

Homily
Solemnity of Mary - A

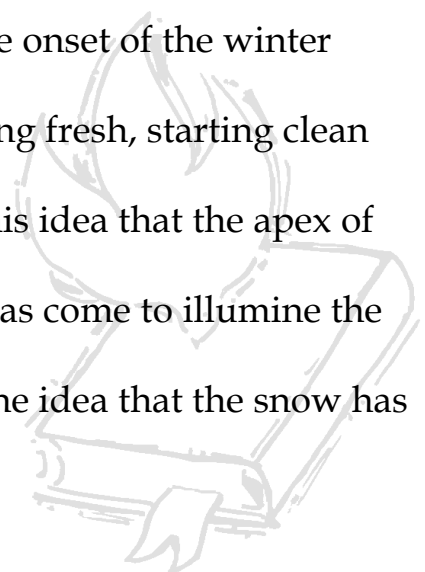
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
January 01, 2022

Nm 6: 22-27
Ps 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8
Gal 4: 4-7
Lk 2: 16-21

Behold, you desire true sincerity;
and secretly you teach me wisdom.
Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
You will let me hear gladness and joy;
the bones you have crushed will rejoice. (Ps 51: 8-10)

He aquí, tú amas la verdad en lo íntimo,
Y en lo secreto me has hecho comprender sabiduría.
Purifícame con hisopo, y seré limpio;
Lávame, y seré más blanco que la nieve.
Hazme oír gozo y alegría,
Y se recrearán los huesos que has abatido.

Those words from Psalm 51 are used frequently throughout the season of Lent and on the Easter Vigil service as well. What I really like about this passage (especially since we are at the onset of the winter season) is this whole idea of starting new, starting fresh, starting clean with the start of a new calendar year. For me, this idea that the apex of the darkness has reached the sky, that the sun has come to illumine the night and each day gets successively brighter, the idea that the snow has



covered our sins and has given us a new pallet on which to draw reminds me that the worst is behind us, the preparation is behind us, and we are now made clean in the presence of the Lord.

We have this light, we have this cleansing, we have this presence that is whiter than snow. To me, this image from Psalm 51 is important because whenever I am working on my computer or whenever I am having problems in life – sometimes *I* realize that in the world of faith, I need to just stop and “reboot,” stop and go to confession, stop and pray. Instead of getting worked up with anger, when I allow Christ to “cover” me and cleanse me, I am allowing God to put me in the right disposition.

I often preach about having “the right disposition” in the confessional but sometimes I need to stop to practice what I preach, to be cleansed by what holds me back to get right with God. I believe in having a disposition of love that allows us to be properly formed to deal with the struggles of the world.

This Advent Season, I was reflecting on that disposition in light of 27th Anniversary of my diaconate ordination. On that day when we

celebrated the feast of St. Francis Xavier (the patron saint of the Joliet Diocese), I reflected on this 16th Century who chose to travel overseas and minister in Japan, to preach the word of God and bring something new and fresh and loving to the people of the Far East, knowing that he was going to get great resistance in preaching that message. I remind myself that, in a very small way like St. Francis Xavier, the ministry I have undertaken has not been an easy one and has been an easy target for those who live contrary to the gospel message. Yet, I am living the life I have been called to live as all of us are called to do. I ask God for strength in this ministry, as we all should. I ask God to help me stay clean in a world that often likes to live “in the deep yogurt,” as one of my seminary professors often lamented.

I was not a very charitable fellow on December 25th after all the Masses I had celebrated that weekend. With just a few hours of sleep between the Masses on a travelling weekend with wind chills thirty or so degrees under zero, I was in no mood for overextending myself on the day of the Lord’s nativity, yet that was what I was asked to do.

