

**Homily**  
**28<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT - B**

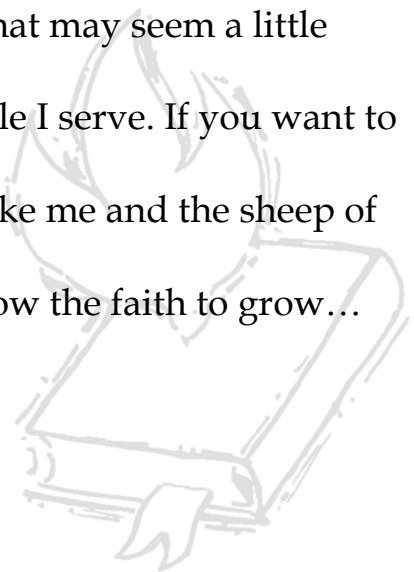
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
October 09-10, 2021

Wis 7: 7-11  
Ps 90: 12-13, 14-15, 16-17  
Heb 4: 12-13  
Mk 10: 17-30

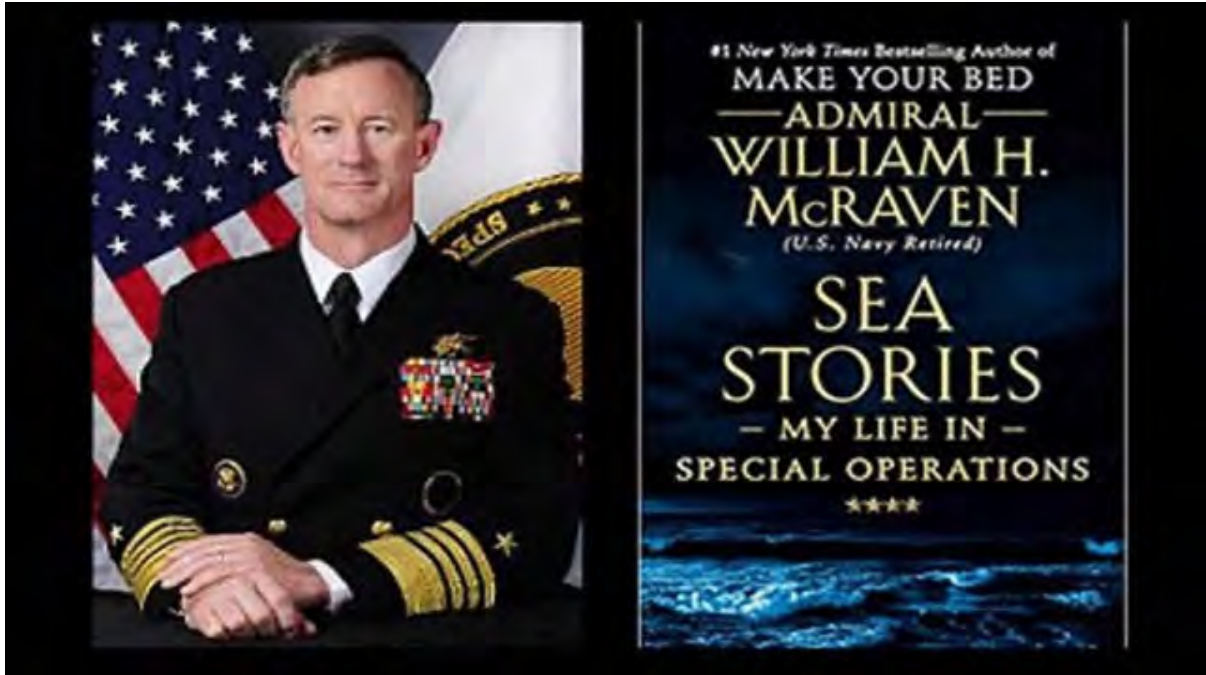
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As I had mentioned in a previous homily, I had been asked by the leadership of The University of St. Francis to be interviewed, to answer a simple question, *What has happened to the faith life in the Church?* In my heart, I believe that part of the faith life in the church has been lost when people lose faith in their leaders. The answer to this question lies with Church leaders like me - I have to be a better leader. I have to set the example; if I cannot set the example, then what good am I to preach this message to all of you, especially in regard to the gospel reading that we offer today?

