

**Homily**  
**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – B**

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
May 01-02, 2021

Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Ps 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4

1 Jn 4: 7-10

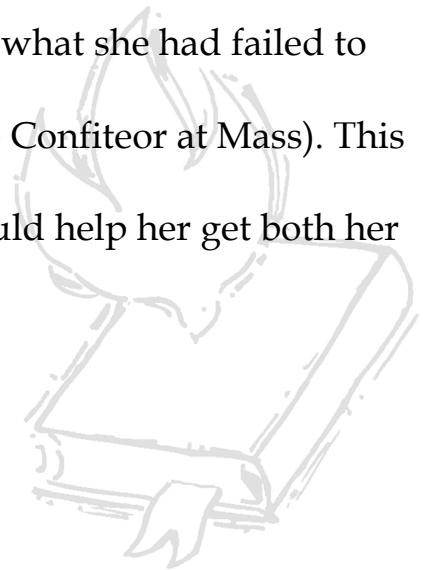
Jn 15: 9-17

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I would like to share with you my story of the **FOURTEEN**

**BAPTISMS** I celebrated at St. Patrick's church last Saturday night (May 1<sup>st</sup>) at the 4:00 p.m. Mass. Last month or so, a mother introduced herself to me and said how she was feeling very close to God. She had returned to God in her faith but her children had not been exposed to what she had learned as a child.

This mother told me that she wanted to bring her children back into the faith and wanted to ask God to be with them in this journey. This mother knew about Original Sin and she certainly knew about her own sins. The mother knew what she had done and what she had failed to do, as all of us do (especially when we pray the Confiteor at Mass). This mother had asked me if there was any way I could help her get both her family and her back on track.



In my own journey of faith, I have learned in my priesthood that being pastoral means that sometimes I have to bend a little bit on the theological. I have learned to believe in something that the current Archbishop of Milwaukee, Wisconsin once taught me (the Most Rev. Jerry ListECKI). The good archbishop once taught me that, if possible, *grease and water everything!!!* Essentially what he was trying to say is we clerics should not deny the faithful the sacrament, that we need to give folks that approach us the opportunity to receive that grace, as long as they are properly disposed.

In this story, I came to find out that this mother bore eight children in her family, children who ranged from seventeen years of age to nine months. Now I know what the rules of the Church are concerning catechesis. I know that when a child is of a certain age, they need to go through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children. When a person is over the age of 14, they should go through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. I get all of this. I also know that we clerics are in the ministry of saving souls, starting with our own. To reject a woman

or to push a woman away or to put roads blocks in the way of her or her children from receiving the sacraments is something that does not affect her; that is on me and my reluctance to help this woman is something for which I will have to answer to God.

I know more than anyone else about my strengths and of my weaknesses, of the things I might do well and certainly the sins that I have committed. I know that I eventually am going to have to answer to God for many things in my life. The one thing I want to make sure to do as a priest is to love our kids, protect our kids and do what we can to offer grace to our kids.

So, I made this woman a deal. I said to her, "Look, this is what I am going to do for you. I am going to baptize your children - all eight of them. I am going to make sure that they receive this grace from God, this "entry way" into the faith, so to speak. That said, I do this with the understanding that all of them, *all of them* will walk through the classes in our religious education program and that they will receive the proper training that is necessary so that they can be right with God."

I said to this mother, “I want to make sure that we bless your marriage as well, that we make you right with God. We need to walk this path together.” I thought about what I had done, based on today’s first reading from the story of Acts. I reflected on how Peter did something really radical in his own era; Peter decided to baptize a Gentile, which was unheard of among the Jewish faithful.

The first documented Gentile baptism in the Bible was cited in Acts 10, when Peter baptized Cornelius and then baptized all these Gentiles that accompanied Cornelius. Peter did something that radically was against the beliefs of his time, but he baptized these Gentiles anyway. Later in Acts, St. Paul would approach the apostles (around 49 AD) at the Council of Jerusalem and proposed that a *spiritual mark* (not a physical one such as circumcision) was impressed on Gentile believers in their faith in God through baptism. St. Paul argued that if the Gentiles possessed that spiritual mark, then they, too, began their own journey to be closer to God.

If we truly believe this, then we have an obligation to offer those of faith this spiritual mark. That said, we also need to catechize our faithful and we need to guide them correctly. As leaders of the faith, we are obligated to live correctly as well or else neither you nor I have any business teaching the faith – I very strongly believe in my diaconal promise to “believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach.”

