

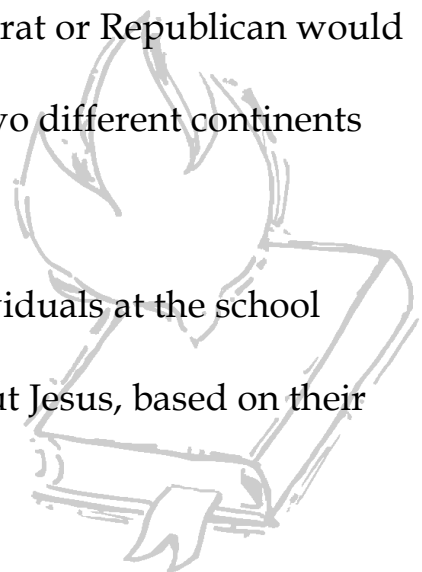
Homily
26th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 24-25, 2022

Am 6: 1-7
Ps 146: 7, 8-9, 9-10
1 Tm 6: 11-16
Lk 16: 19-31

The inspiration for today's homily comes from Chloe Perez, a kindergarten student who attends school at the St. Patrick's Church I previously served in Joliet, IL. She and the rest of the school celebrated the Mass with me last Tuesday on the feast of St. Matthew the Apostle.

The premise of the school Mass was to celebrate the feast of St. Matthew, one of the four evangelists who wrote the good news (or "gospel") about our Lord Jesus. I explained to the students that if you took any four people in a room and had them tell the story of Jesus, each would play out the narrative in unique ways like the four evangelists did, similar to a way that a stereotypical Democrat or Republican would interpret a political event or two people from two different continents would approach cultural events in life.

To illustrate the point, I addressed four individuals at the school Mass and asked them to tell me something about Jesus, based on their



own personal experience of life. I started with the fifth-grade teacher at the school, Mrs. Kathleen Delach, who graduated from St. Patrick's School in Joliet some years prior. Kathleen told me that if she were to describe Jesus, she would see him as "the one who died on the cross to forgive our sins." This seemed like an adequate answer coming from an adult with life experience who has studied the life of Christ crucified for some time.

I then turned to an eighth grader in the room, one Kyle Hoffman. When asked the same question, he told me that Jesus was the one "who sent down the Holy Spirit to the apostles." This answer, too, seemed appropriate, as Kyle was preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation later that school year.

I then visited the second-grade section of the church in order to speak with Iyana Vargas. Iyana told me that Jesus was "sleeping" on the altar and that she would be able to receive Jesus after her first communion the following May. Coming from a second grader who is studying about First Communion, again, this answer also seemed wholly appropriate.

And then there was Chloe Perez from the kindergarten class, who floored me with her response. When I asked her about who Jesus is to her, Chloe responded, “Jesus is the one who made the sandbox and I love to play in the sandbox!” Out of the mouths of babes...

I ran with Chloe’s analogy to explain the perspectives of the four gospels writers in reference to our Lord. I preached to the kids that in the world of the sandbox, St. Matthew told the story of Jesus as if to give us rules about “how to play nice” in the sandbox. I told the kids, in reference to the theme of the “Messianic Secret” that underlies Mark’s gospel, that those who play on the beach ask the question, “What is a sandbox and why is that important to me?” For those reading John’s gospel, the concern does not focus on what the sandbox does but *what the sandbox is*, explaining the concept of being a sandbox itself.

In Luke’s gospel, though, the theme of the text is to turn the sandbox upside down and redefine it. If we focus on Luke’s gospel (as we do this year), he would show us how Jesus pulls us out of our complacency altogether, fills us with the Holy Spirit and sends us off “to the ends of

the earth” to live our lives like radical disciples, showing us that to live a Christian life, we must imitate Christ in the manner we care for the poor and those who are the most in need of God’s grace.

