

# Homily - The Memorial of Ss. Joachim & Anne

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

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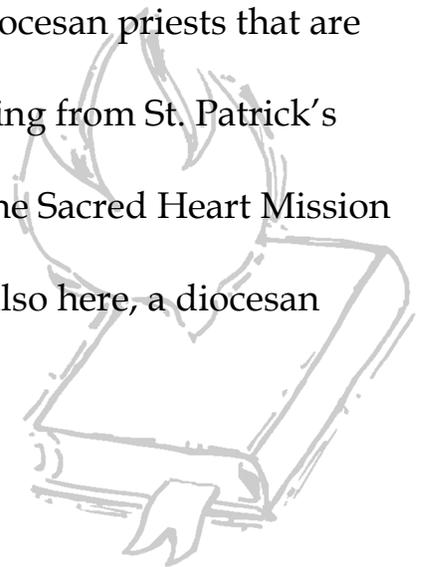
Sir 44: 1, 10-15

Ps 132: 11, 13-14, 17-18

Mt 13: 16-17

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I would like to preface this homily by acknowledging and thanking the Viatorian priests who have served this part of the diocese for over 175 years. First, I would like to thank Bishop Christopher Glancy, a Viatorian cleric who was nice enough to be present at Fr. Fanale's last week here at the parish. I would like to thank Fr. Jason Nesbit from the Maternity BVM Church in Bourbonnais, the oldest of the Viatorian parishes in the diocese. Fr. John Peeters also is present, the Viatorian pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Kankakee. Fr. Dan Belanger is the Viatorian pastor from St. George's Church in St. George; unfortunately, he could not be with us today. We have a few diocesan priests that are present with us as well, including Fr. Dan Hessling from St. Patrick's Church in Momence and Fr. Ray Lescher from the Sacred Heart Mission in the Pembroke Township. Fr. James Holup is also here, a diocesan



priest who has been very active in this part of the woods. Fr. Thomas Tenneth from St. Joseph's Church in Bradley is here as well. I also wish to thank Fr. Jim Hyde, a Chicago Archdiocesan priest who has brought with him a group of Haitian parishioners from Our Lady of Peace Church in Chicago. We are most happy that all these faithful have chosen to join us at this celebration.

I found this picture online that was taken a few years ago that I gave to Fr. Fanale earlier this week. Of all the Viatorians who served a great number of parishes in the southern end of our diocese, what you see



*Pictured at the 2015 Chrism Mass at St. Raymond's Cathedral (Left to Right) are Bishop R. Daniel Conlon, Dan Belanger (St. George Church in St. George, IL), Fr. John Peeters (St. Patrick's Church in Kankakee), Fr. Fr. Jason Nesbit (Maternity BVM in Bourbonnais, IL) and Fr. James Fanale (St. Anne's Church in St. Anne, IL).*

among us is pretty much what Viatorians are left who currently serve this diocese; this is it. The Diocese of Joliet was honored to welcome a great number of Viatorians who served the southern parishes that we serve; now we're down to four Viatorian parishes and after next week it will be down to three. We certainly want to give thanks to all of these priests because they are the ones who brought in the French customs of St. Anne and St. Mary Magdalene from France to Canada and subsequently to the States. We are very blessed to have them and I ask that we acknowledge them for their service to this diocese.

Unfortunately, I am not French. I am a Polish Italian. My father's family came from Poland and Austria. My mother was born in Italy, in the state of Calabria. If Italy looks like a boot, Calabria is the toe that kicks Sicily. So, my customs and my traditions are a little bit different from those of the French, although when we talk about families, moms and grandmas are pretty much the same from any part of the world in which we live.

When I was asked to talk about the French customs associated with St. Anne, I had to go back and talk about my Italian family because when I think about grandmothers, four words come to mind... *One Life to Live*. When I was growing up in Sandwich, Illinois, I was a farm boy, living on a three-acre farm, a mile down from the Sandwich Fairgrounds, the Sandwich Airport and the Sandwich Sky Diving Club. We didn't have great television in the middle of nowhere and what little we had didn't have very good reception. When I was young, the kind of things that I would watch on tv during my formative years were programs like Ray Rayner, Garfield Goose, Bozo's Circus, cartoons in the morning and Cub baseball games in the afternoon as well as game shows.

*The last thing* I would watch during my youth, the absolute last thing that I would spend time viewing, were soap operas. The nice thing about a Spanish soap opera (or telenovela) is that they only last six months and then they're done. With American soap operas, to me they are as dull as watching paint dry; they are as painful as watching a

White Sox baseball game. (How many of you are White Sox fans out there? One Our Father and two Hail Marys... now go home).

So, one or two weeks a year, my grandmother, Carmela Cosenza, would come to visit us in Sandwich, Illinois on the farm. Now, my grandmother was born in Calabria, was raised in Calabria and came with her family from Calabria in the 1950s to the United States without speaking a lick of English. All she spoke was Italian, so when she came to my house each year, me communicating with my grandmother was next to near impossible.

