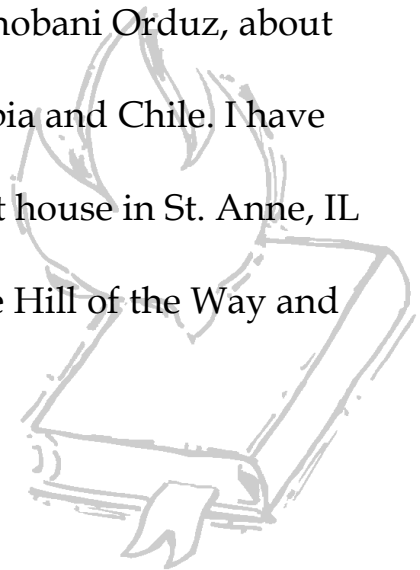


Homily
24th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 10-11, 2022

Ex 32: 7-11, 13-14
Ps 51: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19 1
Tm 1: 12-17
Lk 15: 1-32

In addition to all the other things that I do here in the parish, I also teach three courses at the University of St. Francis. I teach a course this semester on the Old Testament. I teach a course this semester on Death & Dying and the theme that once you realize you are going to die, that is when you start to learn how to live (from the book Tuesdays with Morrie). The third course I teach is a new endeavor for me, a course entitled, "Hispanic Ministry."

As part of the Hispanic Ministry course, I am conducting all these interviews with those invested in this subject. I interviewed a religious member of the Viatorian Community, Brother Jhobani Orduz, about how the Catholic faith has been lived in Columbia and Chile. I have interviewed Ana & Eileen Rivas from the retreat house in St. Anne, IL named "El Cerrito de Camino y Esperanza" (the Hill of the Way and



Hope), who shared with me important lessons about the faith life of the Hispanic community that is lived in the streets and the homes. Eileen and Ana shared with me that the challenges they encounter concerning the lived faith life on the streets is the same challenge we clerics have to face in today's age – we must visit the faithful in their homes and the streets to encounter their *Lo Cotidiano* (their daily faith lives) and guide them to God's house, where the sacraments are conferred.

Now that we are starting religious education, Director John Rehmer is registering children for the catechesis program at our parish. John's challenge is to get more kids invested in the faith while, at the same time, caring for a mother who actively is dying (and subsequently died on September 21st – *eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord...*).

Like Brother Jhobani, Ana, Eileen and John Rehmer, each of us leaders in the Catholic faith find it difficult to get our youth to invest in the faith. I have encountered this challenge at the universities and schools; I certainly have encountered this challenge in our faith. For all kinds of reasons, good people forget about God and faith so much that

by 2070 (according to the Pew Research Center), the largest denomination in this country will be those who believe in nothing.

In this Hispanic Ministry Course I teach (in any course I teach), the two words I teach I am trying to teach are two basic words on which I focus concerning any subject about the faith. The first word is *Bienvenidos* or *Welcome*. The second word is *hospitalidad* or *hospitality*. We have to make people feel welcome in the faith but we also must realize that the way we accept and love others in God's name is the first step in allowing anyone to encounter God.

At least in my experience, if we make an effort to welcome, to love, to be hospitable to those we encounter, we go a long way to find that lost coin, that lost sheep and certainly that lost son. All of this begins through the invitation to invite others into this beautiful house of faith.

Imagine what would happen in this parish if we started going door to door and welcoming people to our house, if we started loving people, and saying to them, "we love you and care for you in God's name."

That said, we also know that once we enter someone else's house, we

are going to be obligated to follow the rules of the house. I am assuming parents would say the same thing if you entered their house as well.

Parents readily will tell us that if they establish rules in the house, the kids would be obligated to follow these rules, or else chaos would result. If a parent told their kids to take off their shoes in the house, imagine what would happen if they did not! I think many parents have a basic theme that exists under their roof and between their walls – “My house, my rules”; “My way or the highway!”

In this parish, I am *sure* that kids would always follow the direction their parents set... maybe. You know what happens most often if kids do not follow the rules of the house. The same might apply for those living in a city, state or country. This same theory certainly applies in the house of God. For me, I certainly focus on Matthew 25 as a mantra in my own life for those who follow the ways of God and those who do not – for those who are prepared and attentive, the doors are wide open; for those who are not, God responds to us by saying, “Amen, Amen, it is as if I do not know you.”

