

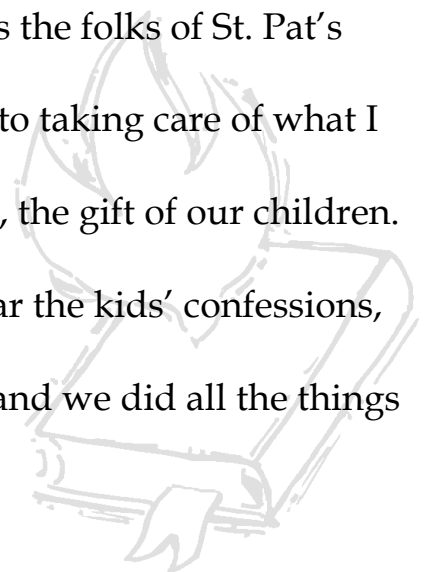
Homily
3rd Sunday of Lent – B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
March 06-07, 2021

Ex 20: 1-17
Ps 19: 8, 9, 10, 11
1 Cor 1: 22-25
Jn 2: 13-25

Lost in the craziness of everything that has been going on with COVID and the winter storms, our kids in the Religious Education Program had an opportunity to celebrate their First Confessions at our border town parishes last month. Not all of the kids were able to celebrate the sacrament because of the massive snowstorm that we encountered in the Illinois area. Because of the storm, some of the kids were not able to attend the service but for the few that did, we provided a wonderful experience for them. I really feel blessed for having John Rehmer and Kim Emerson (our Directors of Religious Education at St. Patrick's and St. Anne's, respectively), as well as the folks of St. Pat's and St. Anne's who have dedicated themselves to taking care of what I consider God's most precious gift in our society, the gift of our children.

At these services, I had an opportunity to hear the kids' confessions, we took some pictures, we gave out some gifts and we did all the things



that you want to do for a second or third grader, to tell them that they are loved. For those who came to these services, we wanted to make this a good experience for both them and their families.

What I tell kids in reconciliation that reconciliation is a *good* thing, not a type of punishment. Reconciliation is supposed to be a therapeutic sacrament; at the end of the confession, I try to tell the kids that God loves them and so does this community. Unlike a secular world that holds grudges, once we walk out of a confessional, we are made clean and we have a chance to start all over again.

This type of forgiveness is a good message to tell our adults as well, that sacrament of confession is not supposed to be something that is painful. Confession is something that is supposed to be very loving and therapeutic. What I often offer the kids as a penance when they have the first confessions is what I call a "Twenty Year Penance." I tell the kids that they have to wait twenty or thirty years until they become parents themselves, raise some kids and realize maybe their parents were not as crazy as the kids might think they were during their youth.

To be a parent is not an easy task to have that. Being a parent is a

vocation that is quite difficult. When people ask me if it is hard to be a priest, my standard response is trying to raise a couple of kids. To be a parent is an awesome responsibility; to be a child is a gift of love from God.

During these first confessions, I often ask the kids to say prayers for their family and then go and give their parents a big hug, telling mom and dad how much they love them. I try to teach kids that reconciliation is a *good* thing, that God *wants* to love and forgive them. I tell the kids that the community loves them and forgives them as well. I tell the kids that the priest confessor represents both God and the community, especially the parent who serve as the primary educators and moral compasses for these kids.

When we instruct the kids, we tell them that the way that a confession normally works consists of four basic steps: *examination, confession, contrition and absolution*. A student needs to think about the things they have done wrong in life. The priest offers a penance, based on the type of sin that is committed; the penance usually is related to the specific sins shared by the penitent. After the confession, the penitent

offers a penance, stating that s/he is sorry for her/his sins and then the priest offers an absolution in the name of God and the Church.

Concerning examination, what I normally do with kids is that I usually pull out my billfold with my stack of cash, which usually consists of a couple bucks (if I wanted to be rich, I would not be a priest!). It is then that I pull out a \$10 bill and offer the kids a challenge - I will give them ten bucks if they can name the Ten Commandments, a good start with an examination of conscience - ten bucks for Ten Commandments.

Now I want you to think about this. Just think about this. How many of you know your Ten Commandments? How many of you can cite this simple examination of conscience that I teach the kids? Over the last few week during the online Masses, I have been teaching the folks about the Golden Rule - do unto others as you would want them to do unto. The Ten Commandments reflects that Golden Rule - love your God and love your neighbor as you would want them to love us.

