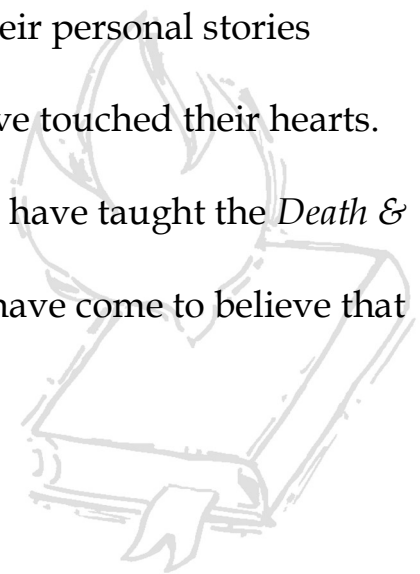


Homily
31st Sunday OT - B
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 06-07, 2021

Dt 6: 2-6
Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51
Heb 7: 23-28
Mk 12: 28-34

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From my personal experience and the years I have taught the *Death & Dying* course for the University of St. Francis, I have come to believe that



the words of Morrie Schwarz (from whom Mitch Albom wrote his best-selling work, Tuesdays with Morrie), very much resonate with those I have encountered during the grief stages of life: *“Once you learn how to die, it is, then you learn how to live.”* According to Mitch Albom, Morrie Schwarz stressed how important it is for us to create our own culture and *not* to allow society to create the culture for us. As Christians, we learn that our culture must be formed by our Lord, the gospel message and the teaching authority of the Church, so that our Lord can form us, guide us and lead us because we understand that there was a greater purpose in life than the short time we live on earth. Our scripture teaches us that if we live a Christ-centered life, according to God’s presence, then we find our ultimate purpose and an everlasting joy in heaven.

The idea of allowing those who grieve (and anyone else, for that matter) to tell their story is so important to me. Every time I celebrate a funeral, I try to meet with the departed one’s families, just to ask them to tell me the stories of the loved one who has died. I come to find out that

the more I hear about Christian stories of faith, the more I learn about my own, how the faith lives of others can very much affect me. When I hear these Christian stories, I am inspired to try to be a better priest, to be a better Christian, to be a better sojourner, walking this path with all of you.

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funeral, we re-dedicated and blessed that piano in her name and put a plaque on the piano to honor her memory, as a way of saying thank you.

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A few months ago, there was a period of one week when three choir members from St. Anne's Church all died relatively close to each other – music director, Jim Neville, Fedora Capriotti and Mary Ann Pilotte. All three of them used to sing and play in the balcony of St. Anne's Church over a decade ago to give thanks to God for his presence in our lives, based on the particular gift of song afforded to them. The current group of choir members at St. Anne returned to singing for these three funerals, which was very appropriate – “to sing is to pray twice,” the old religious axiom often is quoted. I can only imagine how many souls were lifted up during times of grief (and certainly times of joy) by these three beloved deceased and all those who have followed in their musical path.

When I look at the readings that we have been given today, from the book of Deuteronomy through our gospel reading from Mark, I honestly believe that all our faithful souls gave of their time, talents and sometimes their financial resources to honor the same one God that is recognized by Jewish, Christian and Muslim faithful alike. In

Deuteronomy 6: 4 (from today's first reading), the Jewish word that summarizes the passage that reads, "I am the Lord, your God, the Lord alone" is called "The Shema," a central belief in all the major western religions (the manner in which the religions adore and understand this one God is different but it is still the same one God).

As Catholic, we believe in our hearts that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament scripture, that Jesus Christ is the New Adam, the New Moses and the New David – Jesus is the fulfillment of the Shema's teachings. We learn that as Jesus explained to us the teachings of the Old Testament and the way we should conduct our lives, that the manner we worship and live like God was changed profoundly. As Catholics who believe that Jesus is the New Messiah that would take us to the heavenly Promised Land, we Christians no longer need to sacrifice or are concerned in getting to heaven on our own because God is going to lead us and guide us through the presence of this New Messiah, this Son of God.

To see so many individuals at both parishes model this type of Christian faith is a real inspiration for me, because it inspires me to do the same every time I hear the stories of these good souls' lives. We have celebrated so many funerals (and so many baptisms as well!) that those who sit in the pews today reflect the good work of those who have gone before us.

There are so many good souls whose stories I do not mention today but I very much appreciate each one of them... and you! in my heart. At these funerals we have celebrated, good souls have cried with us and others who have celebrated with us when telling all these wonderful stories. In telling their stories, these wonderful families have shown me that the presence of Father, the example of faith through the Son and the binding presence of the Holy Spirit, who unites us all. If we believe in God, if we understand what this Church can do as a Body of Christ with each member having a role to play in the salvation of the world, then we also know that when we celebrate this Mass, we never are not doing it

alone, since the angels and the communion of saints pray with us as well.

After communion, I will offer a *Salve Regina* and *Hail Mary* for our beloved deceased, as I do for every funeral I celebrate. I just want you to know that we will continue to pray for you, serve you and love you. We will baptize you. We will marry you and we will bury you. We will offer these sacraments always in the name of this one God, this Shema. We realize that if we are people of faith, that death is not the end, it is just another stage in our life that prepares us for what is yet to come.

If we truly support our Church, God's institution that Christ established on the cross, if we believe in this Church, then we honor those who have gone before us, by supporting these communities, supporting our families. At the end of my wake services, I often ask families when was the last time each family member went home and told their spouse, significant other or children, their parents, family, friends, the neighbor, the stranger, the orphan, the widow, or widower, the hungry or the thirsty, the imprisoned, if they loved them, if *we* loved

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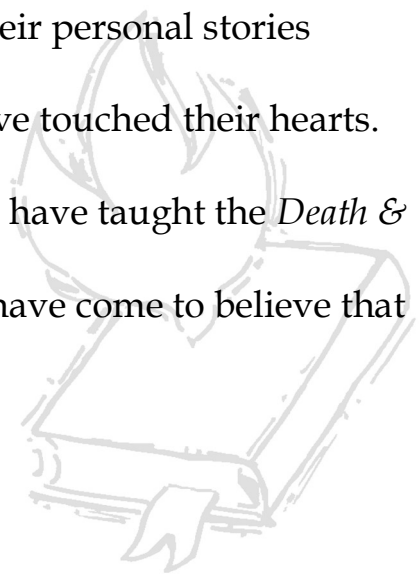
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