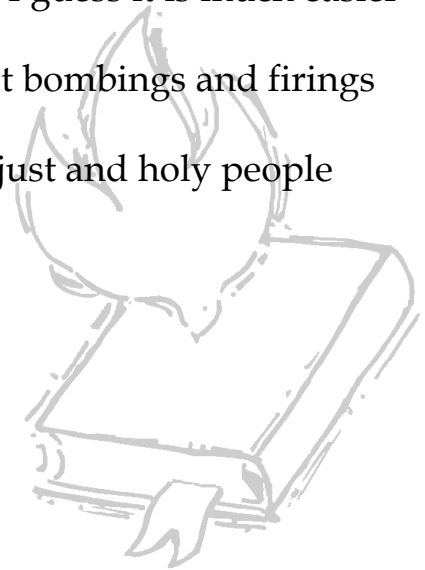


Homily
5th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 8-9, 2019

Is 6: 1-2, 3-8
Ps 138: 1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8
1 Cor 15: 1-11
Lk 5: 1-11

A professor at my old seminary used to tell me that if I wanted to be a good homilist, then it was important for me to read and pay attention to as much in the world that I was able. He showed me how to connect the events of the my personal life as well as the daily newspapers and magazines to the gospel message and that method has served me well over the last twenty plus years of my priesthood.

The problem, though, with reading the papers and such is that the news the papers offer usually infuriates me. The fact is, the media is in the business of inciting the people, in providing juicy stories that stir the emotions and often leading them to a life of sin. I guess it is much easier to get people to buy papers when you talk about bombings and firings and scandals that rock a society rather than the just and holy people who reflect the love of God in the world.



As I was reading the papers just recently, I became incensed at some of the actions and comments that the papers wanted to provide for me. I read about the Supreme Court of our Country which negated a law from Louisiana that would have stopped late term abortions. This same Supreme Court also defied God's natural law, allowing other couplings outside of a man and wife to be legally married. I constantly read comments from politicians who state that they would defend the rights of a woman to choose whether their baby should be killed before birth, even those who claim to be Catholic.

I think, though, that the most despairing thing that I came across this week was found in an article from the Reuters' News Service some time ago that was run in the national papers. The article reads as follows...

GIRL SUSPENDED FROM SCHOOL FOR SAYING 'HELL'

A second-grade girl from Pittsburgh was suspended this week from her public elementary school for saying the word "hell" to a boy in her class.

But 7-year-old Brandy McKeith says she was only warning the boy about the eternal comeuppance he could face for saying: "I swear to God."

“I said, ‘You’re going to go to hell for swearing to God,’” Brandy was quoted as saying in an article that appeared on the Web site of the Pittsburgh Tribune Review on Wednesday.

School officials were unavailable for comment. A Pittsburgh Public Schools spokeswoman told the newspaper that the student code prohibits profanity but does not provide a clear definition of what profanity is.

The girl’s parents, who said they believed their daughter’s version of the story, were flabbergasted by the suspension and complained to the school principal.

“Kids are bringing guns and knives to school. ... They’ve got dope. And we’re worried about ‘hell’?” said her father, Wayne McKenith.

Meanwhile, the incident drew the attention of civil liberties experts as far away as New York.

“There was no threat and the word was being used in its intended way, not in a vulgar manner,” civil liberties attorney Christopher Murray said in a statement distributed by his New York law firm.

NIÑA SUSPENDIDA DE LA ESCUELA POR DECIR “INFIERNO”

Una niña de segundo grado de Pittsburgh fue suspendida esta semana de su escuela primaria pública por decir la palabra “infierno” a un niño de su clase.

Pero Brandy McKenith, de 7 años, dice que solo estaba advirtiéndole al niño sobre la eterna ventaja que podría enfrentar por decir: “Lo juro por Dios”.

“Dije: ‘Vas a ir al infierno por jurar a Dios’”, dijo Brandy en un artículo que apareció el miércoles en el sitio web de la Pittsburgh Tribune Review.

Los funcionarios de la escuela no estaban disponibles para hacer comentarios. Una portavoz de las Escuelas Públicas de Pittsburgh dijo al periódico que el código estudiantil prohíbe la profanación pero no proporciona una definición clara de lo que es la profanación.

Los padres de la niña, quienes dijeron que creían la versión de la historia de su hija, quedaron pasmados por la suspensión y se quejaron con el director de la escuela.

