

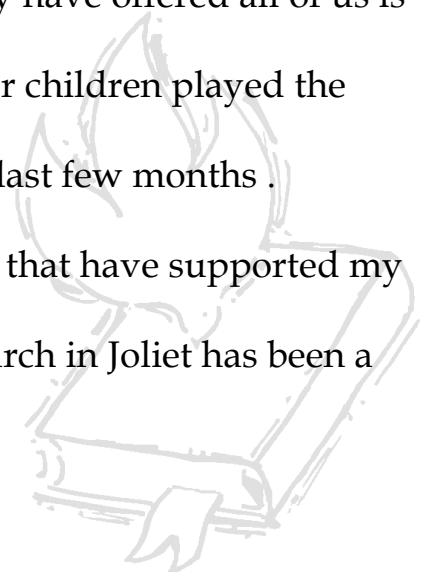
Funeral Homily
Donald Jankowski

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 19, 2021

Wisdom 3: 1-9
Psalm 23
2 Timothy 2: 8-13
Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

I wanted to offer my “thank yous” at this time rather than at the end of the Mass, as Fr. Tim Andres will be offering his own words of comfort as well at the Final Commendation. That said, there have been so many folks in our lives that have been an inspiration to us, whether it be the families represented in Italy and Poland (whose presence will be felt at the end of this homily) to those who have lived and worked with my father in the Chicagoland area, Argonne National Laboratory and certainly the parishes where he, Maria, Julian and I have travelled together. Representing all the friends that have crossed paths with our family, what Carmen LaFranzo and her progeny have offered all of us is more than cherished – Andrea LaFranzo and her children played the cello and violins for my father, especially these last few months .

Representing all the parishioners in this area that have supported my family, Gloria Nussbaum from St. Patrick’s Church in Joliet has been a



wonderful support (though I never get to try any of her pies – my father got to them before I did – not that I need any more pie in my life!!!).

I would like to thank those folks at St. Paul's Church in Sandwich, IL and St. Mary's Church in Plano, IL as well. Through my formative years during my father's first marriage, the faithful in that part of the state were extremely supportive to pops and to all of us. The Marian priests of the Immaculate Conception carried my father through the loss of his first wife, my mother Zaira Zelinda. My aunt (and godmother) Concetta "Connie" Mazzulla and her husband Ernesto supported and protected my father through his initial years of marriage and introduced him to his second wife – for someone to be married to *two* wives for over twenty-five years is a blessing in and of itself.

I would like to thank all those from the parishes I have served (and currently serve) for being as kind and generous to my family and me. Most of them know that after a long weekend of ministry, my weekends usually ended at my family's house for "intellectual" discussions with my brother Julian and my father telling all of us (including his wife) that we were all too young to run a snowblower or balance a checking



account. Joanne Hermann from my current parish in Momence wanted to offer support this week to me so, as a joke, she decided to knit for me what she called, "Bernie Sanders

Mittens." When I was in high school, my mother used to knit these types of mittens for the priests and bishops up at Holy Name Seminary in Madison, WI. Bernie Sanders would be proud of Joanne Hermann.

For the purposes of this homily, I also would like to thank the "Theology Brain Trust" at the University of St. Francis. Drs. Richard Nicholas, Dan Hauser and Tim Weldon asked me to offer theology courses there over a decade ago. They asked for a priest who had a degree to teach at the university; instead, they got stuck with me.

In a way, this Mass very much parallels what I am teaching in my "Death and Dying Course" at USF; all of a sudden, what I teach in the classroom has become a "practicum" course for me this semester. At the university, I begin the course by having the students read a book called,

“Tuesdays with Morrie,” a story written by Mitch Albom. In that book, Mitch lamented that he was taking his life for granted and that he really never understood what the true meaning of life was about.

Reconnecting with his sociology professor from his college days, Professor Morrie Schwartz taught Mitch some basic values of life that we all take for granted – “Once you learn how to die in life is when you learn how to live.” Morrie channeled a Buddhist-type mentality in preaching about the end of his time on earth – once you rid yourselves of the attachments you have in life, you then find out what is really important. I very much understand how the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism can be understood in any religion, *especially* the Catholic faith:

1. Life involves suffering
2. Suffering is caused by desires
3. Get rid of the desires and you get rid of the suffering
4. You get rid of the desires by a type of eightfold path (right living, right understanding and so forth)

Morrie channeled a bit of my grandmother Carmella Cosenza in his teachings – get a good cry out of the way each day and then enjoy life!

