

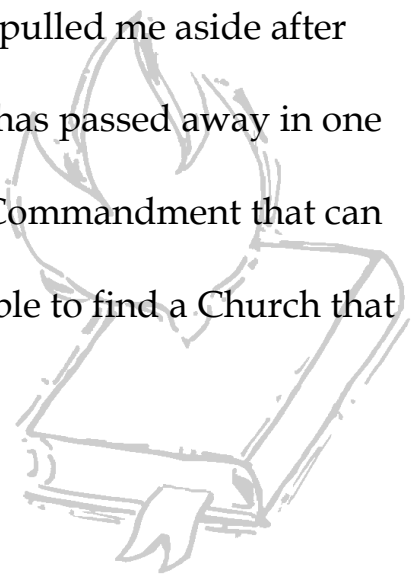
**Homily**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday OT - C**  
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
January 22-23, 2022

Neh 8: 2-4, 5-6, 8-10  
Ps 19: 8, 9, 10, 15  
1 Cor 12: 12-30  
Lk 1: 1-4, 4:14-21

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Why is it that some of the most life-affirming faith experiences usually are preceded by tragedies in our lives? How often do we tell each other how we often meet our families and friends only when funerals or other times of loss take place? How often do we not stop to realize how good we live until something special in our lives is lost? As to the events that transpired on January 18<sup>th</sup>, a moment of such grace took place at this parish that our staff was so lifted by the faith of this community. As always, we grieved that the moment of faith had to be preceded by a moment of loss. Let me explain...

A couple weeks ago, a member of our parish pulled me aside after one of our Masses to tell me that her fiancé Eric has passed away in one of the most reprehensible acts against the Fifth Commandment that can take place in our lives. Eric's family, not being able to find a Church that



could accommodate their needs, asked if they could work with us in taking care of an ecumenical service on behalf of their loved one. As the family had never experienced a death such as this (and hopefully never will again), they looked for direction in finding comfort during these worst of times.

For us on the staff at the parish to conduct this service became a week-long endeavor. Our little “mom and pop” parish usually could not handle a funeral of this size and certainly did not have the facilities to handle a reception after the service. As I priest, I have been invested in ecumenical services before but this particular one had to go off in a manner that would give comfort to a family certainly in need. My maintenance man was going to take the week off eating Cheetos and watching Judge Judy on the television. On this particular week, we were going to be short-staffed and ill-equipped to handle what we were about to do.

During the course of our conversations with the family during that week, something extraordinary happened (as extraordinary things often

do). What took place that week between cultural groups, high school administrations, language groups and church groups was a beautiful reflection of our second reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. During the week, ministers from two Baptist churches joined forces with us to pull off a spectacular funeral liturgy on behalf of the family. That we were able to accommodate the guests coming to St. Patrick's and to offer a service appropriate to all of them was a sight to behold.

Then there were the funeral costs themselves. As you know, the costs for such an endeavor can be quite costly and the last thing someone wishes to tell the family in this type of grief is that they cannot offer a farewell to their loved one because of money. In this moment of crisis, God bless our States Attorney's Office who provided resources that assisted the family get through the financial problems that they had to overcome.

Then there were the counseling services. We talk each year about the Ministries Appeal for the Diocese (which we will do this year as well)

and more often than not, we do not realize how important those services are to us, especially in a parish when we are not equipped to help families out with counseling services on our own. With one phone call to Catholic Charities, a whole slew of people became involved with providing phone numbers and other contacts for the family who were seeking out help to get through their grief.

Finally, there was the reception. Normally we do not have the resources to help a family with funeral luncheons, but concerning this family who had no resources on their own and not being able to find a place to host their reception (or what was called a “repass” by this particular family), so many people came to the rescue to make the reception possible. Unsolicited donations were freely offered by individuals at Sacred Heart Church and Joliet Central High School. Mt. Carmel Church donated the use of their parish hall for the sake of the family. The workers at the Spanish Center across town provided the labor to set up and clean up the event. And the discounts and donations

that came in from places like Brown's Chicken and Sam's Club made this event possible without much work on our end.

I have to tell you a story about Sam's Club. Last week I went to visit Sam's Club and asked one of the helpers there for the name of the store manager so I could write a letter to the business. The woman first thought I was writing to complain about something but then realized I wanted to write and thank them for their kindness on behalf of Eric's family and the Church. When the woman realized my intentions, she began to sob furiously, telling me how the folks at Sam's work with Eric's mother and when they heard the news about the son's death they raised almost a thousand dollars in a couple of hours to purchase all the necessities at the store for the reception.

Needless to say, when this family came to St. Patrick's for the funeral and subsequent reception, they were overwhelmed with the love that was made possible by so many people that allowed God to work through them so that the Lord's grace could shine forth. The staff at St. Patrick's on that day was a sight to behold - even Jim Smith came back

from his “Cheetos Coma” to help set up and clean up the church on his own volition. I wish you could see what I see and realize how blessed we are to have the folks we have on the St. Pat’s Staff, especially in these most trying of times.

As I reflected on these particular events that transpired these last few weeks and related them to the readings from today’s gospel, I found such comfort that the words of the gospel could ring so true in our daily lives. In our first reading from Nehemiah, we read a story about a Chosen People who had deserted the Lord, had fallen, had reconciled for their sins and had returned back to the home they so loved. Ezra told these people in return the same words of comfort that he could easily tell our families who suffer or even us in the pews: eat the good food and drink the good wine because the Lord is among us on this holy day and his presence is the strength that will sustain us in the worst of times.

In our second reading from First Corinthians, Paul focuses on a theme often repeated in his own writings – we all represent different parts to this body of the Church and Christ is the head of our body. If

we allow Christ to lead us and work through us, if we remove those obstacles that separate us because of language, culture or color, so many beautiful things result of a faithful people that work, play and pray together in God's name.

And when we work and play and pray in God's name, when we allow Christ to channel himself through our lives as if we were a vessel and the ministry is offered in his name, the words taken from the prophet Isaiah and spoken by our Lord ring so true in today's gospel:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. Jesus said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

*El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí, porque me ha consagrado por la unción. El me envió a llevar la Buena Noticia a los pobres, a anunciar la liberación a los cautivos y la vista a los ciegos, a dar la libertad a los oprimidos y proclamar un año de gracia del Señor.*

Jesús cerró el Libro, lo devolvió al ayudante y se sentó. Todos en la sinagoga tenían los ojos fijos en él. Entonces comenzó a decirles: “Hoy se ha cumplido este pasaje de la Escritura que acaban de oír.”

As we continue to pray for healing in the life of Eric’s family, let us continue to allow our Lord to fulfill this passage of love and liberation through us and for the sake of all the people that we meet. This is our prayer.