

RYSZARD HAJDUK CSsR

BENIGNITAS PASTORALIS IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

A b s t r a c t. Pope Francis addresses to the whole Church the appeal for pastoral conversion, involving the proclamation of the Gospel to all people yearning for the kindness and sensitivity of the Saviour. In the teaching of the Bishop of Rome, *benignitas pastoralis* plays an important role as a spirit of mercy and gentleness accompanying pastoral concern for sinners – the weak, the suffering and despairing. Pastoral gentleness should also shape the ministry of the word which continued to play a significant function in the saving mission of the Church. Because *benignitas pastoralis* was most fully expressed in the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ and His earthly activity, it is why the task of preachers of the word of God is to prolong the mission of the Saviour, showing people the gentle and merciful face of God, bending solicitously over human weakness and proclaiming the message of salvation in a simple and comprehensible language. The presence of *benignitas pastoralis* in preaching makes it possible to reach the audience with the Gospel, discovering the true face of a merciful God, and find in His word a source of strength needed for their spiritual growth. So executed, the ministry of the word is opposed to Pelagianism, rigorism and permissiveness, because it points to the “primacy” of God’s love which thus enables man to achieve the ideal of holiness according to the ideal of the Gospel.

Key words: preaching; homily; proclamation; pastoral care; gentleness.

In his teaching Pope Francis calls the whole Church to pastoral conversion which is to rely on the proclamation of the Gospel to all people, inviting them to live in friendship with Jesus (cf. EG 27).¹ The task of the Church is to be a servant and mediator of love that leads to forgiveness and self-sacrifice (cf. MV 12). Believers in Christ are called to “run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challen-

Ks. prof. dr hab. RYSZARD HAJDUK CSsR – wykładowca na Wydziale Teologicznym Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego; adres do korespondencji: ul. Kardynała Stanisława Hozjusza 15, 11-041 Olsztyn; e-mail: reich-hart@wp.pl

¹ Rainer BUCHER, “Mehr als Stellschrauben,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 6(2016): 15.

ges us, with their pain and their pleas” (EG 88) in order to give them the goodness and tenderness of the Saviour.

Such an approach to the mission of the Church calls to mind *benignitas pastoralis* which consists in performing pastoral ministry in the spirit of mercy and gentleness accompanying sinners – the weak, suffering and despairing. The ideal of the ‘pastoral of gentleness’ refers to the term συγκατάβασις that was used by the Fathers of the Church (Origen, Saint Basil, Saint John Chrysostom) and indicates the descent of God’s love to people to be passed to them.² *Benignitas pastoralis* means God’s kenosis towards the helpless and immature man who is injured by his sins to show him mercy and help him to find the hope of salvation.³

Since *benignitas pastoralis* sets the direction of the pastoral conversion proclaimed by Pope Francis, and is the paradigm for the entire activity of the Church, the ministry of the word should also be fulfilled in a spirit of mercy and gentleness. This thesis is further justified by the action of God who adapted His way of self-communication to people so that they could accept His truth (cf. DV 2). Therefore, preachers of the word of God are obliged to imitate the divine συγκατάβασις, giving all people the message of salvation in a manner appropriate to their cognitive abilities.

This article is an attempt to show *benignitas pastoralis* as applied to the proclamation of the word of God. To get a fuller picture of the issues the ideal of gentleness manifested in the action of God towards men will be presented first, and then the rules of the ministry of the word in the spirit of *benignitas pastoralis* and its fruits expected due to the needs of listeners will be examined.

1. THE DIVINE PATTERN OF GENTLENESS

God is gracious, slow to anger and very gentle (cf. Ps. 103,8). His desire is that man knows Him and is near to Him. Man has difficulty in ascending

² Rudolf BRÄNDLE, “Συγκατάβασις als hermeneutisches und ethisches Prinzip in der Paulusauslegung des Johannes Chrysostomus,” in *Stimuli. Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Ernst Hassman*, ed. Georg Schöllgen, Clemens Scholten (Münster: Franz Joseph Dölger-Institut, 1996), 298-300.

