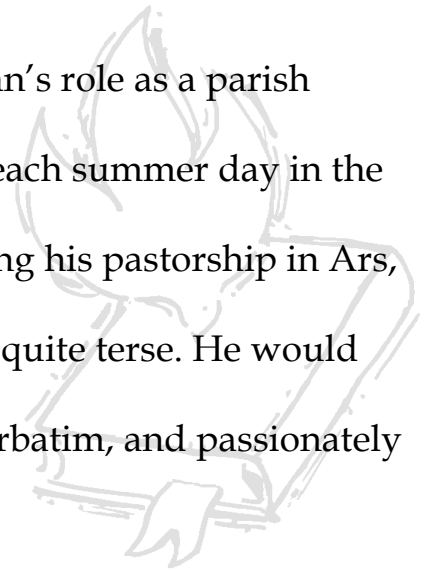


Homily
19th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 10-11, 2019

Wis 18: 6-9
Ps 33: 1, 12, 18-19, 20-22
Heb 11: 1-2, 8-19
Lk 12: 32-48

The inspiration from today's homily comes from the writings of St. John Vianney, a nineteenth century priest from Ars, France who Pope Pius XI designated as the patron saint for parish priests in 1929 and whose feast we celebrated on August 4th. As I preached about St. John Vianney's life on his feast day, I spoke about this man's devotion to his ministry and spirituality, which compensated for his poor academic skills that prevented him from passing many of his seminary courses. The head of his seminary at the time permitted St. John's ordination, noting that his holy life was the overriding factor in their decision to ordain him.

This life of holiness became evident in St. John's role as a parish priest. Tradition tells us that he spent 12 hours each summer day in the confessional (16 hours a day in the winter) during his pastorship in Ars, France. His preaching style was passionate and quite terse. He would often quote the horrific language of his time, verbatim, and passionately



explained why this type of language would lead the faithful to the path to hell. St. John forbade inappropriate dress in Church, challenged those of their behavior inside and outside worship services and was unrelenting in the way a good Christian would conduct themselves. Because of the life he lived and the message he preached, this *curé* of Ars became the patron of all parish priests throughout the world.

At my last parish each year on August 4th, I used to sit in the confession for eighteen hours (usually 6:00 a.m. until midnight, accompanied by Eucharistic Adoration), right in the middle of the diocese in the city of Joliet. When we advertised the event, folks from all over the diocese used to come to visit, some to spend quality time talking about their lives, others just to see if I could endure eighteen hours in the confessional. I used to think that if St. John Vianney could celebrate confessions 10-14 hours a day throughout his priesthood, I easily could handle it one day for eighteen hours.

There was an image that St. John Vianney used in the 19th Century that very much stirred my prayer life this week, in light of the gospel reading that our Lord presents to us today. In one of his homilies, St.

John Vianney talks about the faith life of the individual and compares it to a small bundle of straw that is ignited. St. John stated that a good Christian *individual* who prays is like that small bundle, ignited for all to see – the flame glows, but seems somewhat dimmed. St. John compares the glow of an individual’s faith life to the glow brought forth by all of us joining together in prayer, combining those bundles in order to produce now just a glow but **A BLAZE OF FIRE**, a vision that none of creation can unmistakably miss.

The message that comes forth from St. John is a challenge to all of us in today’s age as well. As a Church, St. John challenges us to unite in prayer, to allow this fire of baptism to blaze in our community so that this faith may grow strong amidst the struggles of the world. With this blaze, produced by the faith of all the people gathered in this room and throughout the world, we recognize a type of light that can be seen in the darkest of night, a light that glows with a presence of God much greater than an individual can provide. This fire, united together by our prayers around this altar, scares the thief away, scares sin away, so that

those who build the fire are protected by the light that keeps them warm.

Christ calls this fire in next week's gospel "the blaze of baptism." It is a fire draws us to this altar, this "source and summit of our Christian life" as if it were a guide to show us the only thing in life that really matters, the only thing in life that inspires us correctly to carry that fire of baptism to others.

This fire is a product of our faith life, a product of those who say "yes" to the eternal calling of our Lord in this world. In our Old Testament readings, we see how this faith inspired Abraham and the prophets to continue the Lord's mission throughout the world despite the struggles that the world presents. From Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph and so forth, each leader of the faith were called by God to keep that faith burning in their hearts and to pave the way for what was yet to come.

In Luke's gospel, this fire symbolizes the Holy Spirit, the fire of God that is present in each of our hearts. Throughout my homilies this year that focus on the Gospel of Luke, I have noted the various places where

the Holy Spirit has inspired the various characters in Luke's writings to go out and love and serve the Lord. It is this fire that inspired our Blessed Mother to carry her Emmanuel into the world. It is this fire that ignited the heart of our Lord at baptism, the fire that led him to the cross and strengthened him on his path to Calvary. It is this fire that descended upon the apostles at Pentecost and opened their mouths to speak in tongues. And it was this fire that struck our beloved St. Paul and converted his life in order to follow the will of God.

The challenge that our scriptures readings present to us today is whether we are ready to accept this fire and allow this fire to glow within us, to accept this faith and Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to be ready and vigilant with this gift from God – turn our eyes away from this gift and the thief waits in the wings of our house. I often preach this theme to the fifteen year old Mexican young women who celebrate their quinceañeras, similar to the three I will be celebrating this month. At their special Mass, these young women listen to the story of the ten virgins from the 25th Chapter of Matthew who wait for the groom's arrival at the wedding feast. Five of the women kept vigilant by

providing extra flasks of oil so that their flames would continue burning; five were foolish and did not. When the groom arrived, the women who were prepared were allowed to the feast and those who were not were locked out. This is why I tell these fifteen year old girls to stay vigilant.

I tell those who are to be married to stay vigilant to their marriage vows. Like the wedding feast of Cana in the second chapter of John's Gospel, those who seek the Lord in their marriage will be provided with nourishment for their lives and a presence that strengthens their relationship. A couple without Christ is a couple who may lose focus on the foundation of their relationship.

This is why I suspect St. John Vianney spent so much time in the confessional. I suspect that for St. John, that room was the place to recognize the fire that may have been dimmed by a life away from God. That is why I believe St. John was so passionate about his preaching and lifestyle - it was through a diligent life with God that the believer will be saved. That is why I believe St. John has become the patron saint for parish priests, so that all of us priests may follow his words and keep

vigilant in the faith lives we lead. For when we all focus on Christ, the light shines brightly; when we do not, the light dims and we are vulnerable to the sins of the world.

Today, I conclude my homily with the prayer of the Holy Spirit, which I often use at Pentecost as a reminder of the vigilance we need to keep in order for Christ to glow in our hearts. May we follow the thoughts that this prayer conveys:

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of Your faithful,
and kindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit, O Lord,
and our hearts shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.
O God,
who taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant us by the same Spirit
to delight in what is right
and always to rejoice in His consolation.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ven Espíritu Santo
llena los corazones de tus fieles
y enciende en ellos el fuego de tu amor.
Envía Señor tu Espíritu y todas las cosas serán creadas,
y renovarás la faz de la tierra.

Oremos.
¡Oh, Dios,
que has instruido los corazones de tus fieles
con la luz del Espíritu Santo!,
concédenos que sintamos rectamente
con el mismo Espíritu
y gocemos siempre de su divino consuelo.
Por Jesucristo Nuestro Señor. Amén.

This is our prayer.