To this question, I came up with a response that may seem a little odd, but I think it really affects me and the people I serve. If you want to build the faith life in the Church, then a leader like me and the sheep of the fold need to learn three basic charisms to allow the faith to grow...



**MAKE YOUR BED  
DON'T WIDEN THE PLATE  
MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE**



A retired admiral in the US Navy named William McRaven gave a commencement speech to the graduates of The University of Texas in Austin a few years ago (in 2014 – see <https://singjupost.com/wp-content/cache/wp-rocket/www.singjupost.com/admiral-william-h-mcravens-2014-commencement-address-at-university-of-texas-at-austin-transcript/index-https-webp.html>). McRaven’s speech was turned into a

book entitled, [MAKE YOUR BED: LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE...AND MAYBE THE WORLD.](#)

In this speech, McRaven talked about how he climbed the ranks of the US Navy to the rank of Admiral and how he did all kinds of wonderful things in service to our country. That said, McRaven focused not on the great accomplishments that he had achieved but rather, the little things of life that pave the way for the greater things one can accomplish.

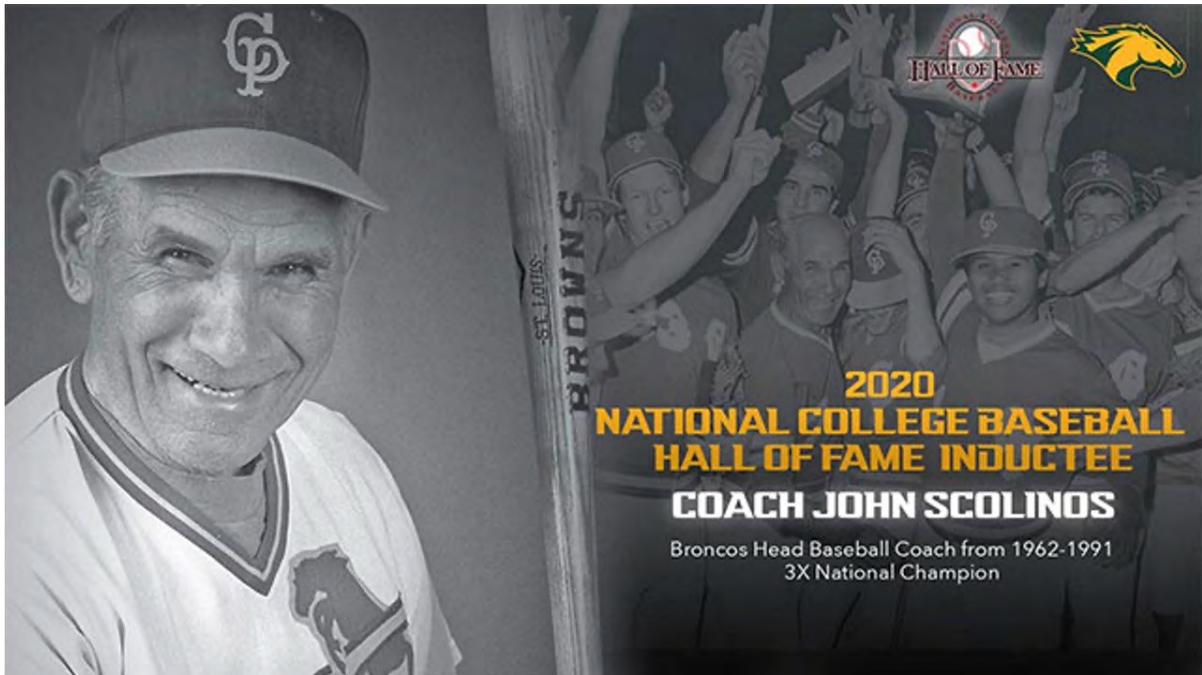
McRaven stated that if you really want to succeed in the world, then you start the day by making your bed. Quoting directly from this retired admiral, he stated,

“If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you cannot do the little things right, you will never do the big things right. And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made – that you made – and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better. If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.”

In my reflection on Admiral McRaven's speech, I came to believe the same when it comes to faith and certainly the studies from our university students. When follow the little rules in life, it is then we learn to respect the more important rules as well. If we can make our bed, dress for success, learn how to be respectful to each other and learn the value of the small things in life like a smile, a kind word and a loving disposition, then the world becomes a better place to live. When we do not respect the little rules, we have great difficulty respecting anything and then our lives take a more difficult path, one that is often fraught with doubt, despair and selfishness (the opposite of the theological virtues faith, hope and love).