That said, whenever my grandmother left my house during the day (whether she was getting her hair done, going out to eat, going on some kind of trip or whatever), she forced me to sit down and watch *One Life to Live* on television. Then when my grandmother returned, I had to tell her everything that happened on the soap opera. I didn't speak Italian, she didn't speak English, but somehow some way she knew exactly what I was saying about that blessed soap opera.

During my formative years, this type of communication drove me crazy because I was thinking to myself, why am I doing this? This is the grandma who was the one that sat in the corner and really didn't speak to anyone. She was the one that, sometimes, unfortunately, we took for granted as if she were a piece of furniture. It took me years to realize that the one that didn't speak English in the Italian family was smarter than all of us because she had the wisdom and the understanding of what it was like to raise a family.

From what I was told, Nana Cosenza lost her husband when she came first to the States in the fifties. Through her loss and her subsequent difficulties, she taught me great lessons of life she learned through her struggles. She taught me that even though she was sad being a widow early in her time within the states, every morning she would go to the bathroom and she would get the morning cry out of the way. Once she left the bathroom, Nana Carmela considered the rest of the day a gift and then she would treat it as such. So many days, nana would spend time with her family and friends and do all the things you

need to do to get on with life. My grandmother continued this pattern until the age of 99 before she died.

Before she died, Nana Cosenza instructed me what I was to do in order to celebrate her life. Per my nana's instructions, I was to go and buy cases of wine (which I did) and then distributed them to the mourners at my grandmother's wake. I was instructed to tell the mourners to take a bottle of wine home with them, to share the joy of being part of the family, to never take family and friends for granted and to make sure that they tell their kids, grandkids, spouses and people around them, that they tell their friends, the poor, the sick, the people who they did not know, to tell them that they were loved as well, that they were (and are) important. I was told that if we followed those instructions, then we would understand what family and faith is all about.

For this reason, whether we are Italian, French or any other nationality or whatever, we understand why we're here today. We're here today because we are trying to give honor to our grandparents who

have dedicated their lives in service to us all. I especially was thinking about my own grandmother because on this feast, the names of Joachim and Anne do not appear in the Bible; we take their role in this story for granted. There are non-biblical texts that tell us the name of our Blessed Mother's grandparents, most notably a non-canonical text called *The Proto-Evangelium of James*. Similar to the story of this non-canonical text, the story from the first book of Samuel tells us a similar tale about a woman named Hannah who wanted to have a child but was unable to do so on her own. Because of her prayers, God intervened and Hannah gave birth to a son named Samuel. As a result, Hannah offered a wonderful prayer that is paralleled in St. Luke's gospel by our Blessed Mother's *Magnificat*. Both Hannah and Mary offer a prayer of Thanksgiving to God for the child set before them, a prayer of thanksgiving we offer both for the sake of the child and the parents and grandparents who come before them.

As we are told of St. Anne's story, she too wished to have a child but had difficulties along the way. Through the prayers of Ss. Joachim &

Anne, God intervened and the Holy Spirit protected this daughter of theirs from sin as she entered the world. Because of Joachim & Anne, we are introduced to the holy person of Mary. Because of Mary and her husband Joseph, we are introduced to the God-child who entered the world and was given a home and heart in which to live.

In a way, the characters of Joachim and Anne do not receive their due respect within our diocese as well. In this diocese of Joliet, I think we have four parishes named after St. Anne – we have a St. Anne parish in Oswego, one in Crest Hill and one in Channahon (none of which bearing the relics of St. Anne who have offered healing powers like the one in our little town). As far as I know, we have no parishes in the Joliet diocese that bear St. Joachim as their patron. Even in our own diocese, we often take for granted the role of the grandparent in our own local communities, which may be why the numbers attending this feast at our National Shrine has declined over the years. I would say this sentiment applies to Ss. Joachim and Anne, about my own grandmother

and I would certainly say this about any grandparents that's sitting here today.

What I also believe every grandparent would say about their role in life is that the good ones realize the focus should not be put on them anyway; the good ones are fine with that. The Christian grandparent does not seek accolades on the front pages of the newspaper for what they do. All they care about, all you care about, is that your kids and your grandkids and your families persevere and are able to make their way through the world and into heaven. Without the efforts of Joachim and Anne, we don't get Mary and without the Blessed Mother, we don't get the Savior of the world.

It's because of the example of the grandparents that what we do here is made possible. Sometimes we need to stop and think about those who have come before us and those who have made it possible for us to be here and to persevere today. So, before I offer this special anointing that traditionally accompanies this Mass, what I would like to do is offer a special blessing for the grandparents in our community. If our

grandparents would do me a favor, if you are a grandparent or great grandparent, a super grandparent or whatever you may be, I ask you please to stand at this time... I now would ask the rest of you to extend your hands out towards the nearest grandparents in this community and ask God to bless them all the days of their life.

Let us pray...

Lord God, as Joachim & Anne served as the model of being good parents to the Blessed Mother and as holy grandparents to Jesus, we ask you to bless these grandparents in our own community. May they truly offer their love, their faith and the hope of a bright future to those in our community to be good role models in the faith so that whatever they do word and in work they always do in the name of the Lord through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This is our prayer.