After watching my father's wife Maria care for him the way she did, a specific quote from Morrie seems even more apropos for this homily (forgive the language in advance). Morrie says...

Take my condition. The things I am supposed to be embarrassed about now – not being able to walk, not being able to wipe my ass, waking up some mornings wanting to cry – there is nothing innately embarrassing about them. It's the same for women not being thin enough, or men not being rich enough. It's just what our culture would have you believe. Don't believe it.

I teach the students in my course that, like Mitch, our society likes to define our culture and how we think about life and death. Morrie would tell us not to allow society to define our culture; we should define it ourselves. Life is special; life is sacred. Every person has a story and every story can teach us something we can learn.

As my father wore down in his five year battle with cancer and watching Maria and Julian take care of him every day, I remembered the promise Maria made to her husband, my dad, a promise, a covenant that she followed to the end. My father wanted to spend the end of his days in the house in which his family and he lived. To do this used to be

commonplace; nowadays we have hospice residences and hospitals, which is fine for many. That said, every time I saw Maria clean my father, feed my father, wash my father and endure the stages of grief that my father endured as the cancer took over, I could not help but think of what my atheist cousin wrote to me when my father thought he was ruining his marriage because of all of his suffering. When I told Marty Jankowski that Maria should become the general of something for what she had done for pops, this is what he said in return...

Yes, Maria is the general of LOVE. Love is manifested in many forms. This is just one of many ways Maria has shown your dad that she loves him. She loved him twenty-five years ago and showed him that in different ways. She still loves him the exact same way as she did back then. Now she simply shows him that same love in a different way. And that will continue to evolve in different ways that you have yet to see. While dad to see it is also exquisite. Witness, cry, yet also rejoice. This is what makes the world go around. Our undying love for one another.

I was not in a position to tell Marty that St. Augustine would argue that LOVE also happens to be the first step in understanding God - I am not in the mood to argue about this with an atheist that understands this Christian value a great deal from his own perspective. That said, I very

much understand how two wives endured much, had to raise kids and deal with the day-in, day-out joys and struggles of marriage so that my father, their husband, could enjoy twenty-five years of it *twice* in his life. If we can get past the grief and suffering, we also can look back and realize that my father's life also was very blessed.

During these last five years, my current family also have had the opportunity to spend time with Mike Sayles, Rich Tapella, Mary Sue Reardon and the gang at Carlson-Sayles-Holmquist Funeral Home as well as Fr. Tim Andres, Judy Halsne, Scott Pucel, Jen Meredith and Cheri Gimbel here at St. Joseph's. Both Rich Tapella and Cheri Gimbel videotaped interviews with me about funeral planning for the university class I teach – Rich calls himself “the better twin” to his “dry half” brother, Fr. Joseph Tapella – Cheri has to endure my nonsense on a weekly basis here with my Tuesday Masses. Both the funeral home and this parish have been a great support for Maria, who promises to make both groups a nice dinner when we get to the other side of the funeral. I kid Maria that she makes nice dinners for everyone but me, to which she retorts, “Excuse Me?” and then feeds my veal meatloaf to the dog.

What Fr. Tim has offered this family is a respite to find a place of calm in a hectic world. My brother attends Mass at St. Joseph's in Rockdale. Fr. Michael Magiera (the pastor in Rockdale and cantor at this Mass) has been badgering me for years to learn the Mass in Latin, which I now am doing for the Poor Clare Sisters at the Annunciation Monastery.

Between them, the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Centro Vilaseca and whatever parish and community my father and Maria have served, our family truly has been blessed by a bunch of folks who have lived today's gospel message as much as my family has lived it for them. Very quietly, without recognition, they have loved us in their way and we have hopefully done the same for them.

You will not find this love on the front page of the newspapers – the headline story often is reserved for politics and horrible events of life. Love does not get published in the front page of the newspaper or headlined in the news. Love is unheralded by a society that often wants us to live in a culture of fear instead of a God and a Church that is founded by a type of Christian charity revealed through sacrifice.