In the world of baseball, John Scolinos coached three teams to the NCAA championship and served as the pitching coach to the US Men's Olympic Team which won the silver medal at the 1984 Summer Olympics. In 1996, Scolinos offered a speech in front of 4,000 coaches at the American Baseball Coaches Association in Nashville, TN.

During this speech, Scolinos adorned around his neck a big 17-inch baseball home plate with black lining around the perimeter of home plate and completely black on its back side. Those at this meeting laughed at him, made fun of him and wondered why a man of such repute at 87 years old would attend a special dinner with such an



adornment wrapped around his neck.

Twenty-five minutes into his speech, Scolinos reminded the coaches in attendance that from little league onward, whether it be junior high or high school, college or minor leagues and certainly in the major leagues, if you aspire to be a pitcher on the mound, you are obligated to

learn to pitch between the 17 inches that make up the border of that home plate.

Scolinos reminded the coaches that if a player cannot pitch between those seventeen inches that make up the width of home plate, no one will expand the plate or make special rules for any given pitcher. If you cannot pitch between those seventeen inches, a pitcher will no longer be pitching... a pitcher will be demoted to the minor leagues... a pitcher might be out of baseball altogether.

In this talk, Mr. Scolinos offered the following summary concerning his speech entitled, "Don't Widen the Plate." Scolinos said...

"Here is a question for each of you. What would you do if your best player consistently showed up late for practice? Or if your team rules forbid facial hair and some of your players start showing up on game days unshaven? What about if one of your players got caught drinking after hours the night before a game? Would you hold those players accountable or would you widen home plate for them to fit their special needs?" The 4000 coaches now sat quiet as the old coach's message began to mesmerize them.

Coach Scolinos then turned the plate on his chest towards himself and took out a black magic marker to draw something on it. When he finished he turned the plate around for the crowd to see. He had drawn a simple house complete with a front door and two windows.

He then said “The problems with most homes in America today - and with many organizations and associations - is there are no standards for people to follow or people willing to enforce them. We no longer teach our children, our players or our employees our members accountability. It’s so much easier for parents, managers and executive directors to just simply widen the plate!” The result is there are no consequences when people today fail to meet standards.

“Let’s face it; we have lowered standards in education. Has widening the plate helped out our schools? We’ve changed the standards in some religions - has widening the plate helped our Churches? We have lowered the standards all across government - has widened home plate made our governments better?” Then he turned the home plate on his chest around to reveal the backside of it again and said “When we fail to hold ourselves, our children, our players or our employees accountable to any standards our future gets dark - as the backside was completely black.

Whether it be baseball, family, government, society and certainly the faith, I believe that Coach Scolinos is right. If we are not following home plate of faith such as the Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church, Love Thy Neighbor and Do Unto Others, if we are not following the basic rules of faith that often can be find in every major religion, then in the end we will be held accountable to the only demographic that counts on the last day, the demographic of God. Like

honoring home plate, God will hold us accountable concerning the basic tenets of decency and love and certainly for us who have been taught about the basics of Christianity, will hold us accountable for the teachings of the bible and the tradition of the Church. According to the parameters that this Father has set for us, we are obligated to follow a basic set of parameters in the faith: not *my* will be done but *thy* will be done. Honoring God's parameters is like honoring home plate in baseball – you continue to pitch if you can keep within the seventeen inches and you get into heaven by following the will of God.

I teach at the University of St. Francis whose patron is St. Francis of Assisi (the Blessing of the Pets at this weekend's Mass is in honor of St. Francis, whose feast we celebrate every year on October 4<sup>th</sup>). St. Francis set the radical example of faith when he gave up all his wealth and all his possessions, just like the gospel references today when the man who sought wisdom and love was challenged to give up his possessions to live like Christ.



