

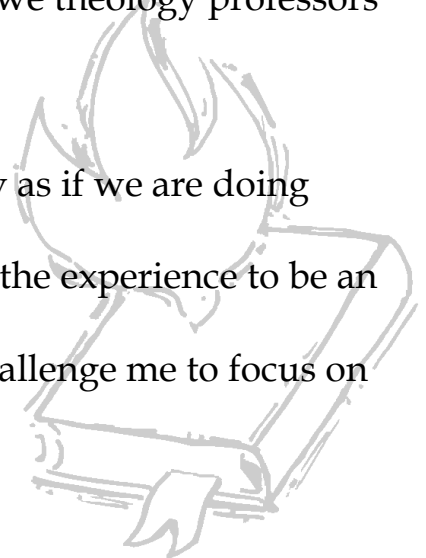
Homily
Epiphany of the Lord - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
January 01-02, 2022

Is 60: 1-6
Ps 72: 1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13
Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6
Mt 2: 1-12

In December addition to all the Christmas masses, anointings and special visits, hospitals and nursing homes and care facilities, I also needed to write are all my evaluations for the University at St. Francis. I teach three courses at the university each semester, which is a challenge - because of the movement of our millennial generation away from God, about 25% of those who are millennials designate themselves as people who do not believe anything. Often this group of millennials claim possibly to be religious or non-religious but do not invest in any particular organized religion. This particular group of students become a challenge teach, but nevertheless, that is what we theology professors at the university are called to do.

Sometimes we professors look at our ministry as if we are doing missionary work at a Catholic University. I find the experience to be an eye-opener for me, because the non-catechize challenge me to focus on



trying to teach “the unteachable” with the ways of God I understand in my faith life is what is going to get me to heaven. Sometimes what I teach I do very well; many times I do not.

In the courses I teach, sometimes I look at the evaluations that are written. When I do so, I encounter a whole gamut of opinions from those I serve.

Q11 - Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences in this course?	
1	yeah this class and every other theology class is really frustrating because it feels like *even though y'all tell us you don't force Catholicism* y'all absolutely force it and it's uncomfortable.
2	this course was extremely unorganized. there were never notes and we never stayed on topic. he made this course very awkward and it was hard to learn when he jumped around to random subjects thought one class
3	no
4	Very good class. I enjoyed it.
5	I loved the atmosphere; there was discussion, debates, but it was respectful and we were all able to have a good banter with each other.
6	I liked it
7	I enjoyed this course.
8	He was a great teacher!
9	Father Pete is one of the best professors I have had the pleasure of knowing at USF. He is understanding, forgiving, and deeply involved. He made my experience at USF better by being my professor, and I am a better person after taking this course. Everything I have learned from this course will stick with me for the rest of my life. I am very grateful for Father Pete and the impact he left on me while attending USF.

A few students are very dissatisfied with the ways that things are taught; some are very satisfied in what is being offered. In one particular course, I was looking at the evaluations by those on the negative side of life reject theology altogether. One student wrote...

Yeah this class and every other theology class is really frustrating because it feels like even though y'all tell us you don't force Catholicism y'all absolutely force it and it's uncomfortable.

The course was extremely unorganized. And the notes, you know, straight on topic, he made the course awkward. It was hard to learn when we jumped around to random subjects.

On a side note, when a student asks question in class, sometimes we make a tangential move to address the students' issues. I feel what when students are getting invested in the class, I want to make sure to acknowledge the students and their views before returning to the subject at hand.

On the other side, we have students that had a fond opinion of the class. As stated in the evaluations...

- (This was a) very good class. I enjoyed it.
- I loved the atmosphere; there was discussion, debates, but it was respectful and we were all able to have a good banter with each other.
- I liked it
- I enjoyed this course.
- He was a great teacher!

The last commented about the course really affected me when a student wrote the following...

Father Pete is one of the best professors I have had the pleasure of knowing at USF. He is understanding, forgiving, and deeply involved. He made my experience at USF better by being my professor, and I am a better person after taking this course. Everything I have learned from this course will stick with me for the rest of my life. I am very grateful for Father Pete and the impact he left on me while attending USF.

