

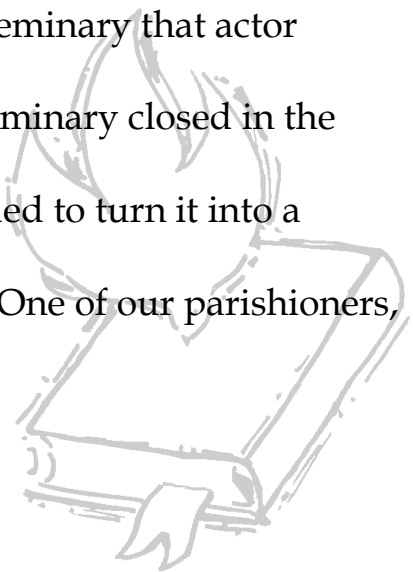
Homily
4th Sunday of Easter – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski 10-11,
April 29-30, 2023

Acts 2: 14, 36-41
Ps 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5-6
1 Pt 2: 20-25
Jn 10: 1-10

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, I was thinking about all the wonderful ministers in our area who take care of so many individuals, so many folks that are in need of God's mercy. I have shared stories with you about good souls in the Bordertown Parishes who have taken care of the needy, the poor, the homebound people of that nature among so many others.

In this particular weekend on this Good Shepherd Sunday, I was thinking about Brother Alfonso Brown and Brother Charles Pratt who serve Good Shepherd Manor here in Momence, IL. Back in the 1930s, forties, fifties, there was a seminary in St. Jude Seminary that actor Danny Thomas actually supported. When the seminary closed in the late 60s, the folks that bought the property decided to turn it into a facility for those men with special needs to live. One of our parishioners,



Jean Gibson, moved to Illinois because her son for many years lived at Good Shepherd Manor. Brother Alfonso, Brother Charles and the wonderful staff over at this facility have taken care of so many individuals who really had nowhere else to go.

What the Little Brothers of the Good Shepherd offer these men often goes “under the radar” with those who live outside of our local community but what they do models the gospel message. The good brothers provide a home for those with special needs who can have a place to live. The brothers provide love; they provide care.

Each brother offers a specific ministry to the residence of this facility. As head administrator, Brother Alphonsus not only has to care for the residents but serve as chief fundraiser, administrator and visible head of a facility that certainly needs our financial and spiritual support in order to function. Brother Charles likes to offer his musical talents with the residents – he hosts a YouTube channel where Brother Charles plays his guitar, wears his cowboy hat and sings country music for the residents (although he refuses to sing for us in church!).\

Brother Charles prides himself on his YouTube channel with his culinary delights, which he takes right out the “Betty Crocker Cookbook!!! He told me that in his early days of community he served as the cook for the rest of the brothers and the Betty Crocker Cookbook saved him many nights of wondering how to feed a spiritually hungry mob (I would joke about this but I used “The Joy of Cooking” at the seminary to feed my classmates when the kitchen staff was snowed out in the winter, so I am no one to complain about Betty Crocker!!!).

Over the last few years here in the me area, Brother Charles and Brother Alfonso have asked me to head over to the manor on occasion to anoint a group of individuals, because there is no priest over there, the priest that was supposed to live there has moved down to Florida and good brothers could find no priest to offer the sacraments. I told Brother Alfonso and Brother Charles that perhaps once a month I could go over to the manor to celebrate Mass with the residents so they knew that someone actually cared for them, somebody actually loved them.

Because these wonderful men all have special needs, sometimes

people don't realize the blessings that these good souls receive, but we do. We are supposed to take care of those most in need of God's mercy... and these good souls certainly meet that standard. To witness how Alfonso and Brother Charles, dedicate their life to taking care of these individuals by bringing them to Mass in Momence, by walking the halls to take care of their needs and to grieve with their families when they are ill or they die fulfills the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel more than I could ever illustrate – God remembers what these brothers do in secret and certainly will respond to this goodwill on the last day.

Concerning funeral services, Brother Alfonso sometimes asks me to visit this little plot of land on their campus where St. Patrick's sexton Roger "Bones" Hess serves for the sake of families who wish their loved ones to be buried on site. Whenever I am asked to anoint a resident or celebrate a committal services, the routine for me to offer the sacraments has a familiar pattern. In these times of need, I usually am called to drive up to the main building of the property on "Fr. Alphonsus Drive, where Brother Alfonso usually waits for me. Getting into my car, the

good brother then directs me to take him to the place where we need to offer the anointing or celebrate the funeral. In the process, we get to meet all the wonderful individuals that live at whatever facility we happen to visit. Brother Alfonso often tells me to bring my basset hound Gabby with me on these trips so that she (the dog) can wander up and down the hallways visiting the residents, a therapy dog for those who are at the manor.

To watch these servants in action is a wonderful testimony to how much they care for these individuals. Stephen Loftus (whose funeral I celebrated last year) often shared anecdotes about the residents there with whom he often worked and shared time with those who had no one else to visit them. To know that quietly these individuals care for this specific group of people when others may forget, when others may have other things to do, is a real blessing for me, because when I see Brother Charles and Brother Alphonso (among others) doing what they do, it serves as a model of what I need to do as a priest and Christian.

Many in the St. Pat's community can attest how Brother Charles often

brings some of the residents to our Saturday evening Mass because there is no priest available to serve the men on their campus. So they come to Momence to join us in prayer. I like to pick on Brother Charles and brother Alphonso mercilessly. I tell them that they are sitting in the “geriatric ward” of St. Patrick’s Church building, just like there is a special section in many churches for all the older folks just to think how long the priests’ homilies are going to drone on that particular week.

What gives me pause this Good Shepherd Sunday is that the Little Brothers of the Good Shepherd are not visible in front of all of you celebrating the sacraments but they are front and center in this community in how they share their hearts with the rest of us. The brothers may not be recognized outside of the Momence geographical region but they do like so many shepherds do in so many communities – they live the faith in their small way, in the way that God has called them to live. The beauty of a Christian brother or sister is that, because they are not responsible in celebrating the sacraments, their focus often is directed towards prayer, study, service and the like. We can talk the

same way about all kinds of different folks who offer that same kind of quiet service in hospitals, nursing homes, care facilities, those who visit the home bound, those who pray for the dead, the sick, those most in need of God's mercy. If God's love inspired us to live in God's way, every ministry directed by God is a holy one.

On this particular weekend, I wanted to remember these two individuals because I wanted them to know that we truly do love them and we very much appreciate what they do. It is through their quiet example of faith living out that sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel. God knows what's in their hearts; God knows the kindness that they have accorded these wonderful men of faith who live in this facility because sometimes there is nowhere else for them to go.

Good Shepherd Manor is located in Momence, Illinois at 4129 N State Route 1-17-17 [phone (815) 472-3700]. Please pray for Brother Charles, Brother Alphonsus and the residents and staff of the manor. Please pray for those who live in Momence and St. Anne – they are small parishes with great hearts and great love. We are blessed to have the brothers in

our community; we are blessed to have you with us as well. Please know you are not forgotten; they are not forgotten because the Lord is our shepherd and with God, there is nothing we shall want (Psalm 23). This is our prayer.