At the university, I teach three different courses. Each semester. I affect somewhere in the vicinity of sixth to ninety students. Whether it be in the fall or in the spring, in each class I teach, I give the students an opportunity to earn extra credit by writing out completely the Prayer to Saint Francis. I tell the students that the St. Francis Prayer is not just the prayer for our patron of the university nor is it just a good Catholic prayer. The Prayer of St. Francis is a prayer of common sense.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

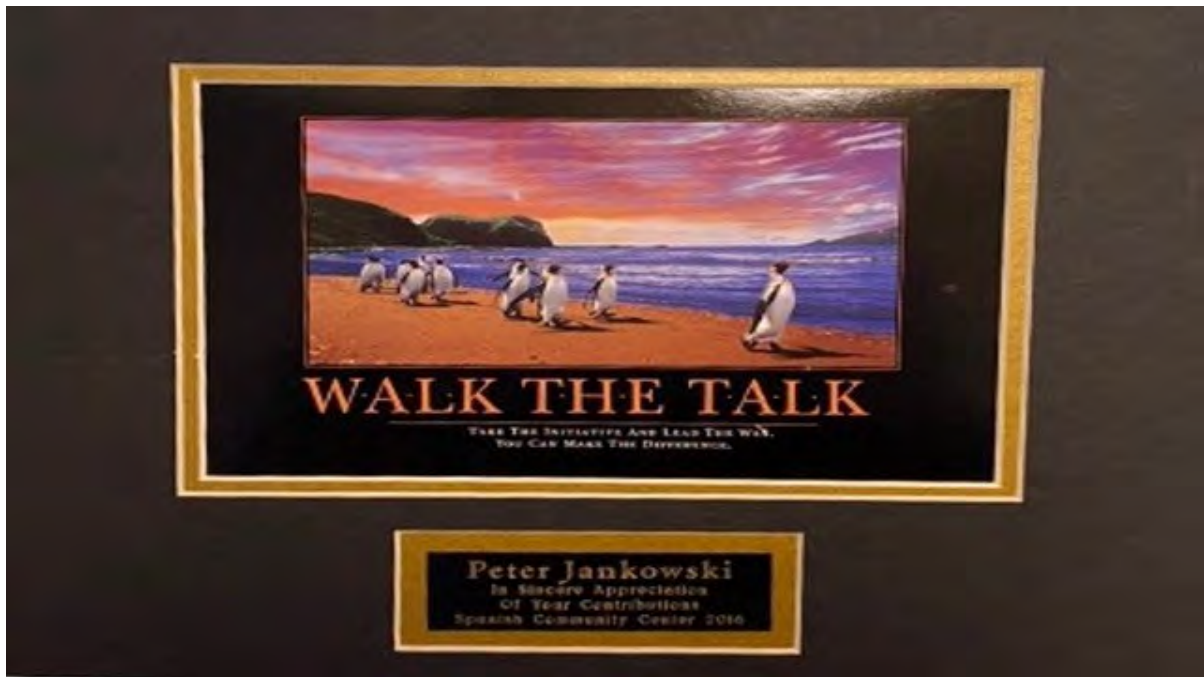
O divine master,  
grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

I have offered this opportunity for extra credit in every class I teach. Yet, among the students who take my courses, only 30% of the time do they take me up on this offer; the other 70% of the students will forego the points for both Christianity and forego a prayer of good, common sense. I guess the students I teach just do not want to memorize the prayer; they just don't want to do the little things. They just do not want to honor the metaphorical seventeen inches that make up the home plate of faith.

What has happened to the faith life of the Church? According to the Pew Research Center, the largest religious demographic in the United States is the religion of the "nones," those who do not believe in anything ([www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/](http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/)). Because of this lack of belief, I am convinced that this lack of faith has caused greater problems in our homes because we are losing respect with our parents. We have that problem in our schools because we are losing respect with our teachers. We certainly at times have that problem in our Church because we are

losing respect in our shepherds. If we priests cannot live the faith, if any of us lose the faith then we will be held accountable to that higher power on the other end of life.

In a good way, though, if we *do* live the faith, great things can happen. As I was preparing for this homily, I came across a picture that I used as the cover for this week's online Mass. The picture reads, "Walk the talk, take the initiative, lead the way and you can make a difference."



I received this plaque in 2016 from the Spanish Center institution in Joliet, IL. I received this plaque because the folks at the center needed a

service that they could not provide themselves. The issue concerned facilities where CPAs and lawyers could advise low-income families about tax preparation and planning for their futures. The folks at the Spanish Center asked if I knew of anyone who could help provide a space for these services to take place.