³ Marciano VIDAL, “Carisma redentorista y propuesta moral,” in *Ser redentorista hoy. Testimonios sobre el carisma*, ed. Noel Londoño (Roma: Comisión de Espiritualidad CSSR, 1996), 419; José S. BOTERO, *La benignidad pastoral. Hacia una pedagogía de la Misericordia* (Bogotá: Paulinas, 2005), 60.

to the top, but God comes to his aid in the form of revelation.⁴ First, He lets people recognize Himself, because no one is able on their own to come to the truth about God. The Almighty Creator is always greater than the human mind and man is not able to embrace the mystery of God with his intellect. As St. John Chrysostom teaches, God descends to man on his own initiative so that he can “understand” Him according to his perceptual abilities. This descent of God (συγκατάβασις) is a manifestation of His compassion and gentleness; thus God reveals Himself to the poor and weak people everything they need for salvation.⁵

The gentleness of God found the fullest expression in the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Resigning from His greatness, the divine Logos descended toward people and meets their needs. By the coming of the Son of God, the Creator stripped Himself of His glory and immersed Himself in human misery and hopelessness. The love of God impels His Word to come down to man to call him to a change of heart and to show him the way to the fullness of life. Jesus immerses Himself in the reality of ordinary people who are enslaved by sin. As a doctor He overcomes our human impotence and gives people support. God’s wisdom brought by Jesus to the world enlightens man and becomes for him a source of power, thanks to which man ceases to focus on himself and rising above worldly matters, can gradually achieve perfection⁶.

Gentleness, with which God in Christ comes to men, is rooted in love. When the love of God meets human weakness and sinfulness, it takes the form of compassion and mercy. God humbles Himself and becomes weak in His Son, so that people receive the strength to overcome their weaknesses. His descent into the human world has always in mind the increasing of humility. In Jesus Christ the condescension of God leads to the exaltation of man. The aim of God, consisting in συγκατάβασις is the formation of man

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *The Fathers of the Church. St. Clement of Rome to St. Augustine of Hippo* (Grand Rapids–Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 85.

⁵ Gianfranco RAVASI, “Comunicación y Palabra de Dios. Visión bíblica y teológica de la comunicación,” in *Evangelización y Comunicación*, ed. Gianfranco Ravasi, Jim McDonnell, Washington Uranga (Caracas: San Pablo, 1994), 85; Andriy OLIYNYK, Συγκατάβασις τὸ φαινόμενον. *Interpretacja reguł kaznodziejskich św. Jana Chryzostoma w pismach Anthony’ego Coniarisa jako przykład współczesnej homiletyki prawosławnej* (Kraków: Homo Dei, 2013), 19.

⁶ R. BRÄNDLE, “Συγκατάβασις als hermeneutisches und ethisches Prinzip in der Paulusauslegung des Johannes Chrysostomus,” 298; Kerry WALTERS, *Merciful Meekness. Becoming a Spiritually Integrated Person* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 86; David RYLAARSDAM, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy. The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38.

so that he can be more perfectly conformed to His Creator and attain exaltation, entering into the Kingdom of the heavenly Father.

Jesus testified in all His earthly life to the truth about God who is a gracious and merciful Father, through the gentle approach to the sinners, the poor and marginalized in social life, the sick and suffering people. His relationships with people were filled by compassion and kindness. In a world dominated by hatred, violence and fear, the gentleness of Christ communicates God's love and forgiveness to people, allowing them to experience the closeness of God (cf. MV 8).⁷

