

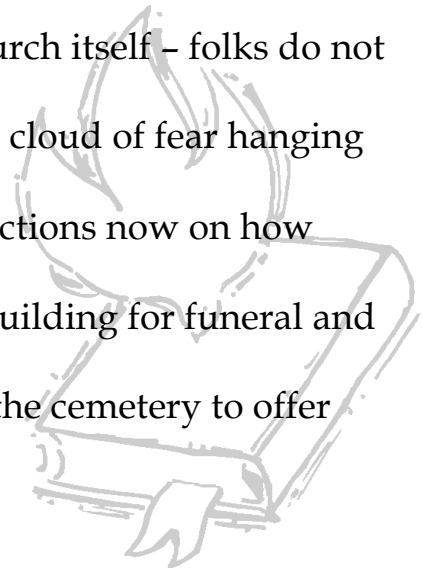
**Homily**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT - A**  
**“Christ the King”**  
November 21-22, 2020

Ez 34: 11-12, 15-17  
Ps 23: 1-2, 2-3, 5-6  
1 Cor 15: 20-26, 28  
Mt 25: 31-46

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On the day I celebrated this Mass, I was asked to visit the St. Patrick’s Cemetery in Momence to celebrate a committal service for Rodney “Rocky” Keen. A few members of Rocky’s family had contracted the corona virus and they chose not to celebrate a funeral Mass in church as a result. Instead, they had asked me to go to the cemetery to offer a brief service on Rocky’s behalf. The family told me that after we reach the other side of the pandemic, we would offer a “celebration of life” over at our church building for the keen family.

This has been happening a lot lately to so many good people whose families do not feel comfortable being in the church itself – folks do not feel comfortable sitting in church pews with the cloud of fear hanging over their heads. Because we have greater restrictions now on how many individuals are allowed inside a church building for funeral and wedding services, we had decided to go out to the cemetery to offer



Rocky's service instead. As a result, I stood at a distance from the family and offered words of comfort on their behalf.

Rocky's family wanted to have an honor guard present at the cemetery. As Rocky served in the military, the funeral home provided an honor guard. The military offered the gun salute; they folded the America flag and presented it to the family. A member of the family then sang "Amazing Grace" as part of the tribute.

In preparation for the service, one of Rocky's sons offered me a few stories about his father's life. I felt badly for the family - they really wanted a service in church but felt uncomfortable doing so; because of this, I did the best I could to offer them God's presence at the cemetery. So, we offered a more truncated service at the cemetery.

At the service, I reflected about Rocky's life as a husband, dad, granddad and great-granddad. I believe that Rocky raised five children, fifteen grandchildren and twenty-three great-grandchildren. Rocky was married for sixty years to his wife Rose. After their marriage, Rocky and Rose moved to California where this patriarch served in the military, only to return to Momence after his honorable discharge from the

military. Back in Illinois, Rocky spent his working days as a handyman by trade, making the necessary repairs to household and business machinery during his working career.

Rocky's family told me that their patriarch worked very diligently through the long days, desiring that his wife stay at home to raise their family. Rocky made sure that his kids received whatever provisions they could from his labors; he would do what was necessary to work those long hours. At night, he would make sure to tuck the kids in bed and tell them how much he loved them.

As was Rocky's custom, every Sunday was spent with God, family and the pool he installed in his back yard. He installed the pool so that the kids had some type of leisure activity during the week and a place where the family could gather on Sundays after church. After his retirement, Rocky spent more time at the pool for the sake of his grandkids and the great-grandkids.

For Rocky, Sundays turned out to be "family day." This is something that I preach quite often, that we do not spend enough time with our families, especially on the Lord's day. In today's age, we seem to live

more like an “eat and run” community. Especially now with the pandemic, we all have the opportunity to sit at table with the ones we love if we so choose to do so, yet we often do not because of the ways our culture seems to form us.

Rocky wanted to create his own culture, as directed by God. For Rocky, Sundays were a day for the family, for God and for that pool. I love that image of the pool because when I teach about the sacraments of initiation for adults wishing to enter the Church, I talk about how water symbolized the images of both life and death. We enter the water and plunge under at baptism, we “die” from our past selves so that when we come out of a water, we receive a new life.