In our first reading from Exodus, we encounter this problem. As we just heard and read – the Lord speaks to Moses, trying to instruct the Chosen People as to the way they are called to live. While Moses attentively listens to the Lord, the people down below choose to melt all their gold to build a golden calf that they worship instead – they chose to worship Mammon over God (which is next Sunday's gospel). In the process, the Chosen People chose to worship the wrong God.

Constantly in these early books of the Hebrew Scriptures, Moses pleads to the Lord to give the people another chance. As many parents do, the Lord chides the people and sometimes disciplines those who disobey the direction that their parents wish them to follow. As we constantly learn in the faith, God *wants* us to get to the kingdom of heaven. God tried to correct, remonstrate and do whatever is possible to get us to kingdom of heaven.

The biggest obstacle for us getting into the kingdom of heaven is *not* God, it is ourselves. When we decide that we do not want to invest in this relationship like any other, we essentially are saying that we do not

care. It is my responsibility at Mass to show you (and myself) that God *does* cares for you and me, even when you and I do not show care for God. Even in those moments when you and I do not show care for God, God still loves us. We are hear to learn that lesson and to invite others to come back into the fold so that each of us can learn about our purpose in life, namely to be with God forever in heaven.

Now I can continue on this negative path and drone on concerning what happens to those who choose not to follow this path of love. Instead, I would like to look at the more positive aspects of our faith life and what happens to good holy people who choose to follow God's path. Just like negativity can draw us away from the love of God, *good* examples of faith can draw us into our true purpose of life. When good people live positive lives, when you start seeing people who live like God, then you and I become inspired to do the same - that is why I celebrate Latin Mass for good sisters who choose to separate themselves from the world of temptation to focus their lives exclusively towards God.

For me, I need to encounter and become inspired by the lives of the saints, the lives of those who have gone before us, who model this life of righteousness. I was thinking about my father's wife and her son (my half-brother) Julian who attended Mass on Saturday night. Maria Jankowski made a promise to my father during hospice care that Julian and she would care for my dad at home during his last months on earth. So they brought him home. They fed him, they cleaned him. They had to deal with all the things they had to deal address when a loved one actively is dying so that my father could leave this world on his terms and with dignity. What he wished was difficult and certainly was not easy to do, but Maria and Julian made a commitment to honor my father's wishes. They made a commitment to take care of him because that is what God wanted them to do as a wife promised to follow on her wedding day, "for better or worse, in sickness or in health."

As you know, John Rehmer skipped out on religious education registration this weekend. I "yelled" at John profusely, knowing full well that John was not here this weekend because he decided to take

care of his mother, who was in hospice at the time (and subsequently died). For the last few weeks, John has made that forty minute drive to and from Watseka, IL to care for a mother who was very devout and very much invested in her faith.

John asked me a week or so ago to go anoint his mother at the care facility in Watseka because he knew his mother was suffering and needed a sense of peace that God would be with her. On his part, John has been offering communion to his mother and aunt for a good number of months. At Mass, John brings his pyx every week to visit those in his family close to him and certainly close to God because this faith we preach is very important to his family and very important to John. His example of faith is better than any example that I could ever discuss because John doesn't just read about the faith... *he lives it – this is his prayer.*

We had the situation over at our rectory where a tree close to the house kept losing branches. We kept dodging bullets, as those falling branches kept missing the house. We knew our luck was running out

and that if we didn't address our tree situation, one fallen branch could bring real destruction to our property.

With this in mind, I called my "tree guy," Miguel Aguirre. Miguel came down to our parishes last year, grinding down about forty tree stumps and cut down a few more trees as well. Miguel helped with our landscaping and gave us some ridiculous price for his work because, as he attested, he offers this work "for the glory of God." Miguel arrived at our parish on Saturday of this weekend with his crew and cut down the tree completely to save us from any future damage to our rectory and garage.

After he completed his work, I asked Miguel what I owed him for working overtime on the parish's behalf. He responded by saying he wanted nothing for the work but if I could give something to his employees, he would appreciate it. I more than was happy to accommodate him; it was the least we could do to help him in this cause.

This weekend, we encountered a problem in our church basement

kitchen. I guess the plumber found out that grease from our fryers was accumulating in our kitchen over the years and the grease was seeping out throughout the kitchen area. Knowing how bad the problem was becoming, I approached a couple named Maurelio & Ruth whose marriage celebration we offered last year.

