

Homily
1st Sunday of Advent - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 26-27, 2022

Is 2: 1-5
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13: 11-14
Mt 24: 37-44

So as we come to the end of our semester at the University of St. Francis and the courses I am teaching, I have been getting lots of small nights of sleep because I have been working on this new course I am teaching called Hispanic Ministry. Essentially, I have been doing these videos every week and presenting them to the students with the activity sheets and the quizzes. And when you do it the first time around, it is a lot of work. Second time around and subsequently it gets much easier. As I have been putting these videos together and learning so much, I tell the students that a lot of the tools we would use for Hispanic ministry, we could use for any ministry and any vocation that we encounter. In the last weeks of the course, I have been conducting interviews with individuals and groups in Joliet to talk a little bit about their ministry and what they have done.



The first group that I interviewed was the Sisters of St. Joseph (Las Hermanas Josefinas) at the Centro Vilaseca Daycare Center, where my parishes have been collecting toys and coats for them every year. The sisters have been in the diocese of Joliet for over forty years and they have not had one vocation to show for all their good work serving the poor. This religious community helped guide me through my initial years of learning Spanish and the culture of the Mexican people; I am very much indebted to the sisters for their kindness to me during these initial years of my ministry.

The sisters were supposed to come at six o'clock on a Tuesday night to talk to my students. I got a call at four o'clock in the afternoon and they told me that they hall had COVID and they could not come to our session over at the university.

In their stead, I ended conducting an interview on myself with the students that attended my Hispanic ministry course. Unbeknownst to me, the dean of the theology department of the university (Dr. Daniel Hauser) decided to join us at this interview and was taking notes of

everything I said, even though I was interviewing myself all “off the cuff,” so to speak.

In this self-interview, I was telling the students how I realize many of them were taking this course just for a grade. Many of these students were more concerned about how they could get their A or get their B rather than learning the core values we offered them. During the fifteen weeks in the course, many students were concerned about the way I graded them (as if some employer would ask them about their grade in a Hispanic Ministry course). Sometimes I wonder if the students truly understand about the moral compass we are trying to give them in a typical theology course.

I told the students during my self-interview that the motivation for me teaching at the university (since all the money that I make at the university goes back to the parishes I serve) is that I want to take care of the communities I serve at St. Anne’s and St. Patrick’s because I am called to love them in the name of God. I instruct these students because I have been called to offer God’s love to the people I serve and the

university faculty asked me to serve the students attending this university and taking the courses I teach.

I told the students during this self-interview that the basic prayers we teach in our courses (the Our Father, the Prayer to St. Francis, etc.) are not just prayers to God but are also words of good common sense. I teach the students that if they memorize these prayers that I would give them extra points on their quizzes. That said, few if any students actually memorize the prayers I offer, even though they are associated with the university, are good common sense and would help them get a better grade. The prophet Isaiah references this theme in today's first reading. Certainly Jesus talks about it in a gospel reading. On the last day, two will be working at the mill; one who is prepared will be taken, the other will be left.

I offer these prayers at the beginning and end of every class that I teach at the university. The question for me is... do they stick? Do the students actually believe in these prayers? Do these students believe in the 25th Chapter of Matthews's gospel ("when I was hungry, you gave

me food; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink.”). I tell the students that the problem that we have in our society (and that we have always had in our society) is this problem of discrimination and marginalization, of cutting people off because they look differently, they act differently or they talk differently.

Everyone is different than us and many times we hold this difference against someone, forgetting that every person is created in God’s image through his likeness; every person is sacred. If a Hindu can teach us that bowing to another person recognizes the spirit that exists in the other person, then why do we Christians marginalize others who have been created in God’s image and likeness and should be treated as sacred?

Every person is good; every person is holy. What they do with this holiness is up to them. That said, if we end up marginalizing others and cutting others off because they are different than us, not only do we lose the opportunity to understand what it means to be like Christ, but we also forget that Christ picked so many of the marginalized as paradigms of the faith, from the Samaritan to the Syrophenician to the Syrian. In

the gospel of Luke, Jesus often picked the outsider to be the one that modeled the faith. Sometimes the person outside the faith ends up teaching us so much more than the ones inside of it.

I tell the students that in my experience of faith, when the Pope tells us to go out to the peripheries, the churches I serve (St. Anne's and St. Patrick's) are certainly two examples of this; *these* are the peripheries of the diocese. The parishes I serve are located in the margins of the diocese. Sometimes the leaders of the Church do not send the priests who are the best-trained or the best-skilled to come out to the peripheries. Yet this is what the Pope tells us to do, to take care of those in the outskirts. Those who very much need God's love that are often forgotten.

For this reason and more, I love being out in the margins of the diocese to tell people I care for them and I love them in God's name. Whether those I serve believe that or not is up to them. I very much have to believe and *do* believe in this, so I try to extend myself to do what I can to help those who live in the margins of our diocese.

Please know I very much care for you. I will do what I can to support you. Please do the same by reminding ourselves what it means to love my neighbor, to do what to others, to uh, when I am hungry, you give me food, which we will do for our food pantries in St. Anne's. For it is in giving, receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Learn the basic prayers and the faith, let us live the life as a gift that God has offered us and let us share this message of hope with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.