God's gentleness and kindness towards people is also reflected in the language through which God speaks to men. By His Incarnation, the Son of God assumed human limitations and speaks to man in words known to him. In the salvific mission of Jesus, the divine message takes on the body of human words so that the dialogue can be conducted between God and man. Through his Son, God speaks to people in a "low" language which is simple and familiar to them. The actions of the Creator and Redeemer resemble the behaviour of a teacher towards his children, full of patience and understanding for their shortcomings and inability. So God speaks to people in such a way as to benefit themselves as much as possible.⁸

In every time and place, the Church has the task to imitate the action of God, turning to people with gentleness and in the spirit of His philanthropy (cf. Phil 2:6f; Tit 2:11; 3:3). The mission of Christ's disciples is to help people discover the gentle face of God and put them in a relationship of trust with Him. This requires them to be conformed to the Son of God, who gives them a pattern on how to lean over human misery with warm affection and tenderness and to proclaim clearly to people the gentleness of God with humility and kindness in order to move their hearts and minds and support them in following the path of salvation (cf. DiM 14; AL 309).⁹

⁷ Hans-Josef KLAUCK, *2. Korintherbrief* (Würzburg: Echter, 1988), 77; Nurya MARTÍNEZ-GAYOL, "Una aproximación antropológica a la teología de la ternura," in *Teología y Nueva Evangelización*, ed. G. Uríbarri (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2005), 316-322.

⁸ R. BRÄNDLE, "Συγκατάβασις als hermeneutisches und ethisches Prinzip in der Paulusauslegung des Johannes Chrysostomus," 301; George T. MONTAGUE, *Understanding the Bible. A Basic Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 40; Mark SHERIDAN, *Language for God in Patristic Tradition. Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 43.

⁹ Hubert FRANKEMÖLLE, *1. Petrusbrief, 2. Petrusbrief, Judasbrief* (Würzburg: Echter, 1987), 57-58; Wilhelm EGGER, *Galaterbrief, Philipperbrief, Philemonbrief* (Würzburg: Echter, 1988), 70.

2. BENIGNITAS PASTORALIS AS A CHALLENGE FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Jesus is the first credible Evangelizer, or an active witness to the Good News of the Father's love to people. The central content of His message of salvation is the mercy of the Father (cf. Lk 15:11-32) who accepts people with their shortcomings and weaknesses, and desires to attract them to Himself. In His benevolent references to people and in comprehensible language, He reveals God as a loving and caring Father and leads them to a life in union with Him. Preaching the gentleness and goodness of God, Jesus evokes in the listeners the desire to repent, meaning – to entrust your life to Him. The task of the preachers of the word of God is to continue the mission of Jesus, showing people the gentle and merciful face of God, bending solicitously over human weakness and proclaiming the Gospel in a way that people will understand the message of salvation.

2.1. Good News of gentle and merciful God

Just as at the time Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel, so today's proclamation of the word of God should be theocentric.¹⁰ God wants to show Himself to the people living in all times as a mild and merciful Father, whose love embraces the whole person's life, suffering and death. He goes out to meet man with love which demands an answer from him. Love seeks a response but always respects the freedom of a loved one. Love doesn't force anything, but hopes for the "yes" of man articulated by him in freedom, just as God first uttered His "yes" to the people.¹¹

In the proclamation of the word of God, the central place should be occupied by the message of the love of the Creator to the creation, expressed in the full affirmation of man. God accepts him and his sin, allowing him to experience that "he is allowed to be guilty".¹² This should not be understood as supposing that the man is constantly allowed to commit sins. The point is that the man is allowed to admit to sin and to be able to do this before the merciful God, that is, in a situation in which he experiences mercy

¹⁰ Philipp MÜLLER, "Eine Pastoral der Barmherzigkeit. Wie die Kirche neue Glaubwürdigkeit erlangen kann," *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 1(2016): 12.

