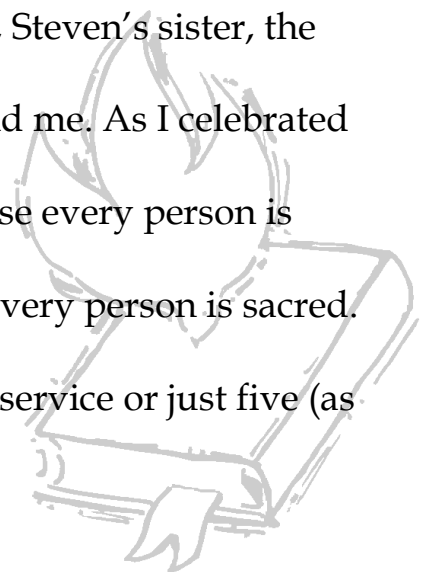


Homily
21st Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 20-21, 2022

Is 66: 18-21
Ps 117: 1-2
Heb 12: 5-7, 11-13
Lk 13: 22-30

Last week. I had the opportunity to travel to Good Shepherd Manor in Momence, Illinois, to offer a committal service for two gentlemen who had died in 2020 but were not able to be buried until recently because of the COVID lockdown in the country. One name of the gentleman was Steven and the other was named Homer (or Buddy).

Steven's sister was able to attend the committal service, but no one else was present; at the funeral service there were five individuals who came to the cemetery for the Committal - the director of Good Shepherd Manor, Brother Alphonsus Brown (the spiritual head of this community and as nice a person that you would ever meet), Steven's sister, the sexton of the cemetery (Roger "Bones" Hess) and me. As I celebrated this funeral, I kept reminding myself that because every person is created in God's image through their likeness, every person is sacred. Whether a thousand people attend a committal service or just five (as



was the case for that service), both God and the communion of saints were praying for each of these individuals because they were both sacred and both very much loved.

I also reminded myself that because of each of these men's extraordinary circumstances, both Steven and Buddy held a deep, loving place in God's life because each of them carried a special challenge in their life in this world... and each needed the loving help of others to persevere. Steven's sister told me how Brother Alphonsus and the staff at Good Shepherd Manor played such a significant role in the life of her brother, because others in the world people might not have been as willing to welcome her brother as Brother Alphonsus and the staff did. I also reminded myself that St. Patrick's parishioner Jean Gibson felt the same way to such a degree that she moved to Momence to be close to her own son who was a resident at the manor and died recently. Because of her devotion to the faith and this community, Jean decided to stay in Momence to pray with us, even after her son died and was buried in our cemetery.

I was thinking about this small cemetery at the Manor that serves as the final resting place for these two wonderful souls, the same type of cemetery where I pray in Minooka, IL with the Poor Clares and the sisters and priests who are buried at that facility as well. I have this sense of peace, knowing that religious brothers and sisters dedicate their lives to praying for our deceased brothers and sisters, knowing that others might not remember the lives of these individuals but the hearts of good religious men and women certainly do.

At the committal service, I was told a little bit about the history of Good Shepherd Manor. I was told that the facility initially served a different group of young men, specifically those high school students who considered a religious vocation in their lives. I was told that from 1933-1973, the St. Jude Society of the Chicago Police Union supported this campus as St. Jude Seminary for high school boys considering the vocations of the priesthood and religious life. With the financing of the Chicago Police Union, this seminary was established and served the faithful for some forty years. I was told that one of their benefactors at the seminary was the Hollywood actor Danny Thomas (of "Make Room

for Daddy" fame), whose devotion to St. Jude extended not just to this seminary but to a hospital that still is functioning in the spirit of St. Jude. Danny Thomas held an attachment to the life of St. Jude's which was present in this part of the world.

As with most high school seminaries (including both Quigley seminaries in Chicago and the high school seminary I attended in Madison, WI), they could not sustain themselves – after the sexual revolution of the 60s and the prohibitive costs involved with Catholic education, the attitudes of our society changed and with that change the desire for priestly vocations began to wane. The same fate resulted in the closure of college seminaries and even Catholic grade schools, which will become even more evident in an abbreviated time, as the Reid organization continues to restructure the staffs, churches and schools throughout this diocese, the same fate that has taken place throughout the country

The number of individuals who have been in high school and college seminaries have declined significantly over the last few decades – this year, the Chicago archdiocese only ordained two men to the priesthood

while the Joliet Diocese only ordained three (I am the lone survivor of my class of three from 1996). If I am correct, St. Anne's School closed around 1986 and St. Patrick's School in the 2010s – both schools suffered the fate of the wrecking ball a brief time after.

That all said, what Good Shepherd Manor represents is so important to us. The grotto where we celebrate this weekend's outdoor Mass (weather permitting) served as a spiritual oasis in the 1920s and is one of the few buildings from the original St. Patrick's Campus that exists today. Because of the generosity from the family of Steven Loftis, Momence Pallet and a couple of anonymous donors, we have been able to host a picnic to celebrate this holy ground on which we celebrate our community Mass, where hundreds of young boys and girls used to live and study and play and *pray!*

When St. Patrick's Academy served as a boarding school for the Chicagoland area, this holy ground served as a haven for young souls to be loved by priests and good religious sisters and brothers who took such little pay for such great service. When the sisters left the school, the Academy became cost prohibitive, just because of insurance and

benefits and fair pay costs that those in the secular world fairly needed to receive to make a living for their own families.

