

**Homily**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent - A**

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
March 21-22, 2020

1 Sm 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Ps 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

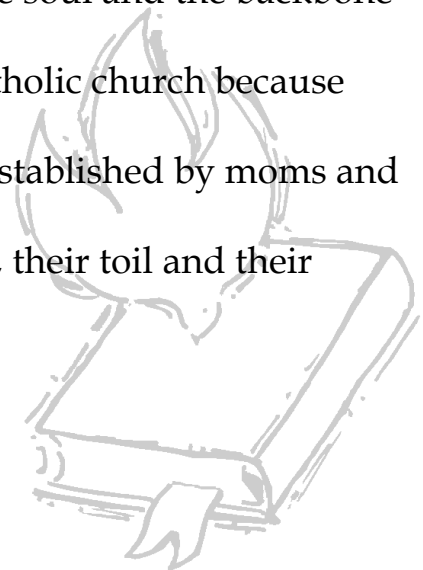
Eph 5: 8-14

Jn 9: 1-41

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This week I have been having a conversation with a gentleman named Brody who has dedicated his life and his ministry trying to preserve churches throughout the country. Brody is a lawyer; he lives at home, is unemployed and is in the process looking for a job. During the time that he has free, Brody has been helping churches around the country trying to help churches stay afloat.

Towards this cause, Brody has been communicating with me and various others to help these small churches that are in perilous situations because he has realized what I have come to realize about small churches. Small churches are the heart, the soul and the backbone in a lot of ways of the mothership called the Catholic church because these are the places of worship that have been established by moms and dads and families with their blood, sweat, tears, their toil and their



labor. This effort may not mean a whole lot to the bigger cities and bigger communities throughout the world, but in these small towns, faith is very personal and faith is very particular. People very much embrace their local church, their home church, and they are very dedicated to sustaining them and keeping them going.

So, we have these farmers and we have a lot of these small-town residents that have done what is possible to help these communities. My little Church (St. Anne) has a long history. St. Anne's Church was established in the 1850s and then in 1872 the parishioners built the current church that stands today. St. Anne's has been known in its history for many healing miracles because of the St. Anne Relic that travelled from France to Quebec to the city in Illinois named after her. To close a church like this at this time kind of defeats the purpose of why it was established to allow people who are sick to find the presence of Christ in their local Church, especially during their difficult times. We want to keep a church like this open!

Over in Momence, St. Patrick's Church that was established in 1859 and built the current church the 1910s, a beautiful building over there

that you could not build in today's age in the farmland. Right nearby is St. Mary's Church in Beaverville, one of the most beautiful churches in the country, let alone the diocese.

These little communities have given up their hearts to allow these churches to thrive, these buildings to thrive exist because these buildings are a symbol of their faith. I learned that in Mexico - usually the Catholic churches are the center of town or the places where people congregate to find hope in times of hopelessness.

Over at Sacred Heart in Hopkins Park, this mission church consists of a wonderfully spiritual group of people that are filled with God's spirit. They have very few resources, though. Even so, the Sacred Heart church building is a place where faithful can congregate, realizing that God is still with them during the most difficult times.

Brody is legally blind. Brody cannot see with his eyes and yet Brody has such great vision beyond physical sight. Brody has a special ability to see that in his heart, in his soul, he very much understands what these small churches mean and he's done what he can to help preserve them

Now, as many things in life, most likely what Brody tries to do is a hopeless cause in many ways. He is fighting an uphill battle. In fact, most of us in the Catholic faith, when we're trying to defend the teachings of the Church, we end up trying to fight an uphill battle because we are confronted by a great resistance from the secular society (and even, at times, among those who claim to follow the teachings of the Church!) – that's just the way that life is. That said, we cannot give up hope; we cannot stop trying. If we were taught to give up hope, then Jesus would have never gotten on the cross and God would have never come down and become incarnate.

If you look in the secular world, they might say that Jesus' battle was a lost cause, but it wasn't. We know this because Jesus provided hope for people who had lost their hope, for people who have lost their way. Jesus was giving us an opportunity to find the path to righteousness once again.

So here we are. We are here celebrating this Mass at a time when we can't go to church as a community and that's what the church is about – us building a community. We can't go to churches or gather as

community, so we come here together at this online Mass so we do not lose this voice.

Brody understands that because there are two types of sight in this world: there is the sight of the eyes and the sight of the heart. Jesus can heal the sight of the eyes but Jesus did not come down to earth really for this purpose. Jesus came down to earth to give us a type of vision that will get us to heaven. *We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5: 7).*

This image of this faith of the sight in our souls and in our hearts, this is what inspires us; this is what gives us hope. We have learned that if we have that kind of sight in our faith, we never lose hope and we have a sense of peace, a sense of peace that will not go away.

I was working on my *Death and Dying* course once again and I came across an article that I gave the students called "Religion and the Mediation of Death," a text that was written by Michael Lemon (a University Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Sociology at St. Olaf College in Minnesota). He writes as a summary... "religiosity appears to serve the dual function of 'afflicting the comforted' and 'comforting the

afflicted.' Thus, for those with a high degree of commitment, religion relieves the anxiety it causes."

According to Edgar Jackson, religion helps control fears and anxieties by revealing not only the tragedy and sorrow of life, but also its blessings and rich experiences. Religion helps us to turn to the best thoughts and feelings into constructive action. Religion inspires those of faith to act as they believe to fill their aspirations of life.

The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1965) calls religion the "great anxiety reliever," asserting that it functions to relieve anxiety caused by crisis. According to Malinowski, religion provides individuals with the means for dealing with extraordinary phenomena; it functions to restore normalcy.

For this reason, we *need* these local churches to allow God to provide normalcy in our lives. For this reason, we *need* local churches so people have a place to go and pray that people can find normalcy with God. We need these local churches because the world constantly changes, but God is God. God is the same God that came 2000 years ago and is with

us today on this altar, in our hearts and in our bodies when we receive the body of Christ at Mass.

Just so you know, in the parishes that I serve, we are going to be offering what's called "Drive-by (curbside) Communion." If you want to go into church, if you want to pray, we will make sure our church buildings are open. If you want to receive communion, stop by; we will stand outside you give you communion. Please remember also... *support your local parishes!!!* Whatever parish you attend, make sure you support those parishes because we need those parishes to stay open. We need that symbol of hope during a time of hopelessness. It depends on you. It depends on all of us. We are the body of Christ; we walk by a different kind of faith, a different kind of sight, not just with the eyes, but with the heart and soul. That is what we are trying to learn in our faith.

This weekend, we have reached the halfway point of the season of Lent. Let us never lose hope. Let us realize that in the world suffering is always going to exist but our hearts we know that God is with us and we have God's presence that gives us sight towards our ultimate purpose in life.

Let us never lose that presence; let's never lose that hope. Let us keep supporting our local churches and spreading this message of love, of *calm*, this sight that leads us to the heavenly destination we strive to reach on the last day. Let us allow God to help us relieve the anxieties of the world for the sake of the people that we meet. This is our prayer.