¹¹ Godfried DANNEELS, "Nouvelle Évangélisation," *Lumen Vitae* 1(1986): 12; Walter KIRSCHLÄGER, "Hat Gott seinen Sohn in den Tod gegeben? – Zum biblischen Verständnis von Erlösung," in *Erlöst durch Jesus Christus. Soteriologie im Kontext*, ed. E. Christen, Walter Kirschläger (Freiburg, Schweiz: Paulusverlag, 2000), 42.

¹² August SCHMIED, "Erlösung als Befreiung vom Zwang zur Selbstrechtfertigung," *Theologie der Gegenwart* 1(1982): 78.

that he doesn't remain alone with his sin and he doesn't have to free himself from it on his own, because forgiveness already awaits him.

Proclamation of the word of God in the spirit of *benignitas pastoralis* should consist in the removal from people their burdens and release in them dormant forces which can help them to form their attitudes according to the Gospel. It is about depicting the gentleness and goodness of God, who cares for human happiness and whose love moves men to fulfil themselves in the image and likeness of the Creator. The preaching of God's word can't begin with the formulation of demands and setting conditions that people should fulfil if they want to deserve God's mercy. The proclamation of the Gospel in a spirit of pastoral gentleness precludes all forms of legalism and rigorism, deforming the true face of God – a lover of men (cf. Wis 11:23).

The ministry of the word realizing the demand *benignitas pastoralis* can't be limited to the transmission of the doctrine itself-preach the word of God to preach the Good News from God and talking about God. This is the witness based on our personal understanding and experience of God. The preachers of the Gospel communicate to people their knowledge of the heart of God that "became flesh" in Jesus Christ.¹³ This knowledge of the heart of God is identical with the experience of God's love which overcomes the fear, isolation and despair, embarrassing the human spirit. It is love coming out to meet the man (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), to induce him to trust in God and submit to His will.

Preaching in the spirit of pastoral mildness always appeals to the Holy Scripture, but is limited to the exegesis of biblical texts. It is not so much about understanding what happened in the past than about the knowledge of what is happening at the moment because of the intervention of God. The starting point is not the sacred text, but the specific situation that requires clarification. The Bible can help in interpreting the action of God in human reality and provides hearers with guidance enabling them to discover Him in their lives. The ministry of the word thus understood leads them in the way to the experience of God, which becomes possible when people perceive His presence here and now.¹⁴

¹³ Henri J.M. NOUWEN, *In the Name of Jesus. Reflections on Christian Leadership* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998), 25.

¹⁴ Donald J. GOERGEN, "Jesus of Nazareth. Itinerant Preacher," in *The Grace and Task of Preaching*, ed. Michael Monshau (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2006), 80-81.

2.2. Pastoral gentleness in relation to the audience of the word of God

The proclamation of the love and gentleness of God is not ‘declamation’ during which the speaker wants to convince his listeners to change their mentality and conduct. Proclamation of the Gospel is performed in God’s presence. God uses the preacher of the word to transmit to people his message of salvation (cf. 2 Cor 5:20). This means that the attitude of the speaker must be in harmony with both the action of the one he represents, as well as with the content of the message transmitted to people in his name.¹⁵ The relationship between the preacher of God’s word and his listeners is filled by gentleness, the herald proclaiming the Gospel will look at them as God does, lovingly, over a weak man and supporting him in achieving full Christian maturity.¹⁶

Gentleness doesn’t allow the herald proclaiming the word of salvation swagger over their listeners or hide his true face behind the “mask of a professional.”¹⁷ The warmth in the approach to the recipients of God’s word can’t be the result of calculation made because of the desire to achieve measurable success even on the basis of the number of people attending the sacraments. Gentleness shaping the form of the relationship of the speaker to his audience is evidence that the preacher of the word of God is able to trust in the “force of sensitivity” that moves people more than erudition and eloquence.

