

Homily
2nd Sunday of Advent - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 7-8, 2013

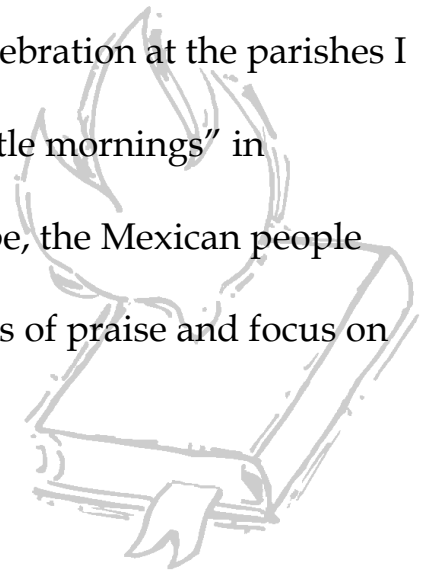
Is 2: 1-5
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13: 11-14
Mt 24: 37-44

This was the homily I gave in English this particular weekend.

Sing the song "Las Mañanitas" for the congregation.

G
Desde el Cielo una Hermosa Mañana (2)
G7 C G
La Guadalupana, La Guadalupana
 D7 G
La Guadalupana Bajo Al Tepeyac (2)

For many years prior to my coming to east Kankakee, I used to wake up for at 3:00 a.m. so I could join a bunch of crazy people from the parish who would arrive at church during some forsaken time of the day to celebrate the annual "Las Mañanitas" celebration at the parishes I served. "Las Mañanitas" means literally "the little mornings" in Spanish. Traditionally on the Feast of Guadalupe, the Mexican people get up just prior to the crack of dawn, sing songs of praise and focus on



the Mother of God and her gift of love to St. Juan Diego some 450 years ago. For the Mexican people, Guadalupe seems to be more important than Christmas; for the nine days prior to the event, Mexicans from around the city and beyond gather to pray novenas in honor of our Blessed Mother's special apparition. At St. Patrick's Church at 6:00 p.m. on December 12th, I will be celebrating our inaugural Guadalupe Mass with the passing out of flowers to the mothers, mariachi music during and following the liturgy while trying to figure out how to accommodate all the people who will enter into our church. Over at the *Camino y Esperanza* retreat house in St. Anne, they celebrated their Guadalupe Novena celebration on December 7th, praying decades of the rosary throughout the area (including Momence and St. Anne's), concluding their day with a Mass at 3:30 p.m. and the distribution of flowers later in the day. On the 22nd of December from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m., our parish will host the annual *Las Posadas* service in English & Spanish, followed by a social in the basement with Mexican Hot Chocolate, Pan Dulce and Piñatas for the kids.

At these liturgies, we sing the wonderful songs of the Mexican faith, songs like “Las Mañanitas,” “O María, Madre Mía,” and “Quiero Servirte Mi Señor.” This last song, in fact, is one of my favorite songs in the entire Spanish hymnal. The song goes like this...

*Quiero Servirte, Mi Señor
Eres Mi Vida, Mi Amor
Quiero hacer to voluntad
Siempre a tu lado, mi Salvador.*

In English, the song translates, “I want to serve you, Lord, for you are my life and love. I want to do your will always by your side, for you are my Savior.” These are important words to me. They remind me that through the gift of humility, I truly understand about God and find it possible to do God’s work with all my heart. For me, that song very much parallels what I consider the most important declaration of servant that a saint ever made in Church history, namely our Blessed Mother to the angel Gabriel during the time of the Lord’s Annunciation when she uttered, “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to thy word.”

For me, the Hispanic people often have shown me this side of my faith that I often neglect. The concept of humility, sacrifice, suffering, and the dependence of God are not traits that we often see in the mainstream United States. Sometimes you don't focus on those charism of the faith until they become personal in your own life. For the Mexican people, however, the idea of suffering has been part of their culture for hundreds of years, beginning with the Spanish occupation in the year 1519.

For the Spanish people, family becomes a priority. Work and other aspects of life often take a backseat to family time, because the Mexican community with whom I work make the family a priority. At Masses, the Mexican families might come to church a little late, but they will stay after Mass for a good long time. There is singing after the Masses, Holy Hours during the week, and a general feeling of community in the way they care for one another.

I was thinking about the way this community passes on their faith to their children in the same way the Book of Isaiah prophesizes. In Isaiah,

the author talks about a “Jesse Tree,” a tree rooted in the earth and grown from a single seed. This seed is Jesse, from whom David and Solomon and future generations of the Jewish heritage come, right up to the star of that tree, which represents Jesus. The Hispanics continually search for that star in the way they live their lives. And through them, I am able to see God in my own life in this unique way. They will even go so far as to bring statues of the baby Jesus during the entire season of Advent for a special blessing, such is one of many customs in which this particular community engages itself.

And here’s the beauty of viewing a culture from the outside in – you start realizing how many of these charisms of family and faith are very much present in your own family and culture but you often look past them because they have become commonplace in your life. Sometimes we all need to be shocked into realizing how good we have it in life before we actually pay attention to what we are doing in life ourselves.

What I have come to find is that this community of St. Pat’s is very much a family that models the charism of the Blessed Mother in the

world of prayer and service. My ministry as a priest has been focused on this parish as the bishop has asked me to do but my ministry also is invested in serving outside of the parish, as all of us priests are called to do for the sake of saving souls. Towards that goal, you all know that outside of this parish, I have invested myself at the Masses throughout the diocese, for the *Las Hermanas Josefinas* in Joliet, the students of the University of Francis and the inmates at Stateville as part of my chosen ministry, as called by the Lord. As I have come to find out, my ministry and my talent is to help those who cannot help themselves. My ministry is to these wonderful people. When they have asked for help, I try to do the best I can to accommodate them, as do so many of you. And with this homily, I ask you to help me in this cause.

On Page Ten of our diocesan magazine this month, you will notice an article about the folks of Sacred Heart Church in Hopkins Park, which is considered the poorest community in Illinois. We call Sacred Heart a “mission parish,” yet as a diocese we have done so little focusing on the poor of our area, focusing more on the poor that live in other parts of

the world. For this reason, we are taking a special “toy and coat drive” (new and gently used) that will conclude at next weekend’s Masses./

I ask, if you are able, to provide one toy for the young children whom the sisters serve. Many have chosen to drop off these packages today in the parish office and sacristies; I ask you to continue doing so this Advent, whether it be here on Sunday or at our office during the week. Please do not wrap the package – we need to know what the gifts are so that we can distribute them accordingly. Just drop the gift either in my office at the parish or the sacristy of the church. After December 14th, we will deliver these gifts to Sr. Mary Beth Clements over at Sacred Heart and she, in turn, will distribute the gifts to the poor.

If we learn this gift of service together, then we learn about why Christ came down on earth at Christmas. Christ did not come down because he had to, but because he wanted to. Christ loved us too much to watch us suffer. We are called to do the same for each other. Let us learn this gift of service. Let us share this gift with each other. Let us offer this gift to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.