

Homily

3rd Sunday of Advent – B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 12-13, 2020

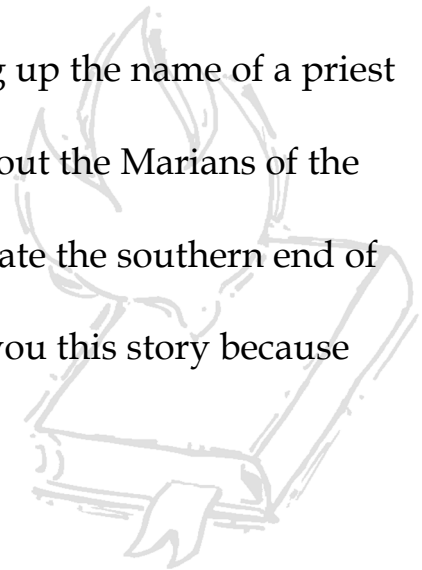
Is 61: 1-2, 10-11
Lk 1: 46-48, 59-50, 53-54
1 Thes 5: 16-24
Jn 1: 6-8, 19-28



Fr. John Savukynas was born on December 5, 1913, in Pittston, PA and called home on April 26, 2002. Fr. John was ordained a priest for the Marians of the Immaculate Conception on August 13, 1944. After various assignments in his order, Fr. John was asked in 1950 by our diocese's first bishop (Bishop Martin McNamara) to serve at a Notre Dame Church in Clarendon Hills. That same year, Bishop McNamara asked Fr. John to care for St. Mary's Parish in Plano and St. Patrick's, its Mission, in Bristol. In the 1950s the parish and Mission comprised the entire territory of Kendall County. Father John served as Pastor there from 1950-1960.

In 1953, St. Anne's Mission was established in Oswego, IL. A church/hall was constructed. Many years later, the Mission became a parish and was relocated to a large church and community center. It is under the care of diocesan priests. In 1958, St. Mary's School was opened in Plano. (Courtesy of the Marian website at <http://www.padrimariani.org/en/curia/departed.php?year=2002>).

Now you might be asking why I am bringing up the name of a priest who died in 2002 and why I am even talking about the Marians of the Immaculate Conception when Viatorians populate the southern end of the Joliet diocese where I currently serve. I tell you this story because



during my initial, formative years as a priest, especially during the times that I was struggling, I would turn to the Marians who lived in Plano, Illinois, next to my hometown of Sandwich, Illinois, where I was raised on a farm. Between Frs. Jerry Zalonis, Boniface Vaisnoris, Tony Nackunas and all the other priests from Eastern Europe who served Kendall County, these clerics provided me with a wonderfully calm, rooted faith in God that helped me navigate through some of the difficulties I encountered after ordination.

During my first ten years of the priesthood, I actually celebrated Spanish masses every Sunday in Plano, no matter where I was serving in the diocese. Fr. Bonnie, Fr. Jerry, Fr. Tony and the folks of St. Mary's Church in Plano were extremely welcoming and made me feel like a member of their extended, spiritual family. I always loved to "go home," so to speak, after a long weekend of ministry.

Back in 2002 when Fr. John died, my visits to Plano practically became weekly. A great honor I ever had was to serve as master of ceremonies for one of their religious brothers who was ordained to the priesthood in Yorkville, IL by Bishop Roger Kaffer. In this capacity, I

often took care of the ancillary roles at St. Mary's Church in Plano, helping the Marians whenever I could. So when Fr. John died in 2002, the Marians of the Immaculate Conception asked if I would concelebrate the funeral Mass and assist Bishop Kaffer, who presided at the funeral from the side sanctuary.

I was honored that the Marians would ask me to join them as part of their family, they were so important to me. When I arrived at the parish on this funeral day, I was saddened by Fr. John's loss and knew that the faithful at St. Mary's would take this loss badly. When I arrived at my destination, I entered the church to say a prayer, console a few of the parishioners and retreat into the sacristy to get vested for the Mass.

As I was greeted in the sacristy by the other priests from the Marian Order, I came to find out that the alb I normally kept at the parish had disappeared. This perplexed me, as I just had the alb cleaned the week before and kept it at the parish, as I celebrated so many liturgies there I felt it practical to leave the alb in the sacristy closet. I also realized during my years at St. Mary's that none of the other albs were ever

laundered at that time and they all smelled like a locker room after an overtime football game.

Alas, I resigned myself to wearing one of the unlaundered, foul-smelling albs, I made my way to the back of the church when I stopped at Fr. John's casket to offer another prayer. It was during that prayer that I realized what had happened to my alb – *Fr. John was wearing it!* I guess the Marians realized that my alb was the only clean one in the closet and figured that I would not mind offering this sacrifice for this most beloved priest.

