other things, were these responses to the question "What are your personal expectations of sermons?":

- "To bring God in the Trinity closer."
- "That they will deepen my religious knowledge and faith, that they will make me reflect on my life and continually convert, that they will contribute not only to the development of my spirituality, but will also stimulate intellectual effort to get to know God also reasonably."
- "The sermon is to explain and bring me closer to the Word of God. To be a commentary on the readings and the Gospels. I don't like it when he brings up other topics, especially political and social issues."
- "More Gospel and truths of faith in sermons. Less social and family psychology."
- "More reference to the Word of God."

As in *Dei Verbum*, it states that "Scripture should be read and interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written", that is, in the Church in which it originated and is faithfully transmitted, as well as in a personal story, in living the relationship with God, which is a fundamental condition for the communication of the Word of God (Vatican II, 1967; Bieliński, 2017).

However, in the case of the question "What in your opinion do you find most demotivating in sermons?" it should be remembered that many people make absurd statements, criticize Priests, ridicule or slander them. In the statements of people you can see the lack of basic theological knowledge, anticlericalism, or insulting Priests by people who should believe in what they wrote (e.g. "I suffer during sermons" – someone who says such things has no idea what it means to suffer; moreover, they are

doing harm both to those they judge unfairly and to those who really suffer). Unfortunately, people used this question to criticize Priests inappropriately, and no rational answers or reliable results could be obtained.

Noteworthy are some of the answers to the question "What do you find most motivating in sermons?":

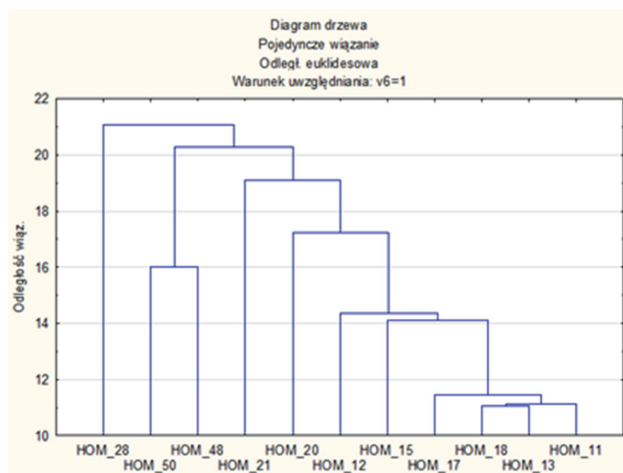
- "To make us reflect, open our eyes to the fact that each of us must constantly convert, and that this conversion requires repentance and atonement. I find it motivating when I see that the Priest is really trying. When he focuses on faith and God, when he sometimes openly raises the subject of difficulties in faith. And when he tirelessly exhorts to pray and live a life worthy of a Christian."
- "Love of God. Above everything, especially above sin and human weakness. I like it when the sermon lifts me up and encourages me to work on myself."
- "Speaking directly about God, His justice, explaining directly the main truths of faith. In a word, back to the catechism."

And the most relevant are Questions 13, 18, 11, 17, 12, 15, 48, 50, 21, 20, 28, hence we present their detailed analysis.

In order to select the variables that affect motivation to listen to sermons, a cluster analysis was applied, using Statistica software. Various configurations of variables were analyzed, and among them, the one that optimally describes the motivation to listen to sermons was selected, and forms a logical configuration. This means that the obtained configuration can be considered a set of variables that optimally describe positive motivation to listen to sermons; therefore, these are the variables that can be considered a set of diagnostic variables (optimally diagnosing) positive motivation to listen to sermons.

The resultant optimal configuration includes four clusters (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Cluster analysis of Questions 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 28, 48, 50.



The structure of the first cluster is as follows: 13 (“I expect the content of the sermon to stimulate me to reflect on my behavior and mobilize me to a deeper relationship with God”), linked most closely to 18 (“Explaining the truths and mysteries of the Christian faith encourages me to listen”), meaning that people are most likely to listen to sermons that direct their lives and specific choices according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic religion. The two variables are then joined by 11 (“I expect the sermon to deepen my religious knowledge”), and 17 (“I’m eager to listen when the homily is based on Scripture, because I’m curious about the explanation and interpretation of biblical texts”), together forming the cluster (((13, 18), 11), 17). This means that sermons are most listened to and appeal most to the faithful when they explain issues of faith, based on the Bible, and at the same time refer to the lives of concrete people, to the choices they make, such as a sermon in referring to the Passion of Christ shows that sins are not an abstraction, but wounds inflicted on Jesus, and anyone who sins is a fellow crucifier of Christ. Further, the point is not

to sin, not to inflict suffering on Jesus. Such a sermon is eloquent, striking to the depths of the soul, clarifying, and directing human conduct to guide people towards salvation. For when the Word of God is proclaimed and explained in a homily, it is Jesus himself speaking. And a homily that combines literary analysis and the theological message of the biblical text in a correct and balanced way becomes a way to encounter Jesus. Every person needs an introduction to the Word of God, which can lead to an encounter with Christ, the living Word of God (Benedict XVI, 2010; Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2014; Bieliński, 2017; Noworol, 2020).

