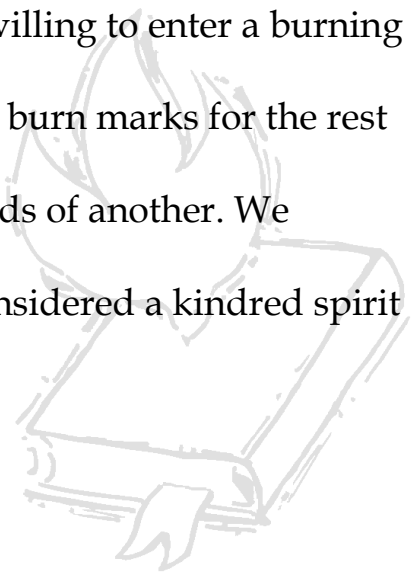


Homily
23rd Sunday OT - B
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 04-05, 2021

Is 35: 4-7
Ps 146: 7, 8-9, 9-10
Jas 2: 1-5
Mk 7: 31-37

On Good Friday of this year, I promised one of our parishioners at St. Patrick's that I would focus on the tragic events that took place in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The person in question is a firefighter and many of his friends, many of his colleagues, those who had dedicated themselves for the protection of others had lost their lives during that tragic event.

I could not help but think that in the Momence community over the last month, I had to celebrate funerals for two individuals whose lives tragically were taken away from them as well. One was a father; one was a mother. The father, some years ago, was willing to enter a burning house to try to save his son and lived with those burn marks for the rest of his life until it was tragically taken by the hands of another. We offered a funeral Mass for a mother who was considered a kindred spirit



and a wonderful soul to the people of the Momence community who had her life tragically taken as well, possibly by the hands of her own son.

During this last week, I also prayed and reflected about a group of our country's soldiers in Afghanistan who stayed behind to protect those in need. Many who realized that their lives would be compromised by the incoming Taliban forces wished to escape the terrorism that was about to unfold in that country. As a result, thirteen soldiers who stayed behind to offer safe passage to these innocent victims became victims themselves by the hand of another.

What can you say to families that are grieving? Just prior the time I was celebrating this online Mass, I met with one of the families whose mother had died, who tragically was killed. During this meeting, the family was grieving horribly, as a member of the family was charged with the crime of taking his own mother's life, right before the meeting took place. When can you say to them at that moment of grief?

Ultimately, I ended up utilizing a sentiment that I share with my

university students from the book I use in my “Death and Dying” course entitled, “Tuesdays with Morrie.” What I teach in the course in the world of grief is something Morrie believed, something Elisabeth Kübler-Ross purported in her interactions with the terminally ill that she has taught doctors and nurses more interested in curative care than palliative care. What I learn and teach is that, in times of grief, sometimes the best thing that we can do is just be quiet and *listen*, is to allow those who are grieving to speak while we remain silent, to let those who grieve just open their hearts and for you and, in silence, to show those who suffer that you care about them by just being with them and listening to them. In silence, sometimes we best communicate by just walking with the suffering in this journey within silence, meeting those who grieve at whatever level they choose to suffer.

This type of empathy that I learn and teach is important to me, it is important to the students that I teach, that I am able to listen to other people’s stories, knowing that even though I may not always agree with lifestyles, religions or whatever it may be, that each person is created in

God's image and in his likeness, that every person is sacred and every person has a story to tell. If we get past the outer shell that covers one's true worth and being, if we can look inside a person's heart to find the presence of the Holy Spirit that dwells within (even if those with whom I interact do not even realize the presence of that Spirit), then I can find a little sacred in every person I encounter.

In the world of faith, we have to search for that holiness in every person we encounter. We need to treat each person as holy, even if they do not see or act like they are holy. We also have a responsibility to love innocent life and protect innocent life.

In my heart, this is what I believe soldiers were doing in Afghanistan – to protect and defend life. This is what I believe took place at the World Trade Center by soldiers, firefighters and policemen and women – to protect and defend life. In my heart, this is what I believe was present in the mother and father who were murdered in this city, who very much cared for their own children.

For this reason, I find teaching at the University of St. Francis is so

important to me, to form the minds of those who attend the classes I teach. From kindred souls like Morrie Schwartz, CS Lewis, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and certainly sacred scripture. We learn that life is valuable and sacred. Morrie Schwarz teaches us well that once you learn how to die, it is then you learn how to live. We learn in the course I teach that society and the media wants to define and mold your culture instead of allowing God and you yourself to define your own culture.

As Christians, we make a promise and covenant to God to allow the divine to lead us and guide us. Oftentimes, society, the government and the media wishes to become our god so that we attach our values to theirs but their values are short-term; their values are empty after our lives on earth have come to an end. Our government, society and sometimes even those within the faith try to steer us away from the chosen path of the scriptures and the sacred tradition that is supposed to flow from the bible. Our government, society and sometimes even those within the faith want to steer us into places that we shouldn't go. That is why we must find a type of resolve to dedicate our lives to one of

mercy, sacrifice and suffering on behalf of most innocent of life.