This is why I tell the students in my Death & Dying Course – I truly believe that obituaries should be put in the *front* page of newspapers instead of the perils of politics, death and fear. As part of my course, I make students write their own obituaries. This may sound morbid but actually it can be very uplifting. Usually obituaries highlight what is *good* about a person and what value that person offered in life. We often do not speak about the positive things about a person’s life until they have departed from it. With the students I teach, I try to ask them to think about what their purpose is in life, what they are trying to accomplish and what might await a person who defines a culture from the perspective of love.

As for my father... his story is rather simple. My father was a *pain in the arse!* He called life as he saw it. My father was not much for pretentiousness and could not stand folks who were duplicitous. In some small way, I think all of us children hold some of those same values (I leave a room much sooner than my father would – my father and his two wives were the model of being social butterflies). If my father believed in a cause, he was unrelenting. If someone needed

something fixed or painted, he stood first in line. He often thought he knew more than others about how something should be done – like most all of us, sometimes he was right and sometimes he was wrong.

Most of all, my father followed a simple bible axiom: *Say yes when you mean yes and no when you mean no – anything more is the work of the devil (Mt 5: 37)*. Be sincere and be true. Be prepared for him to talk your ear off. If my father was on your side, he was your friend for life. He could give it as well as he could take it. He also was fiercely devoted to his wife and children.

What do we say about a person who is *that* devoted to his faith, his family and his community? Our first reading from Wisdom is pretty clear on what kind of life awaits a person who puts the needs of others ahead of himself...

The souls of the just are in the hand of God,
and no torment shall touch them.
They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;
and their passing away was thought an affliction
and their going forth from us, utter destruction.
But they are in peace.
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
because God tried them

and found them worthy of himself. (Wisdom 3: 1-3, 5)

How can I show the students how much this community and family appreciated my father? How much can I show this to his wife Maria and son, Julian, as well as my older siblings? There are so many cultures, so many good people who have paid their respects and offered their words of support during this last week. I thought, in a Christian context, I would define my father's culture from those who cared for him throughout the world.

With a little help from Maria's niece in Borek, Poland and my mother's family in Naples, Italy, with a little help from the internet and a priest who recited what I am about to present in Mandarin on behalf of those Chinese physicists and friends that had crossed paths in my father's life, I would like to offer a custom that I utilize at the funerals of every person I celebrate. Usually this custom is reserved for dignitaries or clergy and religious who have died. For me, every Catholic is worthy of this song and worthy of this love that folks from around the world are going to pray with us today.

For my part, I offer a Latin hymn called “The Salve Regina,” which is chanted by those of faith before they go to bed each night. It is the song dedicated to Mother Mary and those who care for their children. With the help of those I have mentioned, I would like to follow that song with the recitation of the Hail Mary in the languages that affected the heart of my father and the heart of this family – I would like to offer the Hail Mary in Polish, Italian, Chinese, Spanish and English. I offer these prayers for my father in a way to say, “Pops, I love you.”

*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.*

Zdrowaś Maryjo, łaski pełna,
Pan z Tobą,
błogosławionaś Ty między niewiastami,
i błogosławiony owoc żywota Twojego, Jezus.
Święta Maryjo, Matko Boża,
módl się za nami grzesznymi
teraz i w godzinę śmierci naszej. Amen.

Ave, o Maria, piena di grazia,
il Signore   con te.
Tu sei benedetta fra le donne
e benedetto   il frutto del tuo seno, Ges 
Santa Maria, Madre di Dio,
prega per noi peccatoti,
adesso e nell'ora della nostra morte. Amen.

萬福瑪麗亞，你充滿聖寵！主與你同在。你在婦女中受
贊頌，你的親子耶穌同受贊頌。
天主聖母瑪麗亞，求你現在和我們臨終時，為我們罪人
祈求天主。阿門。

Dios te salve, Mar a,
llena eres de gracia,
el Se or es contigo.
Bendita t  eres entre todas las mujeres,
y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre, Jes s.
Santa Mar a, Madre de Dios,
ruega por nosotros, pecadores,
ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte. Am n.

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 in the hour of our death. Amen.

This is our prayer.