Gentleness always expressed a concern for one’s neighbour, allowing him to experience love. Proclamation of the word of God in the spirit of *benignitas pastoralis* is for preachers a challenge to turn to the audience according to the example of Jesus Christ with tenderness and affection. It is about the full involvement in the affairs of men that is reflected in the emotional approach to listeners and their problems. In addition, all the dilemmas of human life, especially the difficult and thorny issues, are treated with sensitivity.¹⁸

In interpersonal relationships marked by gentleness, nothing could be done “by force”, even if a noble goal were reached. Since gentleness can’t be separated from love, the preacher of the word of God can’t treat his listeners as “objects” of manipulation. Gentleness is ordered to respect the freedom of others. Kindness present in the attitude of preachers of the Good News allows

¹⁵ Eckhard J. SCHNABEL, “Evangelisation im Neuen Testament,” in *Evangelisation im Gegenwind. Zur Theologie und Praxis der Glaubensverkündigung in der säkularen Gesellschaft*, ed. Herbert H. Klement (Gießen: Brunnen, 2002), 39.

¹⁶ A. OLIYNYK, Συγκρατάβασις τὸ φαινόμενον, 20.

¹⁷ Joachim HÄNLE, *Heilende Verkündigung* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1997), 472.

¹⁸ N. MARTÍNEZ-GAYOL, “Una aproximación antropológica a la teología de la ternura,” 299.

man to experience that he is a person, intelligent being responsible for his life, worthy of love and respect.¹⁹

True gentleness is the ability to give and the willingness to join other people. It recognizes their value and can empathize with their situation. Gentleness is based on the knowledge of the needs of the neighbour and his susceptibility to injury. In preaching the Gospel, this means that the herald of Christ is not only able to empathize with the situation in which the recipients live, but also has in mind the reactions, feelings and resistance emerging in the hearts of the audience during the proclamation of the word of God. He is aware of how much human weaknesses, limitations and habits make it difficult for a man to decide on conversion. The preacher of the Gospel shouldn't forget about the fact that he has before him those who have not yet reached perfection; because of it they need support on the way to the fullness of the Christian ideal (cf. AL 308).²⁰

2.3. Simplicity and humility of language of preaching

Gentleness and compassion in relation to the listeners should find expression in a simple and humble style of proclaiming the word of God. Following Jesus requires from the preachers of the Gospel an expression of love toward their listeners by their vocabulary and form of communication, adapting to their cognitive abilities. In *benignitas pastoralis*, there is no room for oratorical performances of the Church's speakers or for shocking the audience by erudition, because in the centre of the ministry is a man in need of the Christian truth which is able to liberate him out of mistakes and spiritual numbness.²¹

Jesus can tell people about the gentle and merciful heavenly Father, because He knows Him, living with Him in close union. Also in the case of the preachers of the word of God, speaking about the Creator and Redeemer requires abiding with Him in a close relationship. Whoever talks about God, in fact, presents Him through the prism of a personal encounter with Him. Man can only talk about how his own relationship with God and how he sees it. The proclamation of the message of salvation is always at the same time speaking about God and about the preacher. Similarly, it is in the Bible which tells about people living in relationships with God, using the stories

¹⁹ J. HÄNLE, *Heilende Verkündigung*, 495.

²⁰ N. MARTÍNEZ-GAYOL, "Una aproximación antropológica a la teología de la ternura," 298.

²¹ A. OLIYNYK, Συγκατάβασις τὸ φαινόμενον, 20.

and metaphors. Thanks to them we know God as He is revealed in relation to the people.²²

To express someone's own deepest feelings arising in the meeting with other person is only possible using the language full of dynamic phrases and images²³. It would therefore be a strange thing if someone tried to talk to anybody about another person known to him, using definitions built with abstract concepts. The narrative as a way to communicate imposes itself because of the direct relationship in which one person meets someone else. In the meeting, one person appears to the other through their behaviour which is always communication. Just as the human beings must always behave, so they must always communicate.²⁴ Therefore, not only speaking words and formulating sentences are communication, but the mere presence of persons is a form of their active auto-presentation in the public. If persons can communicate to each other only through their activities, the most desirable way of talking about someone is a story full of verbs and adjectives defining the nature of the action of a human being.