Essentially, the Ten Commandments encapsulate the Golden Rule towards God and humanity in a more specific way. If you go to local

Walmart or one of those stores and sell a Ten Commandments poster, you might notice that the list that a good Jew, Muslim or Protestant might have somewhat differs from the Catholic version, but all the commandments are listed in one form or another.

Essentially, the first three commandments of the Catholic version are dedicated to God; the last seven are dedicated to everyone else. If you love your God, do not put anything else ahead of God – fame, fortune, sleep, diversions, activities, sports, or whatever (The First Commandment). Does God come first?

Do you use God's name in vain (The Second Commandment)? I tell the kids that if you condemn someone to hell, if you damn them, you are inviting God to do the same thing to you. *"Forgive us, our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,"* is a challenge from the "Our Father" that reflects the Second Commandment and challenges us to live it.

Keep holy the Holy the Sabbath day (The Third Commandment). Go to church on Sundays, spend time with your families, put the other things aside because at the end of life there ain't gonna be any sports

any diversion, any anything. In the end, life will consist of just you and God; the more time you spend with the one you love, then you show God that you are prepared to enter heaven.

As for the commandments directed to society: honor, your parents; do not kill; do not commit adultery. Do not steal; do not lie; do not covet thy neighbor's goods; do not covet thy neighbor's spouse. These are all basic, common sense rules of life that everyone should be following; they are good, common sense.

During my reconciliation homily for the kids, I usually am able to keep the ten bucks in my pocket because so few people know the Ten Commandments. What we learned this weekend is that Jesus has revealed himself is the only one that is going to get us to heaven – “Destroy this temple,” as he says in John's gospel, “I will rebuild it in three days” (Jn 2: 19). As we read today, Jesus has the ability to resurrect our lives. We have been given a life that is exceedingly sacred, a “temple,” so to speak, and if we show God how sacred we treat this temple, by the way we treat ourselves and the way we treat each other, then we show God that this temple is ready for the next step of life.

In the gospel of John, by the way, tells us that Jesus is furious not because of the money changers (that is incidental) but because of those who are not supposed to be selling animals for sacrifice in God's house. Inside the temple grounds is supposed to be reserved as sacred space, something we often forget in today's society as well.

In John's gospel, Jesus speaks about the sacredness of the temple and the sacredness of the body at the very beginning of his ministry, as opposed to the other Synoptic gospels. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the three authors put this story at the *end* of their respective gospels, as if the story becomes the *last straw* for the leaders of the Sanhedrin who wish to eradicate Jesus. In John's gospel, this story takes place at *the very beginning* of Jesus's ministry, establishing the fact that Jesus is the temple and that we are temples that can be resurrected even after sin and society destroys them on a constant basis.

If we understand this distinction, if we understand that keeping sacred this temple is our purpose in life, then we realize why Jesus is the reason we celebrate the season of Lent – Jesus can resurrect us if we follow the Lord's path. If we learn this lesson by loving our God and our

neighbor, then we realized there is nothing more important than doing God's will.

By spending time with the ones we love, always in God's name, we understand our purpose in life. The problem with the secular world is that they keep us fixed on the diversions in life that give us temporary satisfaction but deny us of our true purpose. The secular world would have us believe that sports or diversions or sleep or whatever else are more important than time with God in prayer. As I personally have learned with my father's passing over the last couple of weeks, *life is short* and as much fun as I have with all the cool things that are at our disposal, life will end and then our lives consist of just us and God.

Have we examined our consciences concerning the lives we have lived? Have we apologized and said, "I'm sorry" for the things I, or we, have done wrong? Have I gone to confession to ask for forgiveness? Have I received that absolution? Just as importantly, have I forgiven others as God has forgiven us? These are the basic lessons we are supposed to learn in the Season of Lent to prepare us for the Easter resurrection.

If we have not prepared ourselves for Christ entering our lives, if we are not ready for it, we are going to be stuck in Lent for the rest of our existence. We need to prepare ourselves well this season and *every* season by reflecting on what we have done by making sure we make amends for the things we have done wrong to get back on track. As Nat King Cole once sang, "Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, start all over again." We celebrate confessions on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays – 8:30 a.m. at St. Anne's and after the 12:00 Mass on Sundays.

Let us pray that I can give away that metaphorical ten bucks to all of you in this community. May we all learn the basics of the faith starting with the Ten Commandments, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory Be. Let us learn that the two great commandments are not just from the will of God – *they are good common sense!* Let us allow God to teach us how to act, how to forgive and how to permit our temples to rise on the last day by a conduct worthy of God's presence. Let us learn our lessons well and this forgiveness with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.