That all said, YES, I fall sometimes badly. I need to follow God’s way just like everyone else, knowing that when Peter denied Jesus, when the apostles abandoned Jesus on the cross, Jesus also forgave them when they sought God’s forgiveness. Jesus helped them just as we are obligated to love, forgive and help others with a contrite heart. When the woman caught in adultery was brought in front of Jesus, he said to her (John 8: 1-11), “Has no one condemned you? The neither will I, but do not sin again.”

To this belief, we must all hold fast. I must learn and then I must teach; I must learn the example and then I must follow the example. Our

readings today are about love, about learning what self-sacrifice means and then how to live it. As Jesus teaches us today, “No greater love is this than the lay down one's life for one's friend. You are my friends if you do what I command and I what I command you to do is to love one another.

So I gave this woman a chance to get back on the path of faith by having her eight children baptized. As a result, she introduced me to two of her sisters, each of whom also bore three children. This meant that on a Saturday afternoon Mass, I would be celebrating Fourteen Baptisms at the 4:00 Mass – Get me out the water hose! I am hoping by doing this, we are trying to save souls of three families... and my own as well.

In this same light, I encountered another woman that approached me, asking to have her marriage blessed. The woman felt lonely; she felt set apart. The mother felt castigated by the community; she did not feel like she was going to be invited into our life of prayer.

So we invited this woman to attend Mass with us, as well as her family. As a result, the woman started investing herself into our community. For the last couple of months, she chose to say “thank you” by cleaning our house, by cleaning our church and by cleaning our gymnasium. The woman brought family and friends with her to remove large furniture from the property and pull old carpeting from our houses.

As a thank you to the parish, this woman introduced us to a woman who wishes to help our parishes in our office ministries, a woman who previously worked in Hispanic Ministry simultaneously at St. John Paul II, St. Patrick’s and St. Rose’s Churches in Kankakee. This woman found secretarial help who already possesses the documentation and accreditations by the Joliet diocese. This woman, María Flores, will begin working with us on May 12<sup>th</sup> and hopefully will assist us with inviting those in our community who could not find a local place to worship and socialize with our Catholic community.

When I first was assigned to these parishes a couple years ago, I was informed by the residents of this community that about 70% of the workforce in this area were the faithful of the Hispanic and Black communities who labored over at Van Drunen and Silva farmlands, as well as at Momence Packing. I was told by parishioners that they *wanted me* to invite these good folks to our parish community because no one previously had catered to them for the last twenty years or so.

Now I know that my predecessors at these churches I served had done what they could with the talents and gifts they had to invite the faithful into our parishes. I also know that when I minister, my talent is more akin to a “bull in a china shop.” I believe that if the ministry I am asked to offer is the right thing to do, then I will do the ministry, regardless of the consequences.

So I accepted the challenge of the faithful and I invited our faithful to invite those who did not feel welcomed. We started celebrating Spanish Masses and now the Spanish Mass at Momence is the largest growing and largest attended Mass that we have on the weekends. We found that



the choir from our *Camino y Esperanza* retreat house wished to join us at our Sunday Masses; Ana Rivas and her staff have assisted us with catechesis, with marriage formation, with baptism preparation and with RCIA. The folks in all our communities have been so wonderful and welcoming in bringing in new parishioners. As a result, the Anglo, Black and the Hispanic communities (as well as anyone else) have come together to serve as a body of Christ – different members and different gifts but the same Spirit that unites us all. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the theme that we will address two weeks from now with the feast of Pentecost.

I am just so blessed that so many of you understand why Christ is imploring us to do in today's gospel, to *love one another*. By doing so, we show God that we are a welcoming community, that we are a loving community and that we are willing offer grace in this community. It does not matter who the person is if they come forward; if that person wishes to be baptized into the faith of the church, if they wish to take that journey and learn about the faith and live the faith, then we have

saved a soul – namely, our own. By loving and sacrificing for others, we have done what God has asked us to do – to go out to the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them everything that Jesus has taught us. As Jesus concludes in this passage from Mt 28: 18-20, “Know that I am with you always until the end of the age.

The gospel of John is always about love; it is focused on Christian charity, sacrificing one’s life for the sake of the other. We believe the same author of the gospel of John wrote the first letter of John who shares the exact same theme. Peter models that theme in the first reading today; I pray and hope that I am modeling that theme for our bordertown parishes. Please know that I am praying for you, that we love you. We want to offer the sacraments to you, and we want to serve you. Let us love and sacrifice together as a body of Christ, welcoming the people in telling them they are loved and sharing this grace and God's mercy with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.