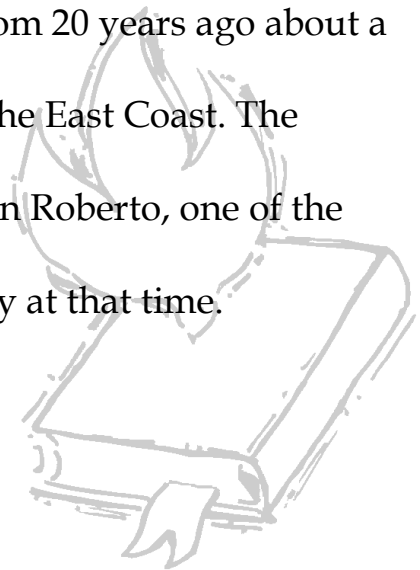


Homily
34th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 19-20, 2022

2 Sm 5: 1-3
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Col 1: 12-20
Lk 23: 35-43

As many of you may know, the liturgical season comes to an end this week. I try to teach our youth the means to determine when the new liturgical season begin, which revolves around the Feast of St. Andrew on November 30th. I have been teaching the kids that the Sunday that falls closest, or *on*, the Feast of St. Andrew signals the beginning of the new liturgical year. In this case, the end of this year signals the end of the three cycles of readings that span the scope of our scriptural readings in the bible.

So as I was reflecting on how to summarize the three years of readings from the bible, I started reminiscing from 20 years ago about a Youth Ministry Conference I once attended on the East Coast. The speaker at the conference was a man named John Roberto, one of the foremost Youth Ministry Speakers in the country at that time.



During his talk, John reflected on the Prodigal Son story from the gospel of Luke (which we read a few weeks ago at Mass). He was challenging us on the way we associate our lives with the various characters from this Lucan parable. He theorized that most people like to associate themselves with the character of the Prodigal Son himself, the one who was a sinner but returned to the fold. Many people might associate themselves with the forgiving Father, who welcomes the sinner back with open arms. Roberto's hypothesis is that the character with whom we in these pews should associate is that of the *second brother*, the one who followed the ways of faith but often became upset or jealous that someone else seemingly received the benefits of God that should rightfully be his.

As I meditated on this image, I started thinking how we often like to associate ourselves with the protagonists in our stories of life rather than the antagonists. A few years ago, I was watching the movie "Aladdin" with my brother and I noticed how my brother got excited when Aladdin got the best of Jafar. I also noticed how he didn't relate to Jafar at all. No one watches "Snow White" and associates with the evil

stepmother; no one watches “The Wizard of Oz” and strives to be the Wicked Witch of the West.

The same theory applies to the scriptures. Who, when reading the story of Martha and Mary, would rather associate with prayerful Mary rather than the chastised Martha? Who would read the story of the Good Samaritan and associate themselves with the Priest or the Levite, or even the beaten man on the road, instead of the charitable Samaritan? The fact is that we would rather associate with the person who gets the most glory at the end of the story than the one who does evil and is defeated in the end.

If we learn nothing else from today’s gospel, we must realize that the only way that we can associate with the source of all good is to first realize that we are sinners, that an element of the characters of Martha, the Levite, the Good Samaritan’s brother or the good thief on the cross exists in all of us. We must realize that our faith life depends, in a way, on associating ourselves with the sinner and recognizing the sin that exists in our lives. As a basic rule of the Catholic faith, we learn in this

life of humility that the only way to get past the cross is to walk right through it and not around it.

It is through this recognition that we are able to turn to the Lord and admit that we are sinners. It is when we recognize our sinfulness then the words of the good thief become sincere and acknowledge the fact that without the Lord, we are nothing. When we pray in the Divine Mercy Chaplet, *“For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world,”* we associate ourselves with sin and turn that sin into the hands of Christ, who places those sins on the cross and cleanses them once and for all. We say these or similar words in the confessional, whenever we ask for forgiveness from our infinitely compassionate God: *Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.* We offer this sentiment every time we turn to our Psalms of Lament in scripture, (for me especially Psalm 51, the one closest to my heart and my own sinful life): *“Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.”*

Over the last three years of Sunday readings in the life of our faith, we have scanned the major readings from the Sacred Scriptures. In those

readings, we have, time in and time out, encountered one story after another about the humble individuals who find salvation in the Lord when they acknowledge their weakness and offer those weaknesses to the divine. We have encountered a Christ-king who serves rather than rules his people, a king who assumed a human nature and took on the sins of humanity so that we may be offered a second chance at the gift of heaven. We encounter a reading today that summarizes the entire scope of our Christian salvation – to follow the life of the good thief is to acknowledge our sinful condition and to depend on Christ to carry us off the cross and damnation and into the eternal wedding banquet of heaven.

And before you might think that Fr. Pete has gone “fire and brimstone” on you, the sequel to this story becomes evident the closer we approach the Christmas or even the Easter Season. We start to realize that when we acknowledge our sinfulness, our eyes open even more to the results of such humility. We find that our Lord is willing to assume our human nature in a manger, willing to cleanse that human nature on the cross and willing to carry us into heaven and he does it not because

we have earned it. The fact is, we can never earn or pay back enough to earn anything that is given to us under a Christmas Tree or upon a cross. The gift that God offers us is one that is freely given and totally devoid of repayment. This gift is a result of God's love and, like a parent loves their child and prays for that child in good times and bad, so our spiritual Father bestows on us this undeserved gift of love because he is our Father and we are his children. Our Father hopes that one day his children may join him in heaven and so he does everything in his power to love us, including giving us the choice to share this love with him or to choose to live without it.

Christ is our King because, despite our sinful nature, he still wishes to heal us and walk with us and die with us because he loves us. As much as we lament over the troubles that attach to loved ones in our family, our Lord endures the trials that are attached to us because he loves us and will do whatever is necessary to bring us to his home. And for those who listen, for those who are willing to walk through this cross to the other side, what our king offers us on that other side is greater than anything we can encounter on earth. That is why it is so fitting to

end our Liturgical Year by recalling Christ's suffering and death - through this death, we all encounter life.

As we conclude this liturgical year, let us remind ourselves about our own sinful condition and our desire to have our Lord purge us of these sins. Let us accept this Christ as our King, as the only means by which this sin can be purged. Let us constantly approach our Lord with a sincere heart so that we may experience this love for which our Lord was willing to die so that we might be saved. This is the most fitting way to close our Liturgical Year and our three year cycle of readings. This is our prayer.