During the time of COVID, Maurelio & Ruth came to us because I guess we offered this “bienvenidos” and “hospitalidad” a great deal, which they appreciated. As a result, Maurelio & Ruth began volunteering at the parish, cleaning pews that stuck with the spray we were required to use during COVID. They sealed the rectory floor after we had Pergo flooring installed on our property. They cleaned both halls of the parishes I serve and cleaned our kitchens on numerous occasions.

When we found out about the grease problem, Ruth & Maurelio were the ones that took our institutional scrubber that electrocuted practically anyone who touched it and scrubbed the kitchen floor FIVE TIMES! They worked eight hours on Friday and another eight on Saturday to

scrub the floors, scrub the countertops and scrubbed the cabinetry to make them as clean as possible.

When they finished I wanted to give them something for their efforts, knowing they were worth a whole lot more than I was offering. When Maurelio & Ruth saw my check, they considered it an insult, because they did not scrub the floors for money; they scrubbed the kitchen because of their love of God and this community. No greater example could be offered me about the grace of God than what Ruth & Maurelio offered this parish this weekend.

I was told that we needed to repair our roof and build a first floor set of “special needs” bathrooms in our gymnasium (you currently have to walk up a flight of stairs to use the facilities). Conventionally, the roof would have cost us \$60,000 and the bathrooms \$75,000. For a parish with a \$325,000 debt, taking care of this projects was going to be quite a chore to accomplish.

The way I am made up, I became determined to make sure that we got this roof fixed and we put bathroom facilities in that gymnasium on

the first floor without \$135,000 at my disposal. So... I began communicating with my “potato chip guy” Nick Skokna. Nick has been feeding the folks in the area with cases and pallets full of junk food throughout the Will, Kankakee and Cook County area (this weekend, we had twelve cases of chips left in an open garage for parishioners to take, from Nacho Cheese Doritos to Sea Salt Ruffles Potato Chips).

Over the past few months, Nick has been giving me boxes upon boxes of chips. He also has been providing me with upgrading LED lighting at the parish which saves us lots of money on our electric bills. Nick got me in contact with a person named Joe Martin and Richards Supply to repair our roof – however we pulled this off, instead of costing the parish \$60,000, the parish actually *made* \$7,000 on our roof project – go figure.

Nick then got me in contact with the owner of Boss Plumbing, a man named Joseph Cohn. Parishioner Joe Kraus has been working with Joe Cohn on a bathroom project that might be able to be completed for under \$10,000 instead of \$75,000. With the help of former Pittsburgh

Steeler and two-time Superbowl winner Ted Peterson and his connection with our plumbing and city inspectors in the area, everyone came together to work on these bathrooms for the sake of our seniors and those with special needs. As one person commented on this project, “Now that’s how a parish is supposed to work!” knowing full well that when we come together as a body of Christ to do something together in the name of love, great things can happen at a parish.

Why does Joe Cohn help us from Glen Ellyn, IL? Why do we get help from Joe Kraus, Miguel Aguirre, Maurelio & Ruth Serna and Ted Peterson? Why do so many of our church and online community get invested in these projects? The answer is simple – because you all have embraced this call from God and you serve our communities for the glory of God. None of what we do is possible without the help and care of people like you.

Maurelio and Ruth once said to me that they did not feel welcomed or embraced until they were welcomed in our community until they came here. I have been teaching the university students about

bienvenidos and hospitalidad and this has been lived by the people in the communities I serve – welcome and hospitality are key. I have been teaching my university students that in Hispanic Ministry, there is a difference between acculturation and assimilation. *Assimilation* is where we tell people you are coming here and you are going to do it our way. *Acculturation* is where we say to people, I want to learn from you and you learn from me. We walk this path together in acculturation and we want to bring God into the fold because if we do this right, all of us, the members of the body of Christ, we do it together.

If we live this way, the next thing you know, we got a roof, we got a bathroom, we got a clean kitchen. Most importantly if we live this way, we got God on our side. That is why we are here. So many people have done so many different things in this parish to live the gospel message in a positive way. Now it is our responsibility to go out into the streets, to find the lost, to find the people who do not know how good we have got it to bring in the kids, to bring in the families, to tell them that this is a place of love. And God loves us. Even when we do not love God, we

come here. We have a chance for heaven if we welcome the lost and love those around us by giving from our hearts.

Thanks for all those examples of faith who have shown us, how to live this life. Let us be determined to live that life ourselves. By the way, we accept this message. Invite the lost to this table, fellowship of centers and offer this grace of God to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.