

Homily
34th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 24-25, 2019

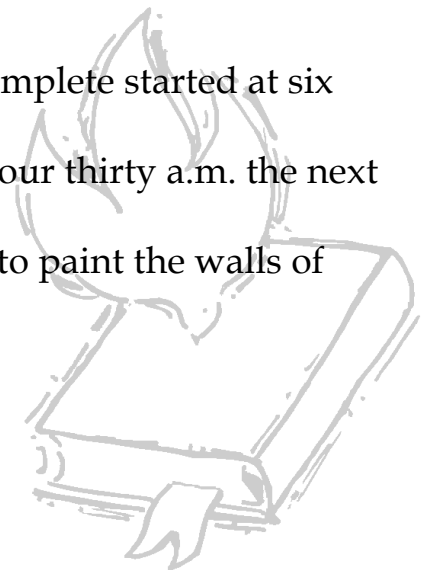
2 Sm 5: 1-3
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Col 1: 12-20
Lk 23: 35-43

I decided to engage in a little “therapy” this weekend here in the east side of Kankakee County...

After a really busy and intense day of ministry on Friday, I decided to get out a paintbrush and tackle the painting of rooms on Saturday. As you know, Wally Martin spent the last couple of months replacing floors and bathrooms and renovating two of the three houses under my care. In the process, Wally was able to paint practically every room of these houses except the offices over at St. Anne’s. That said, I decided to tackle the painting of the offices myself so that this project could be complete.

I came to find out how lousy a painter I was.

What I thought would take a few hours to complete started at six o’clock on a Saturday morning and finished at four thirty a.m. the next day. I came to find out that whomever decided to paint the walls of



those offices with what I call “bubblegum colors” should have a serious conversation with God in the next life. Between painting the prime coats of the walls and what not became a really burdening job. That said, the time painting the walls gave me ample time to reflect on what transpired the previous twenty-four hours and the true meaning and purpose of my own life.

The day before, I began that morning with the daily Mass for a group of cloistered nuns over at the Annunciation Monastery in Minooka, IL. The Poor Clare Sisters have been such a great inspiration for me - during some of the more intense times in my life, these sisters have modeled for me the type of strength in their faith life that constantly reminds me about removing myself from the life of the secular and devoting myself to that of the divine.

After the morning liturgy, I spoke with the sisters, who knew what challenge I had in renovating the houses in which I was serving. I told the sisters that the houses were being renovated and, with the walls of the house now being emptied and repainted, I was in serious need of finding pictures and such to adorn the walls. The sisters responded to

me on Friday morning by giving me about thirty religious pictures to hang on those walls, a few statues to be placed in the houses and a beautiful nativity set in preparation for the Christmas Season. I felt so humbled by this gift, hoping that the folks at the parishes I serve would benefit spiritually from this beautiful gift, courtesy of those from the west end of the diocese who have dedicated themselves to such a wonderful life of prayer.

After I finished my time with the sisters, I travelled over to Morris, IL to pick up a car for myself. As you know, my last car was decimated in an auto accident a couple weeks ago (lesson to be learned – please make sure you turn the lights of your car on at night so that folks like me can see you!!!). With the check I received from the insurance company, I was able to purchase a new car for cash. I have to be honest with you – I liked my old car better but, as Mick Jagger and the gospel have taught me, you can't always get what you want but if you try sometimes, you find, you get what you need. The car serves the purpose for what it was intended without a lot of bells and whistles, so I will get by with what I have.

Following my trip to Morris, I had the chance to visit a former staff member at my last parish in Joliet. Jim has been helping me with a couple projects I currently am undertaking at the parishes I currently serve. At my last parish, Jim helped me renovate a great number of buildings that were in desperate need of repair. Because of Jim, I learned of a program from Commonwealth Edison that gives us a significant rebate for installing special LED lights on our property, making it possible for us to reduce our electric bill by some 40%. Jim also helped me buy supplies for painting the offices on Saturday morning as well. During our lunch, Jim and I also talked about the struggles within our respective ministries as well as catching up with what was going on with our families and lives.

After lunch, I had a bit of time to spend with my father and the family over in Plainfield. I try to visit my father a few days each week, as he is in the latter stages of his life, suffering from two types of cancer and his constant chemotherapy treatments he must endure to fight the cancer. I guess my dog has been a great comfort to the family and the family makes for good dog-sitters while I am off taking care of those

ministries I need to complete when I am in the area. My father's wife Maria also does a great deal of cooking for me, providing lots of food for the people I am called to serve.

At the end of my Friday, I encountered two people that served as the inspiration for today's homily. Everything I have told you thus far is part of the basic work I encounter in my job. I could drone on with you about all the things I do like I just did, as you can do with me. We can "one-up" each other concerning the challenges our respective vocations can present to us (and Jesus infinitely can "one-up" all of us with the stories on the cross). What I encountered at the end of my Friday gave me pause to reflect on the meaning of life the next day, which was the reason I spent my Saturday with a paintbrush in hand and deep reflections in my soul.

I had a chance Friday to visit two individuals who were enduring great struggles in their lives. One woman was at Edward Hospital in Naperville, thirty-six years old, married for about ten years with two children and prospering at a stay at home job that allowed her to take care of her kids as well. She was told this month that she suffered from

uterine cancer and that she would have to endure treatments to fight off this life-threatening disease. We had a good talk at the hospital and caught up a bit about our lives. I had known Erin since my time serving at St. Joan of Arc Church in Lisle, IL some fifteen years ago; Erin's mother was the secretary at my former parish and I have kept up spending time with this family over the years. I promised Erin that I would pray for her at the Masses I celebrate – I certainly ask you all to keep Erin in your prayers as well.