I share this tale of putrid-smelling woe with all of you because in my studies preparing for today's homily, I came across a passage from St. Maximus the Confessor (a sixth century saint who lived in Constantinople), who reflected on the theme of today's Mass by offering the following words:

If women who have the care of a home will on certain days wash with water the garments that are soiled, should we not also make ready our souls for the Birth Day of the Lord, cleaning with our tears the stains of our conscience? And they, should they find the garments so soiled and stained, that they cannot be made clean with water alone, add to the water the softening of oil and the acrimony of soap.

We, likewise, should we have committed sins that are not washed away by repentance alone, let us add the oil of almsgiving and the bitterness of fasting.

Si las mujeres que tienen el cuidado de un hogar voluntad en ciertos días se lavan con agua las prendas que estén sucios, ¿no deberíamos también hacer listas nuestras almas para el día del nacimiento del Señor, la limpieza con nuestras lágrimas las manchas de nuestra conciencia? Y, en caso de encontrar las prendas tan sucias y manchadas, que no pueden ser limpiados con agua sola, añadir al agua el ablandamiento de petróleo y la acritud de jabón. Tenemos, asimismo, deberíamos haber cometido pecados que no son arrastrados por el arrepentimiento solamente, sumemos el aceite de la limosna y la amargura de ayuno.

As we celebrate this feast of *Laetare Sunday* or our Sunday of “Rejoicing,” constantly in our scriptures today we are reminded of the great joy that is yet to come for a faithful person dedicated to following the will of God. Whether it be the joy of entering Israel clean once again (as referenced in our first reading from Isaiah), preparing for the coming of our Lord (which is John the Baptist’s theme in our gospel reading) or waiting until the salvific end times (which is the theme of our second reading today from 1 Thessalonians), we are told three times today that what is yet to come for a people of faith whose desire was to be with God for an eternity is about to come to fruition.

And like the guest who is about to be welcomed by the one who loves them dearly, we are instructed to prepare ourselves for this sacred encounter by washing ourselves clean, putting on our best clothes and making ourselves more than presentable to show the one we love how much we care about them. The great theologians I researched for today's homily (St. John Chrysostom, Pope St. Gregory the Great and Maximus the Confessor, whom I quoted today) interpret our gospel reading to say that the way truly to be ready for what is yet to come is not going to be found in the secular trappings that often envelop the spiritual meaning of this holy experience but to engage in the same disciplines of humility that we often associate with the Season of Lent by dedicating ourselves to lives of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

If we clean our souls and our lives in preparation for the coming of God, then we are ready to accept this light.. and this is what we need to do constantly; we constantly need to be cleansed of those things would separate us from God. For this reason, we celebrate the Season of Advent, as each week a new light successively is lit on our wreath during the season.

With each light, we continually try to get ready for God's coming both with the decorations and all those nice things of the secular world. More importantly, by cleaning our hearts and by living like Christ, the more we live like the light, the more the light shines brightly in our hearts. This type of work, though, does require a bit of perseverance on our part. It requires us to listen to the word, to receive the sacrament and then to go out and live like Christ. If you have not been afforded the opportunity of receiving the sacrament, please call us.

I will be most welcome to come to your homes and offer you the sacrament to do what I can to help you out. You are not alone in any of this, but it is my responsibility to cleanse my heart so I can live my vocation just as you are to cleanse your heart, to live out yours.

In my reflection, I realized some time ago that my loss of a liturgical alb very much symbolized that, after a long and dedicated life to the Church, Fr. John Savukynas was presented to God as clean and ready for the Christ child to appear to him on judgment day. Can we say the same for ourselves? On this day of rejoicing, are we ourselves clean

enough to announce that we truly are ready to accept God in our lives or are we still in need to make ourselves clean?

I would like to conclude my homily with another reflection by Pope St. Gregory the Great who some 1400 years ago reflected on the same type of preparation for the Lord's coming that we could apply to today's era. These timeless words that this pope of the Gregorian Chant offers reminds us that a life of holiness, a life dedicated to serving the other and realizing that our service of the other is the true means by which we are made clean, is the most fitting way to honor the lessons taught in our readings today. This great pope writes,

In all things whatsoever, Dearest Brethren, that you do, hold fast to humility, as to the root of every good work. Pay not heed to the things in which you are better than others, but to those in which you are worse; so that while you keep before you the example of those that are better than yourself, you may, through humility, be enabled to ascend to greater things, by the bountiful mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

En todas las cosas que, queridos Hermanos, que lo haga, se aferran a la humildad, en cuanto a la raíz de toda buena obra. Paga no prestar atención a las cosas en las que eres mejor que los demás, sino a aquellos en los que está peor; de manera que mientras se mantenga antes el ejemplo de aquellos que son mejores que tú, es posible que, a través de la humildad, tener la posibilidad de ascender a mayores

cosas, por la misericordia abundante de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, a quien sea honor y gloria por los siglos de los siglos. Amén.

This is our prayer.