

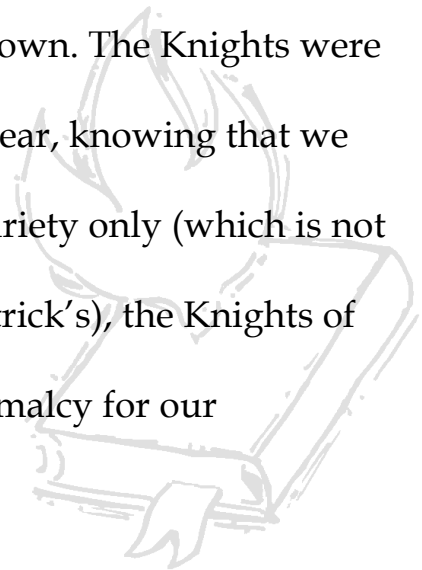
Homily
24th Sunday OT - B
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 11-12, 2021

Is 50: 4-9
Ps 116: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Jas 2: 14-18
Mk 8: 27-35

For this particular homily, I am going to “do a little cheat.” Back during Holy Week, David Wheeler from the Knights of Columbus and a local firefighter asked me to offer a reflection on the 9/11 tragedy from twenty years ago for the Good Friday Service. This is the Good Friday Homily I offered earlier this year...

A week or so ago, I was speaking to Mr. David Wheeler from the Knights of Columbus This “Grand Knight” and his fellow brother knights helped support the parish with a corned beef and cabbage dinner, as well as their weekly fish fry at the parish.

Last year when the pandemic started, the last event we held at St. Patrick’s Church in Momence was our 2020 Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner; right after that event, everything shut down. The Knights were kind enough to cook and serve this meal. This year, knowing that we were offering this Irish Dinner in a “takeout” variety only (which is not the most ideal of situation for celebrating St. Patrick’s), the Knights of Columbus knew that we needed to provide normalcy for our



community. We wanted to make sure that we took care of folks who were seeking God's presence in their life, in this special way.

Especially this year, we are focusing this year on the feast of St. Patrick and St. Joseph, both of whom sacrificed their lives for the sake of the ones they were called to serve - St. Patrick for the people of Ireland and St. Joseph for his wife and his son, the savior of the world. We very much wanted to celebrate these lives of these saints and what sacrifices they offered so that we could have a chance for salvation.

During my discussion with Grand Knight David Wheeler, he asked a favor of me. Also serving as a firefighter for a good number of years in this area, David was lamenting because this year is the 20th Anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy that took place on September 11, 2001. David recalled with me how, twenty years ago, a great many colleagues from the New York fire and police department had sacrificed their lives by entering the twin towers of the World Trade Center, in their effort to rescue people from the horrible destruction from this terrorist attack.

As David was talking, I began to reflect on how, prior to our pandemic, folks were living their mundane lives, their normal lives

(what Mircea Eliade would call our “profane” lives), going through the monotonous events of a day without thinking how we really do not prepare for the moment in our lives when tragedy can strike. For the pandemic, this happened about a year ago. For those that died on September 11th, this happened some twenty years ago. So often, we are usually not ready for these moments yet, these moments often fall upon us.

Our history has taught us that lives could be taken in an instant, whether it be a tragic event like terrorism or violent acts to simple things like heart disease or strokes; sometimes our lives are taken by events about which we are rarely prepared.

In that light, David wanted me to celebrate a special Mass that I told him I would be honored to celebrate. We lamented how innocent lives were taken twenty years ago; we lamented how lives were taken this last year by a disease that we were not prepared to handle. When you lose a member of your family, in the community or even in a profession, the hurt of loss can be overwhelming. This is why we come together and support each other, pray with each other and tell those who suffer that

they are not alone – we are with them and God is with them... nothing will separate us from the love of God (Romans 8).

After speaking to Firefighter David Wheeler, I decided to read up on what took place during that tragic event from twenty years ago, specifically about two priests directly involved with this tragedy. One of these priests from the religious order of the Holy Cross was just assigned as a pastor of what a local parish is that a particular year. On the morning of September 11th, he was celebrating his daily Mass, doing the priest things that a cleric is asked to do. Walking out of his church after the morning service, this pastor heard the blow from the airplanes hitting the neighboring building (the parish being located quite near to the World Trade Center) and, running down the street, he encountered fire and police personnel who were about to enter the falling structure.