I often think that as a Catholic priest, I hope that I can make the experience of faith better for the students I teach. Especially as a priest who has suffered in his attempt to protecting children, I keep reminding

myself that Pope Francis said for those of us who and have made a choice to defend Catholic teachings, the pope said, "If you want to confront someone, be a man about it, but face the consequences of your actions." I have made a choice to protect children and have paid the consequences for the choice I have made. In my suffering, I have come to realize that in a small way, I am in solidarity with Christ because of that suffering. I have made my choice - I have paid the price for the decision I have made to protect kids. Because of the choice I made, my life on earth as a priest has not been an easy one. I just pray that the sufferings I have endured because of those choices are in solidarity to the Lord's sufferings.

I thought about what the pope had said concerning standing up to those in authority, especially in the world of faith. I thought about all the martyrs and others who stood up to the powers and authorities of their respective eras have suffered because of the choices they have made. Eleven of the twelve apostles suffered a martyr's death because of the choices they made, as did St. Paul and every Christian martyr

recognized in the Church. I thought about St. Pope Celestine V, whose successor (Pope Boniface VIII) locked him in a tower out of fear of what Celestine might do in the future. I thought about how the superiors of St. Padre Pio also locked him in a tower until the Lord gifted the saint with a stigmata to reveal his true holiness to all. I thought about a Lord who was nailed to the cross by the leaders of the first century church at that time, because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

I ask myself, “Why would these individuals allow God to themselves in that kind of suffering and punishment? If Jesus knew he would be crucified, why would he come down to earth in the first place?”

The answer to these questions, and the theme of today’s Feast of the Epiphany, is what we teach in the *Death & Dying* course from my university class – once you accept death, then you learn how to live life well. We learn that infidelity of the covenant that was given through Moses leads the disaster and destruction (Fr. Lawrence Boadt). We as human beings are not going to get to heaven by our own means; we have learned that we need examples of faith to guide us along. Christ *is*

the light; Mary and the saints reflect that life in their lives as examples to follow Christ. We, as human beings, are not able to uphold the covenant on our own. We need help like little children seeking a parent to guide us. When we learn how to live in the light, even if it means death, is when we understand the Christian message and follow God's path to heaven.

In this spirit of holiness, God decided that the only way the covenant between the divine and the human was gonna work was for God to come down, become incarnate, assume a human will and a human nature, to live with us, to walk with us, to heal us, to feed us, to die for us and to rise for us. By entering that nativity scene, the Son of God set the path and the example that each of us baptized members of the faith need to follow if we ever expect to enter heaven.

I know when any of us try to uphold the teachings of the faith in this type of way, no matter how hard we try, we are going to lose because the secular society, the non-Christian society and sometimes even those leaders within the faith are going to make us suffer the consequences

because they do not wish to choose the path of the divine; they do not wish to follow in this direction. Whatever reason that others prefer the secular way to God's life, I keep reminding myself that no matter how hard this the path of salvation is for each of us, I realize ultimately that I am going to lose in the world of the secular just as Christ lost on the cross. My *hope* in losing is that I win in the long run – as attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, "It is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Look at the people who have lived far greater lives than I ever could. Look at those we honor as martyrs and saints. So many examples of Christ's light shine upon us, including the light itself that infinitely is brighter than Mary or any of the saints. We need to follow that example and learn from that example. *This* is what I try to instill with the students I teach at the university. This is what I teach the sisters at the convent. This is what I teach to you. The wise men forecast this teaching in the presentation of myrrh to our Lord, that pickling spice used to prepare a body that has died – in the cause of the faith, we are going to

lose this battle in the secular world; that is the deal. We are not going to accomplish what we want on earth, because if Christ was crucified for his mission, so will we be.

In my estimation, I figure that I have no more than fifty years left on earth, probably much less. When this time on earth is over, I have to stand before God and I have to answer the same questions that will be posed to each of you – did I love my God and did I take care of the ones God commissioned me to serve?

When I was hungry, you gave me food; when I was thirsty, you gave me drink. When I was ill or in prison, you took care of me (paraphrase of Mt 25). Did I take care of the most valuable and sacred lambs placed under my care as a shepherd of the flock? Whether these lambs sit in these pews or in families' homes, I realize that if I follow the path of the good shepherd, I am commissioned to love every person I encounter, even if they do not love me... because in my experience, those who possess dark souls always will go after those who shine God's light, as evidenced by Herod's slaughter of the innocents after the story of the

Epiphany is told. Sometimes when you have to defend the teachings of the faith, there are consequences to your actions of told is right.

So I continue to teach and continue to preach. I try (sometimes correctly, many times not) to follow God's command and God's direction. Please know I do what I can sacrifice for you. Please do the same for each other, whatever vocation you are called to live, as we offer that sacrifice and that love to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.