Pictorial vocabulary, rich in terms, used in preaching the word of God and typical for everyday human life is of interest and touches listeners. The very selection of words and their use in communication indicates the relationship of God's revelation to the existential situation of the hearers.²⁵ The application of a specific language, used by people in everyday references brings them to God and encourages them to establish relationships of friendship with Him. Using such language, the preacher of the word of God knows that he is not able – even with the help of the strangest abstractions and most grandiloquent phrases – to transmit to the audience the knowledge of the essence of God. He can, however, speaking in an understandable way for all people, bring them into the way of seeking the truth about God who is so gentle and merciful, that He descends with compassion towards His creation, to make

²² Alvin C. RUETER, *Making Good Preaching Better* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 66; Erik FLÜGGE, *Der Jargon der Betroffenheit. Wie die Kirche an ihrer Sprache verreckt* (München: Kösel, 2016), 132.

²³ Rolf ZERFAB, *Grundkurs Predigt 2. Textpredigt* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1992), 121; Manfred LÜTZ, *Gott. Eine kleine Geschichte des Größten* (München: Pattloch Verlag, 2009), 196-197.

²⁴ Michael KLESSMANN, "Seelsorge als Kommunikationsprozess – Pastoralpsychologische Perspektiven," in *Seelsorge heute. Aktuelle Perspektiven aus Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Desmond Bell, Gotthard Fermor (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2009), 12.

²⁵ Wilfried ENGEMANN, *Einführung in die Homiletik* (Tübingen–Basel: Francke, 2002), 354-357; Hermann SCHALÜCK, "Sprache – 'kirchisch' oder jesuanisch? Eine franziskanische Perspektive," *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, 7-8(2016): 20-21.

Himself known to man according to his intellectual capacities and to lead dialogue with him.

3. BENEFITS OF THE PASTORAL GENTLENESS IN THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Benignitas pastoralis in preaching demands that preachers of the word of God go in a certain sense to “all the «peripheries» in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20) to win for Christ the weak sinners, confused and disappointed because of their complicated life situations and state of mind. The purpose of the servants of the Word is to look for convergence in relation to the audience and show them kindness. However, they don’t do it in order to flatter people, but to incarnate themselves in their lives and identify with them.²⁶ According to Alvin C. Reuter, identification has two aspects: it is the identification with the human way of thinking and identification with human delights.²⁷ If they want to convince people, they have to identify their own intentions with the interests of the audience. This becomes possible when the preacher of the word of God – following example of Jesus’ kenosis – becomes similar to his listeners and speaks their language, assuming the way of expression and attitude appropriate to contemporary people and referring to the ideas and metaphors prevalent in their environment.

The word of God moves a man when he finds in its proclamation his affairs (*mea res agitur*). The point is that the hearer likes what the preacher of the Gospel likes; that he is afraid of what the Church’s speaker presents as abhorrent; that he accepts what is recommended, he enjoys what appears as a reason for joy. Lowering himself to his audience, the preacher tries to speak to his hearers with such kindness that people not only know what they have to do, but they do what they know must be done. The servant of the Word should forget himself in order to fill their thoughts with the preferences, understanding, reality and aspirations of the audience. Then he allows people to feel that their needs and desires can be fulfilled just because of what he communicates to them. For when they listen, they reflect on what is there for them. So in order to inspire listeners to action, it is first necessary to recognize their needs and interests, and then offer them help in achieving their deepest desires.

²⁶ Raphael GALLAGHER, “The Reception of Amoris Laetitia”, *The Pastoral Review* 4(2016): 6.

²⁷ A.C. RUETER, *Making Good Preaching Better*, 25-28.