Following my visit with Erin, I drove to Loyola Hospital in Maywood to visit a fifty-year-old named Gina. Gina is a “hockey-mom” of two high school boys very different in personalities, married some twenty years and a part of a very religious family. When I found out that Gina had lost the ability to produce white blood cells and in need of a bone marrow transplant, I decided to pay her a visit, dressed to the hilt in one of those medical hazmat suits. Gina had sought out a bit of spiritual guidance during her suffering and had asked if I could pay her a visit at the hospital.

For both Gina and Erin, each was asking me the same questions that I have heard numerous times in ministry, especially from those in the beginning or prime moments in their lives – why would God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why is their evil and sickness in this world? What did I do to deserve such a bad condition? Normally in those situations, I try just to listen to their stories and offer comfort. I certainly know that no answer will satisfy those who suffer, even though Jesus suffered infinitely more than we can ever understand, both on the cross and every time we abandon the life of the divine on earth in favor of the human things that we think provide more satisfaction.

Theologically, I honestly believe that when Adam and Eve chose to leave the Garden of Eden in preference to the world in which we now live, we all follow that path as a consequence to that choice. Throughout our human history, time and time again we have put our faith in the human leader instead of the divine one, choosing imperfect individuals who gave great leadership skills in some respects but are utterly lacking with others. We prefer to live in a world where we tear other people down to raise ourselves up (look at the political scene as a perfect

example) or where folks try to convince you to buy something or follow a path that at times is unnecessary or even harmful.

We learn in our human history that God doesn't abandon us but we constantly abandon God. Like a parent grieves over a child that does not follow sound counsel, God grieves constantly when we choose to follow a path to destruction rather than salvation.

As we come near the end of the Season of Ordinary Time with this last Sunday of the Liturgical Year (the Solemnity of Christ the King), I was reflecting during my time of painting over the themes that St. Luke's gospel provides as an answer to these questions. Throughout this last year, our emphasis has been on this gospel (and its sequel, The Acts of the Apostles) and the two themes from these writings to which I hold on dearly.

The first theme is in regard to the Holy Spirit, which weaves itself throughout the writings of these two specific texts. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our Blessed Mother conceived the Son of God. The Holy Spirit led Jesus through baptism and into the desert. The Holy Spirit inspired Jesus to teach the faithful, to feed the hungry and to serve

those who were considered outsiders to the society. Jesus places the Holy Spirit into the hands of his Father at the crucifixion scene. It was the same Holy Spirit that descended upon the believers at Pentecost and led them “to the ends of the earth” in this ministry of “the Way.” It is the same Holy Spirit that lives and is sealed within us, a Spirit that, if we truly believe, guides us towards right living and action as the true leader of our community.

The second theme concerns the type of lifestyle the Holy Spirit guides us to live as radical disciples of the faith. Especially in Luke’s gospel, Jesus’ ministry is directed towards and focuses on the life of the outsider, the Gentiles and to those whose faith shines forth even though these individuals seemingly are outcast to our society. When we read stories about the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the tax collector Zacchaeus and the Syrians as well, we learn that if we truly wish to follow Christ, we are required to give up our possessions and to serve with total conviction those we are commissioned to serve. Towards that goal, we are challenged to serve those in our family but especially those outside of it, not just from our surplus but from all that we have.

For this reason, I have done what I could to help this community, to sacrifice from what I have to take care of all of you. How can I preach about being a good steward unless I act like one myself? As I have told the folks in Momence, the renovations necessary to clean up our rectory ran over \$17,000, for which Fr. Dan and I have paid half the total amount. The sisters of the Annunciation Monastery have donated so much to this cause and they have never visited this community – they do this as an extension of their sacrifice to the people out west. I honestly believe that if I do my part then hopefully you will do yours and our parish will grow as a result of the faith life modeled at this liturgy and carries to the ends of this community by all of us together.

These are some of the themes I shared with Erin and Gina during our time in their respective hospitals together. I told both that the strength they have exhibited during these most difficult of times serves as a response to God’s Spirit in their lives and as a model for their spouses and children to follow. I told both that they are not alone in their struggles – certainly Christ endured infinitely more suffering than they have and that Christ instituted this Church so that we are able to carry

this burden together, that those in the pews are praying and supporting those who are suffering like them. I told them both that no matter how much we suffer, our goal and purpose in life is not to live on earth forever but to prepare for what is yet to come in heaven by modeling the life of Christ in all that we do. I also reminded them... and me!... that the sufferings and “stuff” of this world is inconsequential to what really matters in life – to love God and our neighbor, starting with our families.

For these reasons, I decided to paint... badly... yesterday... as a way to reflect on my own purpose in life and whether I possessed the type of strength that folks like Gina and Erin and the angels and saints have modeled for me over and over again. As we turn the page to begin the new liturgical year, I reflected yesterday on whether I am being a good steward and showing the strength necessary to be a worthy recipient of the gospel message today. May we all honor this gospel message by allowing the Spirit to guide us, by being good, radical disciples in sharing this message of love with those most in need of God’s mercy, in

both word and action. May we learn and share this mission of love and sacrifice with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.