Eventually, St. Patrick's Academy was forced to close their boarding school. Soon after, the Academy had to close altogether, just as St. Anne's had done twenty years prior. When the folks of St. Anne's unearthed their dedication stone a couple of years ago, the parishioners shared stories of hope that their school offered the students of a past generation. What remains of St. Patrick's Academy is their gym and the newly renovated grotto where Mass is celebrated this weekend. For this reason, this holy ground where Mass is celebrated remind us that what remains serve as symbols of the faith that we should not easily dismiss. We realize that, one day, even this grotto and our buildings will crumble as all structures do and that the Catholic Church sustains itself through people, not necessarily buildings.

That all said, if we can do what we can to sustain what we have, we show God and this community how much we care about what has been afforded us and we show God that, on the last day, we honestly can say

that we love God and love this community by the way we offer our time, talent and resources to preserve what has been given to us.

Over at St. Anne's this year, their church building marks the 150th anniversary of being built by those that came before us. Recently, our local Kankakee paper chronicled the rather unique life of former excommunicated pastor Charles Chiniquy, who initially brought the Relic of Saint Anne from Quebec, down to the location that now bears the saint's name. We learn that after being excommunicated, Chiniquy sued the Catholic Church for possession of his building; it is said that his lawyer was a young upstart named Abraham Lincoln. After Chiniquy prevailed and kept possession of the Church he built, the good Catholic in the area regrouped to establish a church that served as a home for a Novena that just passed its 142nd year. We are hoping that Bishop Ronald Hicks will conclude this year of celebration with a Mass in honor of the Church on December 4, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

Over at St. Patrick's, we just passed the 100th anniversary of that church building and will approach the 100th anniversary of the grotto in 2026. As I reflected on the family base of St. Patrick's, I could not help

but reflect how, in the parish's 1991 Photo Directory that we placed online, the book was thirty-three pages long; in 2016, the book only contained nine pages. The challenge we face in today's age is to sustain what we have and rebuild our parish family base to show God that we have not lost the faith but wish to reestablish it as a whole.

For this reason, we wish to reestablish a community picnic to remind ourselves that we need to come together as a body of Christ, as a family of faith.. This Catholic Church was never about what God can do for *me*. In the Catholic faith, Jesus died on the cross, which symbolizes the marriage to his bride, namely to all of us as a united group of believers; this Church is supposed to be about what God can do for all of us together.

As the body of Christ, we need to do this together. We need to pray together, play together and pray together. If we believe that the Church is about us doing the work of the Church as a collective body, then we also believe that we are obligated to support each other in these causes, which is what we do when we pray at the petitions for the sick, the dead, the needy of our community, which is done when we go anoint

people who are sick that ask for our health, bringing communion to the home bound and the life.

The challenge in both of these communities is to get people together, to do things together. As I stated in one of my homilies, the activities that we promote parallel a baseball analogy that I often use. For a professional baseball player, if he can hit the ball safely one out of every four times, today that baseball player can earn millions of dollars for hitting just .250. In this community we have sponsored a few functions. Of the numerous activities we held, one was a one rousing success (our Golf Outing) and other events succeeded to a lesser degree. Because of those other social activities, we were able to And because of the other activities that we had, we were able to finance our roof, repair our grotto and renovate four houses in the process. We were able to offer a day of prayer with the relics of St. Pio of Pietrelcina at St. Patrick's and 142 times a Novena in honor of St. Anne in the city that bears her name.

I very much give thanks to the groups at St. Patrick's and St. Anne's Churches that made this picnic possible, from our CCW to members of the Knights of Columbus who helped set up and clean up to especially

secretary Emma Elvir and business manager Kathy Griffiths who worked together to bring all kinds of vendors and entertainment options to our parish this weekend.

The purpose of this weekend's endeavor specifically was to raise funds and raise awareness that our gymnasium has no bathrooms for our seniors or those with special needs. Every time we have a major function in our gymnasium, groups are forced to rent port a potties so that folks do not have to climb to flights of stairs to use our locker bathrooms. I am told that the building that we have outside of the schools is the largest building on the property that can house seniors and there is no way many of our seniors would be able to climb these stairs.

Conventionally, the creation of first-floor bathrooms would cost us \$75,000, according to architect Richard Snyder of the Diocese of Joliet – he was kind enough to create a blueprint of what design he would offer if he were assigned to this project. Rick Preston and the Golf Outing Committee raised \$20,000 toward this cause. Our hope this weekend is to raise awareness of our situation so that we can both preserve our gym

and help those in our city who would need those bathroom facilities in emergency and social situations.

So here we are, as a body of Christ and community of good-willed folks who have come together at St. Patrick's Church to work together for a common cause. I thank everyone who helped renovate our grotto, repair and reinstall our statues and security system, reestablishing our waterfall on the property and fixing the center fountain at our grotto. We have done whatever we could do to give honor to God as those who preceded us, who made these wonderful statues and this wonderful prayer space a reality. If you know of anyone who can offer service to complete our bathroom plan for the sake of those who would be in dire need of these services, I ask you to contact me or those in our parish office.

Regardless, let us remind ourselves of those who sacrificed for this community for the sake of God and this Church. Let us do our part by sustaining the beautiful worship and social spaces those before us sacrificed to give us. Let us do this together by coming together as a

body of Christ and doing what is right and good for the sake of the people that we mee. This is our prayer.