This simple church pastor decided that, although situations are rare to offer general absolution to forgive others of their sins, this tragedy certainly was one of those rare exceptions. Normally, priests are allowed to you offer general absolution only at a time of war or crisis. Before

those personnel ran inside a building that was about to fall upon itself, the priest felt the situation warranted this forgiveness.

I had read that the first cited casualty of 9/11 was assigned to yet another priest, a Franciscan cleric named Michael Judge. I read Fr. Judge's story – as I came to learn, Fr. Judge had gone through a great many difficulties in his life, especially in the initial years of his priesthood. Like all of us, every single one of us, he had to deal with the demons that plagued his life.

And he tried to undergo whatever was necessary to get through the horrors that played to his own life... but he became stronger for it. As a result, Fr. Judge became an advocate for people with alcoholism, drugs, abuse, AIDS, whatever it might be. Fr. Judge very much wanted to serve the people who were most in need of God's mercy. As a result, this cleric served as a chaplain for the firefighters over in New York City.

On that fateful day when the first plane crashed into those twin towers, Fr. Judge was one of the first to enter those buildings to care for those who are suffering. As stories had been told, this chaplain for the fire department prayed over bodies that had been lying in the streets,

then entered the lobby of the World Trade Center's North Tower, where an emergency command post had been organized there. At the Tower, this chaplain offered aid and prayer for rescuers, the injured and those who were dying.

When the neighboring South Tower collapsed at 9:59 AM debris went flying through the North Tower lobby, killing many inside, including Father Judge. At the moment he was struck in the head and killed, the story was told that Judge repeatedly was praying aloud. "Jesus, please end this right now," he said. "God, please end this."

According to Judge's biographer of the New York Daily News, (Michael Bailey), when firefighters found Judge's body (the first death to be recorded at the World Trade Center), they carried his body and placed it briefly in the front of the altar of St. Peter's Cathedral, before Fr. Judge was taken to the morgue. Fr. Michael judge served as a reminder of how horrible terrible acts can take place in this world.

I remind myself how 2000 years ago, another tragic event took place, an event well removed from recent history but faith-changing nevertheless, when all of us, **ALL OF US**, placed the Son of God on a

cross because we thought we were right and he was wrong. The Son of God, who did nothing wrong in this world, who became incarnate, who became baptized for us, who fed us, loved us and died for us because he wanted us to get to heaven. Through our senseless act of violence, what were our Lord's words in response to what we had done? He said, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23: 34).

If we understand that we are members of a sinful community of a sinful race and that we need our Lord to teach us, to guide us, to love us and forgive us for what we have done because of what Jesus has done for us, then we need to do the same for each other. We need to learn how to do what is necessary to prevent needless violence taking place in the world. We need to protect each other, love each other and when people harm us, we need to ask God to forgive those that wrong us. We need to forgive each other. If we do this, then we understand what Jesus did on Good Friday for us and what we need to do to get past this horrendous event from two thousand years ago so that we can enter the perpetual Easter Sunday.

To get past 9/11 and what a group of senseless terrorists did to us, to get past the event of Good Friday and what a group of senseless groups of faithful souls like us did to Jesus, takes an act of courage on our end and active courage to stand up and defend those lives who are vulnerable, to defend **ALL LIFE**. On this day, we must rededicate ourselves to protect those who have done nothing wrong, those who need our help and our protection so that they can be safe. We need to learn the gift of self-sacrifice as all the priests from 9/11 did for us, as *Jesus* did for us, if we have any chance to get to heaven.

Perhaps we can take a moment today to give thanks to those who protect us in our civil community, whether it be firefighters, police, officers, soldiers, government workers, those who have done what is necessary so that we can be at peace. Perhaps we can redefine what essential workers *really* means – the moms, the dads, the teachers, the homeless person on the street, the widow, the orphan and the lowly. Perhaps we can realize that when someone unnecessarily goes hungry or thirsty or is alone or is depressed, then we have an obligation our of

Christ's love to support them and protect them, as reflected in the petitions we are about to offer after this homily.

Most of all, we need to be like God and we need to learn the gift of sacrifice and suffering, as modeled for us on that cross. I would like to thank on behalf of those of us in the faith all of those in public service who offer their lives so that we can be safe. I would like to thank all the priests and religious who do the same for the salvation of souls, starting with our own. We are all sinners. We are all in need of God's mercy.

Once we get past that, once we seek forgiveness for the things we have done wrong and we learn about God's mercy and love, then hopefully we do the same by sacrificing our lives, as Christ has done for us, for the sake of the people that we meet. This is our prayer.