

Homily

Immaculate Conception - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 8, 2022

Gn 3: 9-15, 20
Ps 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4
Eph 1: 3-6, 11-12
Lk 1: 26-38

I have come to learn that one person really can make a difference in the world. Sometimes you will never know who that one person is. I was talking to the university students in my Death & Dying course, as well as my Hispanic Ministry course, and I was asking them to think about what their purpose is in life. What do they wish to accomplish in this world?

In my Death & Dying course, I ask the students to write their obituaries, which sounds kind of an odd thing to do, but in a sense, it is an opportunity to reflect on the kind of life you want to live, what you want to accomplish, the people whose lives you wish to affect. Normally when you read an obituary, it often reflects the kind of things a person has done in life that really helps others out.



As we discussed this project at the university, one of my students was really struggling in writing her obituary. The student's name was Amanda. Amanda is nineteen years old and a sophomore in college. She told me that prior to taking this course with me, her mother had just died. Amanda was really struggling with this loss. As we journeyed in the religious and pastoral views on the subject of Death & Dying this semester, Amanda told me how difficult she found it to visit cemeteries and looking at gravestones, even though she understood that symbols that mark the gravestones often signify the kind of person that individual was, whether that person be a child with balloons and teddy bears on the stone or veterans with military symbols adorning their coffins.

Amanda told me that she was still working through the stages of grief that we discussed in the class concerning her mother, even though the last stage of grief often can be hope for a better future, both for the person that died and those who are left behind. I told Amanda that I would do the best I could to help her out, but her specific purpose in life

might be well suited in living a life respectful of her mother, to reflect her mother's love in the way that she conducted herself. If Amanda's mother meant anything to her, I said, then hopefully she will live a life worthy of her... and the Spirit that guided her mother would also guide her.

In my care is another special needs student named Joseph who approached me halfway through the semester. Joseph was worried about his grade - frankly, *every* college student is worried about their grade - not what they learn in the class but how they could get a result satisfactory to them. As I have told you before, I said to Joseph that I was sure that when he applies for a job in the world, the first thing the boss is NOT going to ask is what grade he received in his theology course!

I told Joseph that if he really wanted to do well at a Catholic University, then perhaps he should learn the basic teachings of the faith: do unto others; love your God and love your neighbor. More important than anything you learn in a theology course is the basic concepts of

learning to treat others as you would want them to treat you (the Golden Rule).

That being said, I told Joseph that I would help him out. All I asked him to do is “pay it forward” and make a difference in someone else’s life. If someone is struggling, if someone is having a problem, I told Joseph to make sure that he loves them as hopefully we have loved him.

I was thinking about yesterday’s Feast of St. Ambrose. St. Ambrose was a wonderful theologian and he was a wonderful bishop in Italy where he served. More importantly, the impact that Ambrose affected my faith life was the way that he and this woman named Monica kept praying for the conversion of her family who had fallen away.

As this happened so many times in today’s age, with this generation, the “Gen X” and Millennial generation which both have fallen away, it is up to the mothers and fathers who live this faith to pray for the conversion of their children. Fifteen hundred years ago, St. Monica and St. Ambrose did just that. Monica’s husband and her child had fallen away in the most severe way. Monica pleaded with Ambrose and asked

him to pray with her for the conversion of her husband and son, which eventually happened.

As a result of her perseverance, her son grew up to be the great Western father of the church, St. Augustine, who fought mercilessly against a heretic named Pelagius, who argued that a believer did not need God to get to heaven, which is very much the theme in today's age. Augustine responded by arguing that yes, you do need God; without God, we are lost without faith. Because of Augustine's mother, because of St. Ambrose, we honor the great Western Father and saint of the Church.

Concerning today's feast, we really do not know the names of the Blessed Mother's parents except for one text called the Protoevangelium of James. The Protoevangelium of James is an apocryphal gospel; it is not canonical (God inspired), but it is the only text we have that tells us that the names of Mary's parents were Joachim & Anne. As this story tells us, Joachim & Anne never thought that they would have a gift of a daughter being born in the world. Later in Anne's life, the Holy Spirit

spoke to them and guided them according to this text, that this child would make a difference in the world. The Church teaches us that this child would be protected from sin by the power of the Holy Spirit and this woman's name was Mary.

Think about what would have happened if Ambrose and Monica did not pray for her son Augustine. Think about what would have happened if Joachim & Anne did not accept this daughter Mary. Think about what would have happened if Mary, the Blessed Mother, did not accept her own son Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Think what happens in today's age if we don't pray for our kids who have fallen away without the mothers and fathers, without the people who intercede and ask God to intercede for the conversion of their children, to sustain and protect their children. Without these advocates, we would not venerate St. Augustine or Blessed Mother Mary. Without these advocates, we have no savior of the world.

One person can make a difference. Today, we honor this person who responded to the call of the archangel, Gabriel, "I am the handmade of

the Lord. Let it be done to me according to thy word.” By offering this *fiat*, Blessed Mother Mary made a difference in our lives.

Let us understand the importance of what she did so that we may do the same as mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and as baptized Christians on behalf of the people that we meet. This is how one person – namely each of us – can make a difference in this world. This is our prayer.