

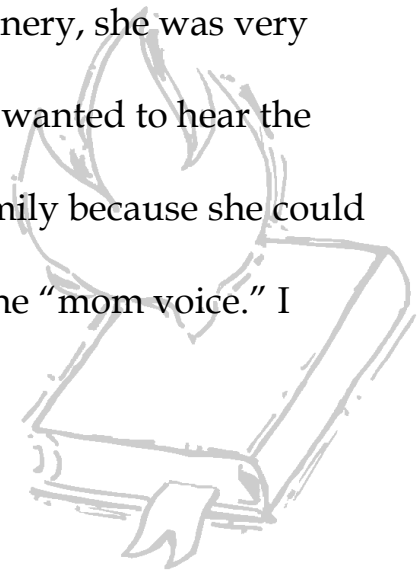
Homily
5th Sunday of Easter – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 06-07, 2023

Acts 6: 1-7
Ps 33: 1-2, 4-5, 18-19
1 Pt 2: 4-9
Jn 14: 1-12

A few months ago, I celebrated a funeral for a woman named Joyce Hart. Two years prior, I had celebrated a funeral for her husband Al Hart. During Al's funeral, I remember that Joyce was so hard of hearing that I had to leave the pulpit during the homily, walk right up to Joyce, get on my knees right in front of her and preach this face-to-face with the wife so she could hear everything that I had to say.

When I met with Joyce's daughters, I asked them to tell me stories about their mother – I often begin with “if you can describe your loved one in a word or a phrase, what would it be?” The daughters were very candid about mom – they said that Joyce was ornery, she was very stubborn, but she also was very loving, and she wanted to hear the homily. When Joyce interrupted my funeral homily because she could not hear me, I realized that she was giving me the “mom voice.” I



learned long ago in life... *do not mess with mom!* I decided to accommodate Joyce by offering the funeral homily in an up-close and personal way.

When I celebrated the funeral for Al Hart, we were preparing to celebrate the "Our Lady of Guadalupe" Mass, with the sanctuary looking flooded with lots and lots of roses. Al's children told me about his joke concerning roses – each year he bought his wife of sixty years three roses and three roses only, representing, what Al joked, represented the *three good years* of their marriage (needless to say, Al & Joyce had a really, really bizarre sense of humor!).

I then pointing to all the roses in the sanctuary and preached to Joyce that, based on what she and her children told me about Al, that all these flowers pouring out of our sanctuary represented every one of those beautiful moments that existed in their lives together.

I have come to realize in my experience that each of us encounter so many of these moments that seem fleeting or that we take for granted or to which we do not pay attention because we often look ahead to the

next “thing” in life when the “thing” that is right in front of us is really special. In a Christian marriage (if both husband and wife are doing their part to allow the Spirit to unite them and guide them), so many of these moments take place and like many experiences in life, we often do not appreciate the beauty of those moments until they are gone.

In the case of this particular family, the daughters shared with me how Al and Joyce really loved to be around each other, to work on the farm, to sit on the porch, and just “be” together. Al liked to work on the farm; Joyce loved to cook. Al did the gardening; Joyce loved to iron. Al did the mechanical work; Joyce loved to do the laundry. Both Al & Joyce loved to spend time with their kids and dedicated their lives to protecting them. I guess when traffic became too dangerous in the middle of farming country, Joyce sometimes tossed two by fours out into the road so that those who enjoyed race-car driving in the country would think twice before passing by the roads on their farm (BTW, I do not suggest tossing out two by fours in the roads of today – my father used to line our property with utility poles until one year the snow

covered them and became booby traps for the snowmobile riders – the police were not happy with my father that one year...

I was thinking about Al & Joyce in preparation for this weekend's homily, thinking about how, when my own father passed away in 2021, there was a moment where I was raised in Sandwich, Illinois that I decided to visit the place where I was raised before I celebrated my dad's Mass. The day of my father's funeral, I drove a mile south of the Sandwich Fairgrounds to the place where my old house used to rest, on Gletty and County Line Roads. I learned that where I was raised served as the border for three counties and three dioceses in Illinois; depending on what side of the street I walked, I either would be situated in DeKalb County and the Rockford Diocese, Kane County and the Peoria Diocese and Kendall County and the Joliet Diocese. I often reminisce that, depending on what side of the street I was born, I could have been ordained a priest in three separate, crazy environments!

When my father sold the farmhouse around 1992, a bank took over the facility (the bank has since closed and currently their old building

rests on the land where I used to sleep and eat. I came to realize that day that most everything on the three-acre farm that we had was gone... except for a set of trees that lined one side of the perimeter of the property to prevent the wind from buffeting the house. My dad was very much a horticulturist and agriculturist. He grew hundreds of trees on a property that had no business having hundreds of trees, but he would grow those trees anyway because he just loved to plant things.