Chloe made me remind myself how, similar to the readings from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes have told us during the weekday Masses, we are challenged to focus on the theme that “the age of youth is fleeting away.” I thought to myself that many youthful people desire to grow up too quickly in our society. Similarly, many adults look down too disparagingly on the life of a child as if to dismiss that type of life. If nothing else, the scriptures tell us that our faith needs to aspire to live like that of children rather than that of the adults, for as children the innocence and purity of life very much plays a part in the life that they lead. For a child, they are not conditioned to be prejudiced or resentful of others – for them, the simple acts of skipping rope and playing in the sand are the most complex things with which they deal in life.

I thought to myself that in the Old Testament Book of Amos, our writer was living in a time of innocence, a time in 750 B.C. where the

chosen people of God received the graces of God during a time of milk and honey. Amos realized how well-off the people were living and challenged them to not disregard the benefits they were given. Amos warned the people that if they took these gifts for granted, if they “grew up” and grew out of God’s graces, then they would lose these same gifts that they enjoyed. Amos, in essence, challenged the faithful to live the life of innocence and purity so that the presence of God would not be lost.

However, as we have seen over and over in the world of faith, the warnings by Amos and the prophets fell on deaf ears. The people did not place the gift of innocence as primary in their lives. Because the faithful of the north did not listen to the warnings of the prophets like Amos and Hosea, they lost the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. to the Assyrian Army. Because the faithful in the south did not listen to the prophets of the south (like Isaiah and Micah) they lost their beloved southern kingdom, as well as the Temple of Jerusalem, in 586 B.C.

Around 30 A.D., the faithful lost their savior by nailing him to the cross.

In 70 A.D., the faithful lost their temple again because of their lack of holiness.

And in today's gospel, the stakes for the faithful grow higher. The faithful rich man, representing those who have but do not share with the poor and unfortunate, lost the opportunity for a heavenly life by abandoning the life of faith in favor of his own hedonistic ways. We read in today's gospel that the pure and innocent, the poor and the sick, have a greater chance of salvation than those who are mature and rich because their suffering and humility parallels the life of Christian sacrifice much more than wealth does. In the end, we are taught that in the New Testament, the Promised Land focuses not on the land of the earth but the land of heaven and to get there, must live in an innocent, humble Christian life of sacrifice and love.

When the rich man pleads with Abraham to return to the world in order to warn his family about the life that is to come for the faithless generation, Abraham remonstrates the rich man that the people have

been duly warned to retain the gift of innocence by the scriptures, by the prophet Amos, by the Lord and by the Church.

Over the next few weeks, all of us will be focusing at Mass on returning to that childlike innocence of God. We will reflect on how life was simpler in our early years of life and how our relationship with God depends on a childlike innocence that all of us are challenged to live. By loving and caring like a child, we look at the cross not just as the most intense sacrifice that one could give for the sake of humanity but, rather, as the most wonderful gift of love that we could ever receive. If we do not allow the world to scar us and separate us from the presence of God in our lives, if our hearts remain pure, then what we see in this world parallels the innocence of kids playing in the sandbox, so to speak. In the life of a child, we no longer view activity in a sense of usefulness or utility but rather as an act of building friendships. As a child, we no longer see our neighbor not according to social status or racial divisions but rather we are unstained and view all those who play around us as a brother or a sister... and we treat them as such.

If we live a life with this childlike innocence, then we realize how lovingly dependent we are of our spiritual Father who cares for us all. If we approach the scriptures, our Church and our lives through the lens of a child, then our readings today make sense – when we all play nice in the sandbox together and invite all in the world to join us in this life of innocence, we understand the life of God.

There may be people in this room who are seven or seventy or any other conceivable age, but in relation to the created universe, humanity on earth is still in its infancy. We still have the opportunity to embrace our youth and to live that life of innocence. We have the opportunity to escape the fate of the rich man in today's gospel in favor of the life of love and humility. In that spirit of innocence, maybe today we take the chance to spend time with our children in order to see them as the window to our Lord, the window to the world of innocence that might be lost through our adulthood. Let us never take the youthful presence of God in our life for granted. Let us embrace the gift of our innocence. Let us take care of those who are in need and welcome them to this altar

of love that our Father has prepared for the children of this world. This is how we learn “live in the sandbox” of faith. This is our prayer today.