As I received this award in 2016, I realized how I did not realize deserve what I was given because there were so many people that were involved in helping me respond to the needs of the Center. As a response to their request, I had asked a relative of mine, Lidia “Estela” Cronk and her husband Mike if they had any office equipment that they

could donate to the Spanish Center so that we could help them out. Because Mike and Estela were in the process of downsizing their business, they were kind enough to donate all their office equipment to help out the poor and needy in Joliet through this gift that was worth tens of thousands of dollars.



In the last parish that I served, volunteers from the parish drove north to Oakbrook, IL and carried from the

higher floors of the building all the partitions, all the desks, all the chairs and lighting and electronics and everything else that was donated and filled two box trucks with these wonderful donations. Subsequently, the drove these trucks to the Spanish center in Joliet and reassembled the partitions, desks, tables and other donated items from the Cronk's

business that was the result of downsizing for them but so badly needed for the poor in Joliet.

I knew that I had no need of this office equipment – our parish was overloaded with office equipment ourselves (which we also donated!). Because of Mike & Estela Cronk, because of the volunteers from my last parish and the Spanish Center, we were able to provide the means by which the poor of the area could find a place of hope.

For me, hope is the real treasure that we need to embrace in life – faith and hope that results from a heart full of God’s love. We learn that this grace that flows from the theological virtues is not supposed to be hoarded but is meant to be given away. We learn that if we give this hope to future generations then we live like Christ and we certainly honor the sentiments of an Admiral William McRaven, a John Scolinos and a St. Francis of Assisi. We learn that the little things, the kind gestures, the respect of others and putting others’ needs ahead of our own allows us to reach the real treasure that we need to seek in order to reach the kingdom of heaven. For that reason, I have learned so much

from all of you and certainly hope I can be a good leader to answer the basic question – what has happened to the faith life in the Church? It happens when we find good shepherds to lead those in need.



A few years ago, my cousin Estela passed away and I was given the honor to celebrate her

funeral. Estela's daughter Melissa Potempa and her husband Jerry have dedicated their lives to take care of Estela's husband Mike, making sure to provide for him in honor of the way that Mike provided for Estela in love. I think about what Melissa and Jerry have offered Mike because it reminds me of how I needed to treat my father, to respect a man who dedicated his life in taking care of me. Because of that, Mike has been shown hope, a hope that he has not been forgotten. Melissa has seen

hope, as she and Jerry honor this couple in taking care of both them and the children of their own.

Because of this example, we understand what the Christian cause is all about. If we are going to talk the talk, we must walk the walk. If we want to understand the value of faith, we must first respect Homeplate. If we want to be successful, we must learn how to make our beds and say our prayers. We learn that through humility, we find the presence of Christ, otherwise it is easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than it will be us without this love to enter the kingdom of God.

At this Fall Festival, we are called to remove ourselves from the world of pride, to throw away all things that are ego and to utilize our time, our talent and treasure for the sake of the other, starting with the vocation we are called to serve – our families, our communities and certainly our churches, whatever it might be. When we live a life of love, we can see the face of Christ.

As for me, I am obligated to live the life that I preach to all of you – if I do not, I have no business preaching this homily in the first place. Out



of love, I have tried to drain myself of my own resources for the sake of whatever community I serve.

In that light, what I willingly choose to do is take the monies that I make from my university classes and put them back into the parishes I serve. Last year, I decided to take my money from the university and purchase a \$20,000 truck for the parishes in this area. When I realized that St. Anne's Church needed songbooks so that they didn't have to pay for disposable missalettes each year, I spent the \$2,500 in buying those books. I cannot preach this message of self-sacrifice to all of you unless I first do it myself. From my heart I tell you that I have no problems with what I have done. If you love the people that you serve, you are willing to extend them, sell yourself out to them.

I need to show these folks, I need to show *you*, that I really do care for you from my heart and soul. From whatever else I can do, please know that I love you and I care for you. I will do the best that I can for you in God's name, knowing that I have my own shortcomings. I want to get to

heaven, too - I need to show God how much I love him by loving all of you, the community I am commissioned to serve.

May we all learn, based on our talents and gifts or whatever God has given us, that to be kind and loving to the people around us is the key to having the faith grow in this Church and in this community. Let us share this message of hope, based in our talents and skills that God has afforded us, with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.