

Homily
3rd Sunday of Advent – C

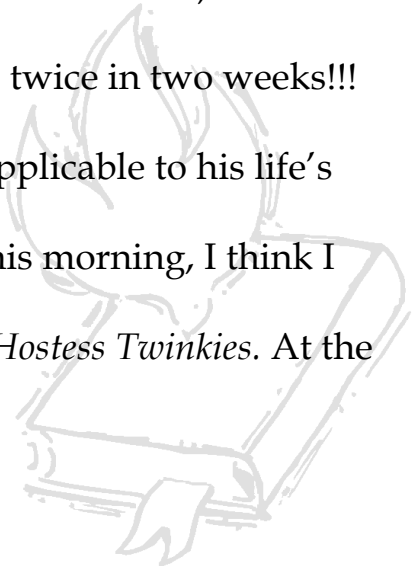
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 11-12, 2021

Zep 3: 14-18
Is 1: 2-3, 4, 5-6
Phil 4: 4-7
Lk 3: 10-18

I wish to begin this week's homily with something rather simple and trite and then end this weekend's homily with something very serious and important.

On this Third Sunday of Advent and *Gaudete Sunday*, I have decided to borrow a homily that I presented a few years ago to the diocesan staff at the Charles Borromeo Center in Romeoville. About a hundred of the Chancery, Tribunal and Borromeo staff were present at the event and what I told them then is what can easily be applied for this weekend's readings. Thus, this homily is not only my way of utilizing what I consider a good theme upon which I think we should reflect, but also allows this lazy priest to utilize the same homily twice in two weeks!!!

So, to begin... if I can describe the gift most applicable to his life's work and what I would like to share with you this morning, I think I could sum up my homily in two simple words: *Hostess Twinkies*. At the



last parish I served, our little food pantry at St. Patrick's in Joliet from 2006 had blossomed into quite a production, as we once served over 300 families a month that once served only ten or so families. Towards the cause of serving the poor and needy, our English as a Second Language Program has expanded from two nights a week to four mornings, four afternoons and two evenings a week. Because of the contributions from our parishioners, we were receiving significant donations towards our *St. Vincent de Paul Society* for the sake of the poor. The seeds we planted in the world of Christian service seemed to have taken off quite nicely at the oldest parish in the diocese.

In the midst all this activity a few years ago, the local Hostess Outlet had called our parish, informing us that as the business was closing in a short time. Before the company was purchased by another outlet that served the Hispanic community, the local Hostess outlet was giving away their entire warehouse of bakery products to the needy organizations in the area. To that cause, we were the recipients of hundreds of *Twinkies* and *Cupcakes* and *Ding Dongs* and *Fruit Pies* – everything my doctor told me I was *NOT* supposed to consume in my

life. We are so overloaded with sugar-infused pastries that our parish staff called all the local food pantries in the area. We called whomever we could find to help care for the poor in the area and in the end, and even then, we could not even dent the amount of food located in that warehouse... everyone in the area had filled their pantries to the brim with enough Twinkies to feed the world!

The Twinkies became a blessing for us. As the Thanksgiving and Advent Seasons came upon us, one hungry person after another was coming to our Food Pantry for aid and our shelves were running dry. Thanks to *The Northern Illinois Food Bank*, we were able to feed one hundred families at our parish at Thanksgiving - for only \$15, we were able to provide a family with a frozen turkey and all the side dishes in one box that the Northern Illinois Food Bank provided us. Parishioners from the local parishes were so charitable to the cause as well - almost *too* charitable. A word of advice - if you ever encourage parishes to place food pantry bins in our churches, please advise parishioners that it is *not* a good idea to put whole frozen turkeys in a bin of non-perishables that doesn't get emptied until a Monday morning.

On Thanksgiving weekend, we had assisted as many families as possible but realized that the *Food Bank* had given us about twenty more turkeys than we originally anticipated. As our staff was engaged in the normally activities of Thanksgiving weekend, we started coming upon one extra family after another who was seeking help during the weekend from the parish, parishioners we knew did not have the resources to provide for their families and were too proud to ask for anyone's help.

One set of parents whom we knew were raising six children, a devout and loving family who has gotten by each day by the grace of God and the help of parishioners from the area. Another father came forward after enduring a difficult separation, a man lonely and lost, having to tell his eighteen-year-old daughter that he could not help her financially at college, so she had to stay at home. We encountered a third man who had offered so much volunteer service work at the parish and lived alone with no family that we wanted to show him how appreciative we were for the kindness he had offered us. By the end of the weekend, we had distributed so many turkeys and Twinkies to so

many people that when the Food Pantry folks returned from the Thanksgiving Break, they had realized that the cupboards had been raided by what they thought was a Twinkie bandit with a roman collar (I guess I look like an overstuffed Twinkie! And I don't even *like* Twinkies!).