I was thinking about that day and the bank tellers with whom I talked. At first, the tellers were wondering why I was just standing there in the middle of their facility; I just wanted to reminisce and think about how important my family was for me. and amazed by what I had seen. When I celebrated Joyce's funeral, I thought about that moment at my house. As part of her funeral wishes, Joyce wanted her daughters to fill a jar with some of the dirt under her favorite apple tree that was on her farm and to place it in her casket so that she could be associated with the soil where she used to live.

To me, that jar of dirt is a beautiful image; the soil reminds me of the

words said at Ash Wednesday – remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return. The soil reminds me that we came from the world and that we return into it but if we have faith in God, we rise from the world to spend the rest of our existence with God in heaven. So the children very much accommodated Joyce’s wishes with this request and we referenced and blessed the casket and the jar as a sign of Joyce’s connection with God.

I also was told that Joyce loved to cook and Joyce loved to do the family laundry (she loved it so much that she often invaded her children’s home to take over their kitchen and laundry room)! At Joyce’s funeral at this funeral homily, I decided to bring my person basket of laundry that had been cleaned and folded and pressed by Maria Jankowski. Maria Jankowski and Joyce Hart are two peas in a pod, very much alike in many ways. I have no idea how to fold a fitted sheet if you paid me good money; I have never been able to learn how to do it, even after watching videos on YouTube on laundry folding. I was told that Joyce, like Maria, could cook and fold as if it were a science. I came

to find out that when Joyce would go to her children's house, she would end up bringing her own food, bringing her own utensils, taking over the kitchen, because as the kids would say, none of them could do it right.

I was told that Joyce believed her children could not fold clothes correctly either (just like Maria). I was told that Joyce did not think her children knew how to cook correctly (just like Maria). *Unlike Maria*, I found out that Joyce loved airing out the laundry outside so much that she used to hang out the laundry throughout all Illinois weather, including the winter; she did not use her dryer at all. The kids told me that during the winter, they end up having to wear what they called "t-sickles," t-shirts that were hung outside and looked as stiff as a board when they were brought inside. When I recorded this Mass online, I included videos of crazy people from arctic places hanging their laundry outside in the frozen tundra - no offense, but they and Joyce *were crazy!!!* This was their way and that was Joyce's way.

The stories about Joyce were different and yet the same about so

many moms and dads whose funerals I have celebrated. Everyone has a different story; every life has a tale to share. I have come to learn as a priest that as unique as each story might be, if the story is told with love and *lived* with a Christian type of charity (love that enters every folded sheet and every cookie baked), then you know that God has played a role in that life because the mom or dad has lived out that vocation according to what God has called them to do.

Today's gospel reading is my "default" gospel for Christian funerals. The message for a Christian believer is one that brings us to the other side. "If you live the life of love than do not let your hearts be troubled you have faith in God, now have faith in me. For in my father's house, there are many dwelling places..." (paraphrase of John 14: 1-6).

To give people comfort, to know that moms and dads who dedicate their lives to their kids are awesome often becomes my default message to families, because a lot of the times in the newspapers or TV or the news, you are not going to hear about moms and dads as the top story or any story that will be reported – so many moms and dads live in this

way that we take that gift of parenthood for granted. The life of a parent may appear to be “mundane” with others in society – so many people do it and so many kids take their parents for granted. Yet, when it comes to kids and their upbringing, if the parents live this vocation correctly, if they serve their kids in a spirit of *love*, we begin to understand what we consider mundane our Lord considers as sacred, just like any person who lives a vocation inspired by God’s love lives a sacred vocation.

I often tell kids during their first confessions that if they confess not listening to mom or dad, I give them what I call “the twenty-year penance.” I ask the kids to wait twenty years until they have their own kids and their own kids are acting the same way that they do to their parents. *When* that happens, I ask the kids to say a prayer of thanks for what their parents had to endure when they were children and then to say one “Our Father” for each parent, giving them a hug and telling them how much they love mom and dad. As they did to their parents, so their kids will do to them. Live a Christian life, love your kids and

learn that folding laundry and doing to the dishes can be just as sacred thing to do as much as some of the wonderful things that are more public in life.

Celebrating “Mother’s Day” one week early, what I often do at Christian funerals is offer a special prayer for the mom or dad whose life we remember at this special Mass, moms like Joyce and dads like Al and all those moms and who have gone before, parents who have dedicated their lives for their kids in Christian service. In the world of ordained ministry, the word “diakonia” (which we reference in our first reading) means “service.” In the world of sacraments, that is the service a deacon, priest or bishops offers to their extended family; for moms and dads, that service extends in the homes.

So in this month of Mary, this month of May, this month of the divine chaplet and the Month of the Rosary, I would like to offer the hymn that we pray at the end of the rosary in honor of Blessed Mother Mary, who is the *Mediatrice*, the *Theotokos (the God-bearer)*, who is the mother of us all. The hymn is called “the Salve Regina” (the *Hail Holy Queen*), which I

offer once again for all mothers who have dedicated their lives to taking care of their children.

*Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevæ,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.*

*Hail, Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst women
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

This is our prayer.