Gentleness is not a pastoral way to maintain the existing state of affairs, but a form of intervention initiating and supporting changes serving people. Likewise, the purpose of preaching the word of God is always a transformation of reality. It has in fact a causative power. His proclamation isn't just giving people some information to enrich their knowledge. The word of God "makes things happen and is life-changing" (SpS 2), and therefore the proclamation is performance – action executed with the help of words in order to create a particular effect on recipients.²⁸ According to Erich Garhammer, the most profound changes in human life don't take place when someone succumbs to moral appeals, but when he feels understood, together with the defensive attitude adopted in the face of a possible need of change.²⁹ The duty of preachers of the word of God is to call people to conversion that is to change their thinking and attitude to life. They should do this with gentleness and forbearance if they want to break the resistance of the human heart to the message of the Gospel. When a man feels understood in this, why he says "no" to the principles of the Gospel, it will be easier for him to eventually answer "yes" to the call to repentance.

God's word is always directed to people whose consciences are burdened by sins and the desire for good is weakened by an inclination to evil. *Benignitas pastoralis* in the preaching of the Gospel can give the impression of leniency toward human transgressions in relation to the law of God or be associated with avoidance of talking about the wrong moral choices. Meanwhile, gentleness is not to leave unsaid the truth about the presence of evil and sin in human life. However, it doesn't allow treating the preaching as an opportunity to reproach people for their imperfection and replace the teaching of the Gospel – how Pope Francis says – with "dead stones to be hurled at others" (AL 49). Sin coming from human weakness becomes a pretext to direct people's attention to God constantly descending to their aid – even through the proclamation of God's word. It becomes a tool in the hands of the Creator, who humbles himself and serves man, supporting him on the way to salvation or happiness which he will fully achieve in eternity. The proclamation of the word of God in the spirit of gentleness is also a source of human knowledge of the true face of God, who doesn't despise human

²⁸ Ryszard HAJDUK, *Postani głosić Dobrą Nowinę. Podstawowy kurs homiletyczny* (Kraków: Homo Dei, 2007), 124; Michał KLEMENTOWICZ, "Performatywna funkcja języka homilii," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 62(2015)12: 161-174.

²⁹ Erich GARHAMMER, *Verkündigung als Last und Lust. Eine praktische Homiletik* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1997), 145.

weakness, but allows, in his mercy, the man to experience true spiritual power (cf. 2 Cor 12:10).³⁰

Gentleness in words and attitude of the preacher of the Gospel gives man the courage to accept himself with his moral imperfection and all kinds of personal limitations. Penetrating into the human heart, the word of God helps his listeners to get in touch with their own inner poverty, stimulates fundamental conversion and allows them to discover the truth about his humanity and radical need of God. Gentleness can't impose on people burdens hard to bear, what doesn't mean diminishing the message of the Gospel, but – how it was typical for Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori – a wise adaptation of values of the Gospel to the situation of believers.³¹ It is connected with necessity of extracting what belongs to the essence of the Christian message leading to such a proclamation of the evangelical values so that people become convinced that the Good News of Jesus is the best way to achieve the fullness of humanity. Gentleness demonstrates that the requirements flowing from Christian faith are transmitted in such a way that the people feel the sweetness of the yoke of Christ (cf. Mt 11:30) and aren't discouraged to look for what is above (cf. Col 3:2).

The announcement of the word of God with kindness and gentleness shouldn't be identified with the decision not to proclaim moral principles. *Benignitas pastoralis* recalls, however, that the primary goal of preaching is to attract people to God and to show them the way that leads to holiness. The first step on this path isn't the observance of moral principles, but acceptance of the grace of God, that is, to establish a personal relationship with God sacrificing His love for man. Not forgetting about human sinfulness, preachers communicate the message of salvation with a firm belief in the transforming power of God's love, guiding "the journey towards the fullness of communion with God" (LF 46). There is no more important message for the world than God's love. It is only the "first love" which "can also blossom as a response within us" (DCE 17) bearing fruit in a form of life according to God's commandments (cf. 1 Jn 5:3).