“Los niños traen armas y cuchillos a la escuela. ... Tienen droga. ¿Y estamos preocupados por el “infierno”? “, Dijo su padre, Wayne McKeith.

Mientras tanto, el incidente atrajo la atención de expertos en libertades civiles tan lejos como Nueva York.

“No hubo ninguna amenaza y la palabra se estaba usando de la forma prevista, no de manera vulgar”, dijo el abogado de libertades civiles Christopher Murray en un comunicado distribuido por su bufete de abogados de Nueva York.

As I reflected on this story from Reuters, I thought to myself that I could not judge the situation, since I did not know the context from which it came. I did not know if the girl was sincere in her comments or if she was acting in a sarcastic way. However, theoretically speaking, I was also thinking to myself that in this society, sex, foul language and inappropriate public behavior seem to be acceptable and advocated while defending the will of God will get you punished. I started thinking to myself that no further than thirty or so years ago, the kinds of actions that have come from the mouths and actions of our citizens today would have scandalized and outraged the people of the past. I

think to myself that in a world that teaches tolerance, we not only tolerate the sinful life, but we now have accepted it, and in some cases actually advocate that type of lifestyle as preferable behavior.

Theoretically speaking, this second grader was right. With these kinds of words and actions, we *are* going to hell! By casting God aside and allowing the sins of the world to become the inspiration for our lives, we have lost our purpose in life and have lost our path to the kingdom.

The purpose of today's first reading and gospel is to call out leaders in our society who are willing to stand up and fight against what is wrong. You made a promise to stand up against sin at your baptism, and so did I. We call that promise the entry to the priesthood of all believers, where we state to God that we believe and profess that God's will be done.

We also just prayed at Mass for God to forgive us our sins. During our Confiteor, we recognized that there are two types of sins in our lives, the things we have done and the things we have failed to do. In

the Church, we call our sinful actions those of *commission* and the things we have not done sins of *omission*. We start to realize that by being silent about the sins of the world, we become just as guilty of sin as those who commit the sin and that through our silence, we quietly tolerate, permit, and advocate those sins that are running rampant in the world.

In the seminary, my old seminary rector (who is now the bishop emeritus from Tucson, AZ) used to challenge us about our vocation. He used to ask us, “Are you *angry* enough to be a priest? Are you willing to stand up for what is right and just and fight against those who turn against the gospel message?” He used to tell us that if we are not strong enough to stand up for the gospel, then we will become priests who just “go through the motions” and are ultimately ineffective in our ministries.

The Church is not a passive institution. We are not called to do nothing. We are called to follow the example of Christ and stand up against the injustices in the world. We know this is hard – in the synoptic gospels, Jesus lasts one year on earth in his public ministry; in

John's gospel, he lasts only three years. We know we will be persecuted and dealt with badly for the sake of the gospel - recently, we celebrated the martyrdom of St. Agatha and St. Paul Miki & companions who all were murdered for standing up to God. The question is whether we are strong enough to follow that path or whether we cower under the blanket of sin under which our society seems to keep warm today.

As parents in our society, the people in that role play the role of spiritual and moral leaders of the family. Kids and spouses look to their parents' example for guidance. At the convent where I live, the good sisters there are supposed to serve as moral leaders of the faith as well - without their support of the clergy and religious within our diocese through their prayer, our work would become that much more difficult to do. Concerning those sitting in our pews, what you do will influence what they do in return. At work, you may not be preaching explicitly the gospel of Christ but that gospel message can be seen in the way you act and conduct yourselves. Here in Church, we clergy and religious have been called to be spiritual and moral leaders of the faithful. It is

our responsibility to listen to the gospel message, preach it, and live it.

When all of us follow the will of God in our respective lives, then maybe we can find the strength of the second-grade girls of the world who seem to have more of a grasp of the world of God than most.

If you want to be strong in society, maybe today is the day to tell people not to engage in scandalous behavior. Maybe today's the day to write those in public service, both in the Church and in our civil societies, and explain to them the repercussions of these sinful actions in this life.

On the day of a deacon's ordination, the bishop instructs them to follow the gospel message in a certain way, a way that was advocated by the girl in Pennsylvania, a way that should be advocated by all. The bishop tells the deacon, "Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach" ("Cree lo que lees, enseña lo que crees y practica lo que enseñas"). If we want to be fishers of men, if we want to be leaders, then we must learn the message correctly, teach the message, but most importantly, live the message. Let us live this message together

as we strive to do God's will, to do good and to avoid evil. This is our prayer.