After I had explained to our Food Pantry Staff how so many good folks needed this help, the staff gave this priest a pass this one time and told him to lay off the Twinkies. The best part of the story is that later in the day, St. Bernard's Parish from the other side of town ended up collecting too many turkeys for their food drive and delivered us twenty more birds for us to use during our Christmas Food Drive.

In my life, I know that these little stories of Christian charity make all the difference in the world, especially to those who are suffering. In relation to the beatification of a married couple some years ago, Blessed John Paul II said the same of Luigi & Maria Quattrochi that could apply to us - the sacred life is often found within the hearts of those who do ordinary things in extraordinary ways.

My inspiration for going the extra mile each Thanksgiving took place a few years ago when some elderly black woman, standing in line to collect a turkey at one of our annual drives, kept staring at me as I was engaged in my normal routine, making this hyperactive priest stop in his tracks because she wouldn't stop staring. After being the recipient of what seemed like an eternal gaze, I asked the woman why she kept staring at me and she responded, "Because I wanted to see the face of God..." I told her to keep looking but I very much got the message she was conveying.

At the time, the woman made me pause, both at that moment and at every Thanksgiving time. I do not consider myself a saint - far from it - and I do not consider my life to be the perfect reflection of God - I pray that God is nowhere near as intense as I am. After that moment, though, I could not help but conclude that at that moment for that woman, she saw the face of God in a person who was undeserving to be attached to that connection but was connected to the presence of God, nevertheless.

I experienced a similar moment like this a few years ago when Bishop Conlon made a parish visit at St. Pat's a few years ago as well. As you

know, bishop has been visiting the parishes throughout the diocese, celebrating Masses and meeting with the parishioners from each of the Churches. With my community, Bishop Conlon celebrated a couple Masses at St. Pat's in Joliet, dutifully stood in the requisite line to greet parishioners and did all the things a bishop is supposed to do for the sake of his flock.

At the end of our Spanish Mass, Bishop Conlon had this "little" moment that probably made all the difference in the world for our community. The bishop decided at the end of his time with us to visit folks from our Hispanic community table-by-table and build relationships with our faithful in a much more casual way. Towards the end of his table visits, bishop decided to sit down next to a six-year-old, who was reading a children's book about the animals at a zoo. Without making a fuss, the bishop began reading the book with this six-year-old, to the amazement of his parents. No greater moment at that reception took place than that little moment that made all the difference in the world for this Hispanic family that saw the face of God through a bishop reading a children's book.

If there is any theme I would like to impress with you on this day, it would be this – the little moments make all the difference in the world in the life of faith. Whether those little moments are found from the words, “What can I do?” to those things of a larger scale, the little acts filled with God love can, unbeknownst to us, become the sacred acts that transform hearts and souls.

This seems to be the theme of our gospel readings today – tax collectors, soldiers on guard and even the faithful kept asking the question, “What can we do to prepare ourselves for the coming of this Christ?” The answer, of course, begins with the little things and ends with the big things. We learn that if all these things are rooted in Christian charity (which is love infused with God’s spirit), then we become vessels through which the Holy Spirit can offer this grace of God to others in the world and then others truly can see the face of God in what we do.

In our society and in our world, these little things are first experienced in the home through the joys and struggles of the mothers and fathers, the parents who bring this charism of family from the

parish Church to the domestic Church of the home. So often the act of love offered by a mom and dad make all the difference in the world for their children and yet, as we will see together, these acts of love are often forgotten or even diminished as something common or every day. As Christians who minister either in the local church of the parish or the Church of a diocese, our moments of grace often begin with those small moments and the way we conduct ourselves in the small ways pays dividends when that seed begins to grow.

As you know, these efforts at times bear great fruit and sometimes they do not. How many times have those like St. Monica approached us because the children in their care have fallen away from the life of love? How many times have we struggled because those in our care do not follow the straight and narrow path, knowing the dangers and pitfalls that result from a life devoid of God? Especially this weekend, we have seen the results of evil in the most devastating way, as we pray for those teachers and students who senselessly lost their lives in Newtown, Connecticut. We realize how short and sacred life truly is and impresses

upon us the need to embrace the life we have and never take it for granted.

If not for that reason but because life is sacred and God gave us that life, let us all be aware of the little moments of life that make all the difference in the world, in the way we talk and live and play and love and, in this case, the way we protect each other in God's name. Let us be aware of the ordinary moments that so many within our faith accomplish in extraordinary ways, moments that we often take for granted but especially now realize how important are in our lives.

As we commemorate the Nativity of our Lord on December 25th, may we say a prayer for those in need and do what is necessary to take care of those who seek that light, both in prayer and in action. May we always offer this hope of the Advent and Christmas light with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.