³⁰ Richard FINN, "Preaching Generosity – Lessons from the Fathers," in *The Grace and Task of Preaching*, ed. Michael Monshau (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2006), 308.

³¹ Domenico CAPONE, *Sant'Alfonso missionario* (Napoli: Valsele, 1987), 59; Denis J. BILLY, *Simple, Heartfelt Words. Preaching in the Alphonsian Tradition* (Liguori (MO): Liguori Publications, 2006), 9.

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The proclamation of the word of God in the spirit of pastoral gentleness imitates the action of God, who in His Son Jesus Christ, descends toward man to show him compassion for his weaknesses and to strengthen him on the road leading to the fullness of salvation. Proclamation of the Gospel which allows man to experience God's kindness and patience, is a service for those who are caught up in sin, harassed by uncertainty and suffering and wander "on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates" (MV 15). Applying the principle of *benignitas pastoralis* in preaching the word of God, its preachers support people in achieving full health, which takes the form of holiness expressed in harmony and inner peace, in improving human capabilities, in healthy relationships with others, in freedom and a rich spiritual life (cf. EG 237).³²

The proclamation of a gentle and merciful God who descends to people in order to draw them to Himself with bonds of love (cf. Os 11,4), is an antidote to all forms of Pelagianism, rigorism and permissiveness. This is because God gives power to the weak man to be conformed to the Creator, He doesn't reject him because of his sins, but He shows him compassion and kind help and He is on his side in pursuit of more and more complete fulfillment of moral principles. *Benignitas pastoralis* in the proclamation of the word of God allows people to experience that "God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross" (AL 62). Therefore, gentleness in preaching can't turn itself into pleasing the audience and fortify them in idleness, when God wants them to follow Christ on the path of holiness.

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³² Francisco ALVAREZ, *El Evangelio de la salud* (Madrid: San Pablo, 1999), 48.

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BENIGNITAS PASTORALIS W PROKLAMACJI SŁOWA BOŻEGO

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Papież Franciszek zwraca się do całego Kościoła z apelem o nawrócenie duszpasterskie, polegające na głoszeniu Ewangelii wszystkim ludziom spragnionym dobroci i czułości Zbawiciela. W nauczaniu Biskupa Rzymu ważną rolę odgrywa *benignitas pastoralis*, czyli duch miłosierdzia i łagodności towarzyszący duszpasterskiej trosce o grzeszników – ludzi słabych, cierpiących i zrozpaczonych. Łagodność duszpasterska winna również nadawać kształt posłudze słowa, która niezmiennie odgrywa istotną rolę w zbawczym posłannictwie Kościoła. Ponieważ *benignitas pastoralis* najpełniej wyraża się we wcieleniu Syna Bożego, Jezusa Chrystusa i Jego ziemskiej działalności, dlatego zadaniem głosicieli słowa Bożego jest kontynuować misję Zbawiciela, ukazując ludziom łagodne i miłosierne oblicze Boga, pochylając się z troską nad ludzką słabością i głosząc orędzie zbawienia w języku prostym i zrozumiałym dla ludzi. Obecność *benignitas pastoralis* w przepowiadaniu stwarza możliwość dotarcia z Ewangelią do słuchaczy, którzy odkrywają prawdziwe oblicze łaskawego i miłosiernego Boga oraz odnajdują w słowie Bożym źródło siły potrzebnej im do wzrostu duchowego. Tak pełniona posługa słowa sprzeciwia się pelagianizmowi, rygoryzmowi i permisywizmowi, gdyż wskazuje na „pierwszeństwo” miłowania ze strony Boga, który w ten sposób uzdalnia człowieka do osiągnięcia świętości zgodnie z ideałem Ewangelii.

Słowa kluczowe: przepowiadanie; homilia; kaznodziejstwo; duszpasterstwo; łagodność.