On the way to my family's house from Momence to Plainfield, IL, I received a phone call from Joliet, telling me that a parishioner from one of the former churches I served actively was dying and no priest in the city was able to go to the Catholic Hospital to offer her the anointing of the sick. I hesitated for a bit and was about to contradict everything I just preached about the gospel message – over thirty priests serve in the Joliet area and not one of them would extend themselves to visit a Catholic hospital on the second holiest day of the Church year to offer the sacrament to what I considered a “pillar” of the Joliet community. I started carrying the same thoughts some of them may very well have felt – we just finished the long haul of Christmas Masses and we just wanted to rest with our family and friends at the end of the day.

It is at those times that I begin to think of all of you, of my own family, and what God has asked me to do in my vocation. The work “diakonia” or “deacon” means service – how would I feel if a cleric did not serve a member of my family or me in a time of distress? How would any of you feel about this? Here was a mother and strong advocate of both the parish I previously served and me personally.

There was no way I could say “no” to a woman like this but, I thought, I would have the same opinion of a stranger as well. Every person is created in God’s image, through God’s likeness. Every person should have access to God’s sacraments. Every person should be given the opportunity to be cleansed.

So I trudged over to the hospital and fought off the winds on a below zero day to anoint a woman named Lynn Michels, who died three hours after this anointing. Her daughter told me that mother Lynn’s disposition calmed after the anointing, as if she had been blessed by the Lord to be received by the Lord. Her funeral will take place on Tuesday at a parish that she loved dearly. I ask you to pray for Lynn Michels and her family during their time of suffering and loss.

For me, Lynn reminded me of how she reflected that love of the Blessed Mother for the children under her care, for the parishioners that she served. Every time I reflect about a mother in our community who lives that Christian life, I reflect on why we celebrate this Solemnity of Mary every January 1st. Like a good mother, the Blessed Virgin gave her life to take care of one child, the Lord our God. For this reason, Mother

Mary is called the *Theotokos*, the *God-bearer*. Because she accepted her vocation as a mother to our Lord, everything in the faith became new with the birth of this son, with the incarnation. Because of Mary's *fiat* or *yes* to God, today we commemorate our opportunity for salvation because God has decided to enter the world through the Blessed Mother, the New Testament's first tabernacle of the Lord

Because of Mary's "yes" to this gift, God was able to assume a human will and assume a human nature, to do everything like we do with the exception of sinning. Because of God's salvific act from the incarnation through the cross and beyond, God has giving us the opportunity to follow that path to become refreshed and be renewed.

I love that image from Psalm 51 because no matter how bad we have it during the day, we always have a new morning, we always have a chance to be cleansed and start anew. The nice thing about going to confession is that I can tell the penitent at the end of the confession that they are loved, they are forgiven and they get to start all over again. What is it that Nat King Cole song? *Pick yourself up. Dust yourself off. Start all over again.* I like the image that our Blessed Mother is giving us,

that our corrupt human nature and all these sins and struggles from the Old Testament have been washed clean by the one who serves as the New Adam, the New Moses, the New David, who enter the world through what the Church calls the New Eve, the Blessed Mother we honor today.

For me, this is the beauty my vocation and certainly of this Mass. No matter what happens in our history and as you know, good people have drifted away from the faith because their sins or our own that have led to the crusades, the reformations, the enlightenments and certainly the heresy of modernism in today's age. With this new snow and our renewal in following Christ, we have a chance to start our lives anew and become clean through the gift of the sacraments.

Please do not forget about this gift of the Christmas Season that infinitely is more important than any wrapped package under our Christmas trees. Please know that no matter what, if we have a foundation of love, if we sacrifice for each other in God's name, then we become clean with God and exist in a win-win situation with each other.

Please know that we are always here for you, that in these sacraments you have a chance to put your past behind you and turn the page, to start clean. May our new condition in this new year reflect our love for God and each other, as the gospel instructs us to do. That love starts and ends here, the source and summit of our Christian life, where we truly encounter a blessed new Year. Please know we pray for you and we love you in God's name. Let us do the same for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.