In the secular world, water has many practical uses – we use water for cooking, for cleaning, for destroying and for keeping us alive. On this last weekend of the liturgical year, water brings us to the beginning of our relationship with God at the time of our baptism and a symbol we use at funerals during the end of our lives. If we really believe in our baptismal calling, if we are coming out of that water to receive this new life, then we are called by God to follow whatever vocation we are asked

to live and to live that vocation to the fullest. If you truly believe in this baptismal call, then we give our hearts and souls and our minds to follow the path our Lord has established for us.

This is what Rocky's family told me that Rocky did. As the patriarch of this family, Rocky was very dedicated, *fiercely* dedicated to his family, to his wife, to, to his kids and so on. When the kids gathered around that pool every Sunday, that image became the symbol of all of Rocky's hard work made manifest. When we are talking about life well-lived such as Rocky's, I often turn to the Book of Wisdom and the same words I repeat over and over at funeral services. If a person lives a good life, what is God's response? God says...

The souls of the just are in the hand of God,  
and no torment shall touch them.  
They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;  
and their passing away was thought an affliction  
and their going forth from us, utter destruction.  
But they are in peace.  
For if before men, indeed, they be punished,  
yet is their hope full of immortality;  
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,  
because God tried them  
and found them worthy of himself.  
As gold in the furnace, he proved them,

and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.  
Those who trust in him shall understand truth,  
and the faithful shall abide with him in love:  
Because grace and mercy are with his holy ones,  
and his care is with his elect. (Wisdom 3: 1-6, 9)

On this final weekend of our Liturgical Year, we reflect on the Book of the prophet Ezekiel, a man who laments a people who turned away from the vocation of God yet seeks hope that a people would redeem themselves and turn back to God. On the River of Chebar, Ezekiel looked east to the return of God's grace and a hope for a people who would turn away from their sinful ways and seek out again the God that created them and wished them to return home.

On this feast of Christ the King, we focus on St. Paul's First letter to the Corinthians, a letter which begins each Liturgical Season of Ordinary Time and concludes this particular season as well. On this particular weekend, St. Paul teaches us that Adam was not faithful to God and died because of his disobedience. We also learn that Christ is the new Adam, who died but rose from the dead because of his infinite obedience to the vocation of life. Where Adam failed to uphold his

covenant with God, so Jesus Christ did not.

Like the last two Sundays that preceded today's reading, once again we focus on the 25<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Matthew's gospel and our final judgment before God. Two weeks ago, the theme of the gospel was being prepared for God's coming; last week's reading focused on utilizing the talents well that we have been afforded. This weekend, we focus on the result of a life well-lived for those who have taken God's call and have offered it to the people they are commissioned to serve. If we live our vocation well and serve the least of our brothers and sisters, then we are welcomed into the kingdom of heaven; if we choose to abandon God's call, then there are consequences for that as well.

Every single one of us has been called to a vocation. Every single one of us has been called to live out our baptismal promises in a certain way. If we live that way that God has destined us to live, then God will welcome us into heaven with open arms.

For this reason, we come to the end of this liturgical season and this type of "final exam" that determines the path we seek after our time on earth. For this reason, we gather around this table to celebrate this Mass.

For this reason, we do not lose hope in a world that focuses on a hopeless lifestyle that is rooted in the secular, that focuses on fear and destruction, which focuses on anger and hatred. With God, we focus on love, sacrifice, service and mercy, most of all. We realized that if we do what God asks us to do, if we follow his commandments and his precepts, if we minister to the ones he has commissioned us to serve, we will be at peace in our hearts, even while the life of the secular lives in fear and trepidation.

Rocky knew what his purpose in life would be when he married the love of his life. Let us never forget our own purpose, based on the talents and gifts that God has afforded us. Let us continually renew our baptismal promises to remind ourselves what God asks us to do as we share that water, that love, that life and that calling with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.