

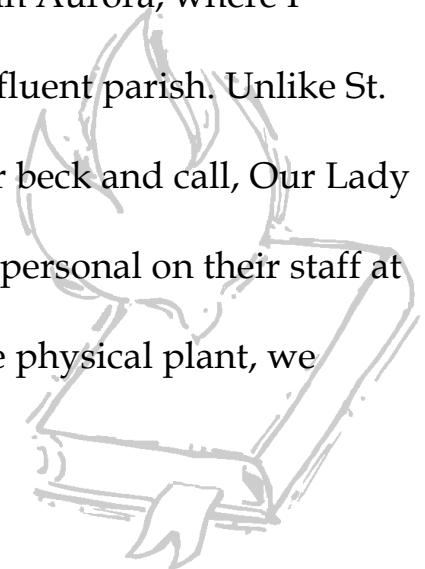
Homily
7th Sunday OT - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 18-19, 2023

Lv 19: 1-2, 17-18
Ps 103: 1-2; 3-4; 8; 10; 12-13
1 Cor 3: 16-23
Mt 5: 38-48

The diocese has asked each of us pastors throughout the diocese to speak about the Diocesan Ministry Appeal which kicks off next weekend. With that in mind, I wish to share a story with you that I will be putting in the Special Edition Easter Bulletin this year. Our bulletin provider has asked pastors to write up their Easter Bulletin Messages by the end of February for publication on Easter Sunday. So before we even start the Season of Lent, I just want to say to all of you... *Happy Easter, everyone!*

My Easter message this year was inspired by an event that took place some years back at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Aurora, where I served as Associate Pastor for this somewhat affluent parish. Unlike St. Pat's where the maintenance man is often at our beck and call, Our Lady of Mercy Church had no full-time maintenance personal on their staff at the time. Whenever a problem took place on the physical plant, we



would depend on the generosity of volunteers or paid professionals to solve the troubles that we encountered, from broken doors to leaky furnaces to things of that nature.

One Easter Night some ten years ago after all the services had concluded, I was alone in the house taking a long post Triduum nap. While sleeping, I started to hear a piercing sound all around me, a constant buzz that would not go away. *The sound was driving me crazy!!!* Up the stairs, down the stairs and throughout the house, I could not shake the noise - this perpetual tone would not leave me. After a while, I started to think that I had caused something to happen in the rectory, even though no candle was lit, no stove was turned on and I had been sleeping for quite a while. In my mind, all I could think about was a pastor returning back from his Easter Supper only to find his parish in a heap of ash.

I could not take the sound anymore so I called a volunteer at the parish named John to help me search the house for the problem. Now John was a married man with a family who left his own Easter festivities to help me stop this piercing noise. In the process, we spent a good

twenty minutes together on a Sunday night looking for the source of this piercing sound without any success. Eventually, John gave up on this search, telling me he had to return back home to celebrate Easter with his wife and kids.

Dejected that he could not help me solve this seemingly important issue, John picked up his coat and for the door. It was then that a great moment of insight had presented itself to my friend. As he was moving away from me, John noticed that the piercing noise within the house was becoming softer and softer house while as he came closer to me, the sound grew louder and louder for him. He concluded that the sound was not coming from the house... *but from my pants' pocket.*

We emptied my pockets and located the culprit, an electric guitar tuner that perpetually plays a tuning note until you manually turn it off (I must have accidentally hit the "on" switch while I was sleeping). Needless to say, John never let me live that experience down and had a great story to take home to his family. And now I bring this story to you so the abuse can start all over again...

While writing this story for the Easter Bulletin and after reflecting on our gospel readings for this weekend, I started playing “The Name Game” with all the Johns with whom I have crossed paths in life. How many people named “John” have I served? How many people named have served me? How many people named John have I offended? How many people named John have offended me? From what background does each person named “John” come and what talents and gifts do they possess? (And by the way, you can play this “game” with any name you wish, whether it be John or Jim or Ben or Michael or Rebecca or Linda or Jane or Jill.)

I came to realize that I have crossed paths with people named “John” who were neighbors of mine when I was growing up and classmates that went to school with me during the various points of my education. People named John have taught me, have served me, have befriended me and have loved me. Some people named John have had difficulties with me as I have had with them. I came to reflect upon the people named John I befriended and asked myself a simple question – have I

treated all of them, the ones I have liked and the ones with whom I have difficulty, as well as I treated my friend John in Aurora, IL?

We have been reading the last two weeks about the manner of conduct a good follower of Christ should live, as taught to us by the Lord's "Sermon on the Mount," specifically what scripture scholars call "The Six Antitheses" ("People say this but I say to you this"). The message of the text is simple – unless we love each person named John or Jane or whomever as we would as if they were our friend or beloved member of our family, then we have a long way to go before we can reach the kingdom of heaven.

Specifically in this passage from gospel of Matthew, we are called not to live like our society does with their type of "eye for an eye" mentality. The type of lifestyle depicted in today's gospel is described by scripture scholars as a *Lex Talionis*, so to speak, or *The Law of Retaliation*. This ancient practice has its origins in the Old Testament Law, as the Torah (or the first five books of the Old Testament) cite the use of this type of punishment at least three times in its writings: (Ex. 21: 23, 24; Lev. 24: 19, 20; and Deut. 19: 21). A similar law is found in the ancient

Mesopotamian code of Hammurabi which replaced financial compensation for bodily injuries with physical injury for physical injury. The Old Testament understanding of the *Lex Talionis* was a person's offense against the covenant community was also an offense against the God of the covenant and would be dealt with in a manner equivalent to the crime.

The purpose of how we live, the mission of this parish and the reason for a Diocesan Ministry Appeal is to invest ourselves in love rather than retaliation, to make it possible that every John or Jane in this world is treated with the same dignity and respect as we would give our best friends - *"There is no greater love than this but to lay down your life for a friend and you are my friends if you love one another."* (Jn 15: 13 ff.) The Ministry Appeal welcomes all who approach us as special people to whom we can respond in their time of need, whether we know them or not or even like them or not. When they seek counseling, we can address them as a friend with necessary services. When they seek education, we teach them the ways of God. When we need leaders in our faith, we call

forward those among us and give them the proper formation to serve our needs.

Our parish goal for the appeal this year is \$18,000 at St. Pat's and \$11,000 at St. Anne's. Last year, our pledges towards the appeal took us up to 50% of our total goal. If you can, if you are able, I ask you to help serve our friends throughout the diocese in need of these special ministries by assisting our parish and our diocese through this special cause.

This week we will walk through the donation cards together. This week, I ask you to think about the manner in which you wish to show God how important God is in our life by responding to his call to serve one another out of love. May the voice of God speak in our hearts as if upon the mountain of faith, directing us in the manner which we treat our neighbors and all people around us. This is how shed the *Lex Talionis* mentality from our lives of faith and replace that law of retaliation with the *Lex Caritatis* or the law of love. Let us share this love with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.