For me, September 11 has another level of tragedy in my life. A year ago there was a funeral for a priest who had been accused of doing horrible things which caused the diocese to spend millions of dollars in reparation for those this former priest harmed. This priest tried to groom me three years ago. This priest groomed a former youth minister who subsequently tried to groom other children, possibly inspired by what this priest did to him.

Because of what this priest had done to others and what he tried to do to me, I was fed up with what had been happening. As a result, I decided to do something about him a few years ago; what I did caused me a great deal of trouble... but hopefully it protected lives. That is why we are here at this Mass – our Lord implores us to protect lives and to tell people that we love them, through our prayers and actions.

When I talked to the university students last week about the tragedies that have fallen our world, we started discussing the value of life. In one class, we engaged in a debate – was it warranted for us to

enter Afghanistan? Was it warranted for us to leave? Was it just for us to have invaded Iraq... or Vietnam... or Korea... or World War II? Even though there were different views concerning the subjects at hand, what really stirred my heart among the students was that many of them came into this debate with a disposition of love and care for someone else besides themselves. These students were willing to love and care for the other in such a way that they wanted to put the needs of others in front of their own.

What the students shared during that debate really stirred me. The students made me reflect about the reading from Isaiah today... "Thus says the Lord, 'Say to those whose hearts are frightened, "Be strong, fear not!" Here is your God, he comes with indication; with divine recompense he comes to save you'" (Is 35: 4). From the book of James, "Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him (Jm 2: 5)?" James teaches us not look at the people are going to help you climb a ladder of advancement or going to give you prestige but to take care of

the poor, the needy, the orphan, the widow, those especially who are vulnerable, both in the womb and outside of it.

For me, when I see individuals who make those kinds of sacrifices, knowing full well that their lives will be compromised because of this, it makes me realize I have to be a better priest and a better Christian to sacrifice my life in the way that they have sacrificed theirs. So we come today to remember those individuals who had given their lives for the sake of protecting others, whether it be in Afghanistan, the World Trade Center, even in within our homes and families within our local community.

If we have that kind of resolve, if we have that kind of love for our brothers and sisters, this world would be such a safer place; it would be a more loving place. So I thought it would be appropriate for this particular mass to end with a prayer that Pope Benedict XVI offered when he visited the World Trade Center himself in 2008, and then offer the prayer I sing at night and at funerals of dignitaries in the faith. I will then conclude with a Hail Mary, asking God to pray for us sinners now

and at the hour of our death, in solidarity with those who sacrificed their lives to protect poor souls like us. These prayers always take me back to the humility our Lord models in the second chapter of Philippians, where St. Paul writes,

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Ph 2: 5-11)

Cristo, siendo Dios,
no consideró que debía aferrarse
a las prerrogativas de su condición divina,
sino que, por el contrario, se anonadó a sí mismo,

tomando la condición de siervo,
y se hizo semejante a los hombres.
Así, hecho uno de ellos, se humilló a sí mismo
y por obediencia aceptó incluso la muerte,
y una muerte de cruz.
Por eso Dios lo exaltó sobre todas las cosas
y le otorgó el nombre que está sobre todo nombre,
para que, al nombre de Jesús, todos doblen la rodilla
en el cielo, en la tierra y en los abismos,
y todos reconozcan públicamente que Jesucristo es el Señor,
para gloria de Dios Padre.

Here is an excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI's prayer at the World

Trade Center in 2008...

*O God of love, compassion, and healing,
look on us, people of many different faiths and traditions,
who gather today at this site,
the scene of incredible violence and pain...*

*... God of understanding,
overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy,
we seek your light and guidance
as we confront such terrible events.
Grant that those whose lives were spared
may live so that the lives lost here
may not have been lost in vain.*

*Comfort and console us,
strengthen us in hope,
and give us the wisdom and courage
to work tirelessly for a world*

*where true peace and love reign
among nations and in the hearts of all.*

*¡Oh Dios de amor, compasión y salvación!
¡Míranos, gente de diferentes creencias y tradiciones,
reunidos hoy en este lugar,
escenario de violencia y dolor increíbles...*

*... Dios de la paz, concede tu paz a nuestro violento mundo:
paz en los corazones de todos los hombres y mujeres
y paz entre las naciones de la tierra.
Lleva por tu senda del amor
a aquellos cuyas mentes y corazones
están nublados por el odio.
Dios de comprensión,
abrumados por la magnitud de esta tragedia,
buscamos tu luz y tu guía
cuando nos enfrentamos con hechos tan terribles como éste.
Haz que aquellos cuyas vidas fueron salvadas
vivan de manera que las vidas perdidas aquí
no lo hayan sido en vano.
Confórtanos y consuélanos,
 fortalécenos en la esperanza,
y danos la sabiduría y el coraje
para trabajar incansablemente por un mundo
en el que la verdadera paz y el amor
reinen entre las naciones y en los corazones de todos.*

*Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevæ,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.*

*Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.*

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray
for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

*Dios te salve María, llena eres de gracia, el Señor es contigo, bendita tu eres
entre todas las mujeres, y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre Jesús. Santa
Maria, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros los pecadores, ahora y en la hora
de nuestra muerte. Amén.*

This is our prayer.