

Homily
32nd Sunday OT - A

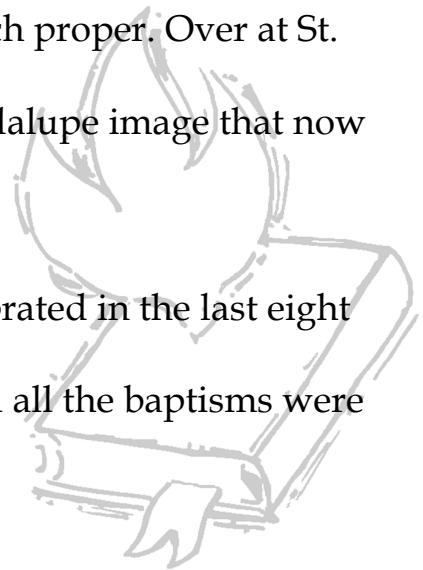
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 07-08, 2020

Wis 6: 12-16
Ps 65: 2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
1 Thes 4: 13-18
Mt 25: 1-13

I was reading a little bit about Fr. Fanale and his advocacy towards the immigrant population here in the border town areas, whether it be the Silva Vegetable Packing Company or Van Drunen Farms. I was told that 70-80% of the folks that work in those companies in the farmlands are Hispanic. The Hispanics have taken root at the border towns to look for jobs and start their lives with their families; they very much populate the cities that I currently serve.

Fr. Fanale supported the Hispanic community a great deal at St. Anne's Church (where I celebrate the online Masses), one in the chapel where I celebrate the Mass and one inside church proper. Over at St. Pat's in Momence, we had to resurrect the Guadalupe image that now adorns the inside of our church.

In addition to the six funerals that have celebrated in the last eight days, we also have celebrated five baptisms and all the baptisms were



Hispanic. For the sacraments we were supposed to confer at the Easter Vigil celebrations, we just conferred the sacraments to five Hispanic teenagers as part of our RCIA process. These teens had desired to celebrate their *quinceañera* Masses and we require them to receive *all* the sacraments of initiation prior to celebrating their special Mass.

A good number of our students who also received their First Communion and Confirmations at the border town parishes also were Hispanic; these seem to be the folks that have come forward more than anyone else to engage themselves in the faith life of the Church. Right now, we currently are offering catechism lessons to those who wish to celebrate Easter Sacraments this upcoming Spring. Of those wanting these sacraments, five of our seven students in the English classes are Hispanic, in addition to the four individuals taking the classes in Spanish.

This is not to say that we will not care for anyone else. We want to care for anyone who walks through the doors but if we want to make

these parishes thrive, we have to address the fact that many Hispanics who were not welcomed previously are now coming to church. Fr. Fanale was a strong advocate for promoting Spanish ministry in this area and so many folks from our parishes really encouraged me to offer this service to these sacred folks. During the funeral services for the good Father, so many Hispanics from the *Camino y Esperanza* retreat house and other Hispanics in the area came to pay their respects because they knew the type of advocate Fr. Jim became for their cause; for this, we all should be grateful that Fr. Jim taught us the important message of the 25th Chapter of Matthew's gospel - when you love those whom others consider least in the kingdom, you also happen to be serving God as well.

We certainly want to provide open arms to any person who seeks the presence of God in their lives. That said, if you are seeking baptisms or First Communions or Confirmations in your lives to "meet Christ" (the definition of "sacrament"), please contact our parish offices. Both Kim

Emerson and John Rehmer are looking forward to taking care of your needs. Certainly in RCIA, with the adults that we have right now, we are offering the RCIA classes in the “Zoom” online format on Wednesday nights. We want to do whatever we can to help all of you out.

The reason I bring all this up is that during the *quinceañera* liturgy, a teenage girl who reaches fifteen-years-old goes through the process of committing themselves to the church. At this liturgy, I utilize the gospel reading that we just read today in preparation for this service. At this liturgy, the fifteen-year-old commits herself both to the Church and to the Blessed Mother. At this Mass, the teen offers prayers in front of the image of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. At this Mass, the teen renews their baptismal promises and they receive spiritual gifts from the community.