Cluster 2 is formed by variables 15 (“I expect the preacher to give specific instructions on how to live, abide in good, fight evil”) and 12 (“I know Christian truths, but need motivation to put them into practice”). Cluster two combines with Cluster 1 to form a larger cluster together, illustrating that sermons should be, as St. John Vianney called the commandments, “like road signs leading to heaven, like signs with names placed on street corners so that we know which way we are going”.

Cluster 3 includes variables 50 (“Do the sermons motivate you to specific actions and thoughts?”) and 48 (“Can you relate the content of the sermon directly to yourself?”). This means that people like it when sermons motivate them to think personally. It is worth emphasizing here, and in pastoral care, that in addition to the anamnetic, making present Christ and His saving works, the Word also has a soteriological function. This means that the salvific significance of the Word of God is due to its special focus on understanding, knowledge, instruction about salvation (Bieliński, 2017). As in the words of the Apostle Paul: “It [the Gospel] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Cluster 4 includes variables 21 (“I’m happy to listen when the preacher talks about the workings of Satan and evil spirits”) and 20 (“I think preachers should remind people more often about the ultimate things: death, God’s judgment, heaven, purgatory,

hell"). This means that in the modern world there is a pressing need to show people that evil spirits do exist, that they are real personal entities, and that they are the source of evil. The actions of evil spirits, through temptation, deception, and inflicting suffering on people (God never does evil), are aimed at bringing people to eternal damnation. In the modern world, this awareness that one is not indifferent to what one does with one's life is very necessary; it is important to warn people of the danger of the idols of modern times, which include a variety of sins, but also idolatry that puts health above God, to which many people have succumbed in recent years (Noworol, 2020).

This cluster combines with Clusters 1 and 2 to form the most diagnostic triad of clusters. It is also joined by Cluster 3, and joins as the last, Question 28 ("I'm eager to hear when a preacher addresses patriotism in sermons"), referring to people's ingrained love for their homeland, which was most beautifully exemplified by St. John Paul II when he kissed the ground upon arrival. Such love for one's country directs people toward mutual respect, and respect for history, so as not to succumb to liberal trends of anti-church globalization (Balon, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

Priests preach according to the command of the Lord Jesus: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). And it is a good thing when, citing Scripture, the sermon is "*genus deliberativum*" that is, instruction, advice, encouragement. Also, the practical conclusion of the surveys of the faithful as to what motivates and demotivates them to listen to sermons is that sermons, which should be present at Mass on Sundays and major feasts, should discuss theological truths in a way that listeners can relate to their own lives. It is very good when the sermon moves from the Bible pericopes to life. It is good when



the Gospel is repeated by various means, which includes religious content and a moral message.

In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI points out the urgency of the ministry of preaching to bring the Word of God closer to modern people, including those insufficiently evangelized, and enable them to access God. The homily is intended to meet Jesus in the Word of God, to experience the power of the Gospel, to experience the effectiveness of the Word of God (Benedict XVI, 2010; Bieliński, 2017). The Word of God is not about historical presence, but the presence of Christ as the One who is currently asking man, addressing him, and waiting for his answer, which is faith (Czaja, 2008; Bieliński, 2017). "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). Theology specifies that the rooting of faith in hearing the Word of God belongs to its mysterious structure (Benedict XVI, 2010; Czaja, 2008). Apostolic faith is animated by an inner impulse to communicate Christ to every person. And the appropriate response that man gives to God is faith. Faith is an adequate attitude, man's response to the revelation given to him by God, which reaches him through the preaching of the Word of God. Faith, the essence of which is a personal relationship with Christ, and trust in Him (Benedict XVI, 2010; Bieliński, 2017). "Faith does not mean merely accepting a certain set of truths about the mysteries of God, man, life and death, and things to come. Faith consists of a deep, personal relationship with Christ (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 84). "The whole history of salvation progressively demonstrates this profound bond between the word of God and the faith which arises from an encounter with Christ. Faith thus takes shape as an encounter with a person to whom we entrust our whole life" (Benedict XVI, 2010, no. 25). This encounter with God takes place especially in the Eucharist – "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14), man meets God in prayer. The Church lives through the Eucharistic Christ, and it is not the homily that

is the essence, since the heart of the Church is the Eucharist (Benedict XVI, 2010; John Paul II, 2003).

John Paul II's *Verbum Domini* reminds the Church that there is a need for preachers of the word whose message of the Bible is authoritative and credible. There is a need for witnesses of the word who will convince themselves that the content of the Bible is not abstract, not overdone, while it is concrete and realizable in life. This is the task for pastoral renewal through preaching, to lead to Jesus, so that the Holy Spirit can guide listeners to a deeper faith. Deepening the truth of the mystery of the Word is also a call to the listeners. To speak anew, without fear, to preach with conviction, the point is to educate the faithful to understand God's action in the history of salvation, in the personal history of each believer, in order to lead people to love God and their neighbors (Benedict XVI, 2010; Siwek, 2011; Bieliński, 2017).

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