If I am correct, Pope Pius XII declared that the Blessed Mother served as the patroness of all the Americas, North, South and Central. St. Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this role of Guadalupe in the Americas some

thirty years later. We certainly want to remind ourselves of the role that our Blessed Mother has played in our life but I also tell these special young ladies is that if they are going to make this commitment, they also have to live the life that they are promising to live at that Mass. The teens have to live that live every moment because if we are going to say that we going to prepare for Christ's return - if we truly are going to wait for the bridegroom - then we constantly have to keep those metaphorical lamps filled to the brim with our Christian faith.

In our parish life, there are so many people that make the commitment and say that they want to follow God at the time of baptism or First communion or Confirmation; others do not keep that that commitment. What are we telling our teens if the promises we make are empty ones? If we in the pews and around the altar are not keeping to those promises ourselves, if *I* am not living the life and am not prepared for the Lord's coming, then I am living a hypocritical life. I have to live the life first before I can preach it to others.

I realize that in my own faith life, I fall short in so many areas; sometimes my lamp is empty and I forget. One of the beauties of being a priest is that I encounter wonderful stories of faith during the confessions that I hear. I learn that if I am not prepared to live the life like so many others tell me, then I have to clean up my act just like God tells others to do through me. I also realize that I am not alone with the shortcomings that afflict me; I am reminded that so many other individuals have prepared for God's coming much better than I have, challenges me challenge to do the same.

I remind myself that in this gospel passage, God sets the challenge for me as well as everyone else. If I am not ready to enter heaven (or if I am), if I am knocking on that door and saying, "Lord, Lord, open the door for us," how is God going to receive me in the way I live my life? Is God going to open the door with welcome arms or is he going to say to me, "Amen, I say to you, it is as if I never knew you?"

For me, at least, the 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel is the one to which I return so often in my prayer life. The three stories that cover that chapter consist of three different ways that God will judge me on the last day – whether I am prepared to meet God (Mt 25: 1-13), whether I have been a good steward with the talents God has afforded me (Mt 25: 14-30) and the story of the last judgment and the way I treat my brother or sister (Mt 25: 31-46), a story which focuses those who have been good servants and good stewards of what God has given and those who have abandoned others.

What have we done to show God that we are ready this entire liturgical year, according to the gospel of Matthew? The gospel of Matthew, this “textbook of faith” which has taught us the way that we need to live this entire last year is summarized in this 25th chapter. I keep returning to this chapter over and over again as a kind of “Final Exam” concerning the manner in which I have lived. I know there are some areas of my life where I had been negligent in the faith and some

areas where I have been an advocate. I continually have to strive more and more to become a better Christian, which is a challenge in my own life... and certainly a challenge in yours. Each and every one of us has been called by God to do something. Whether we follow through with that or not tells God whether we care.

I keep using a basic image of the faith as a mantra concerning our relationship with God, that it is like a marriage or a bond between two close friends. The more we spend time with God, the more we build this relationship, the stronger the relationship becomes. The less time we spend with God, the less time we are ready, we more we drift apart and we essentially say to God, "we do not want to enter through the doors." Entering heaven is not something just something that we are entitled to have because we are not. If we are invested in this relationship with God, then we have to show God how prepared we are through our time, our talent, our resources, whatever it may be.

We have an obligation to be good stewards in this faith, so let us be good stewards together. Let us realize that God has given us so much in this world and we are obligated to respond in kind. Do we fill our lamps? Do we utilize the talents that we have been given or do we allow our lamps to be empty? Do we end up burying our gifts or do we share them, in God's name, with those around us?

Let us realize that this 25th chapter is an elevation of our faith life or condemnation of it. What way do we wish to live? What path do we wish to follow? Let us not allow our lamps to be empty. Let us realize that we have been given a challenge by God. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by God to fulfill that challenge, to fulfill that vocation and to share that vocation, whatever it may be, with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.