

Homily

17th Sunday OT - C

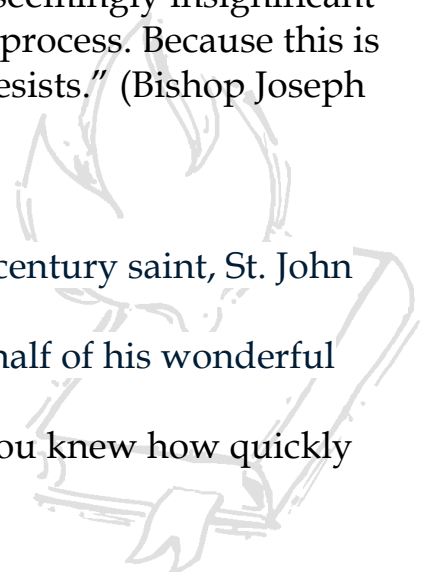
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 26-27, 2025

Gen 18: 20-32
Ps 138: 1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8
Col 2: 12-14
Lk 11: 1-13

There's a couple quotes that inspired me yesterday from St. Anne's Feast Day celebrations. One of them was a quote from Pope Benedict. This is when in 1969 after Vatican II, he was a bishop at the time, Bishop Joseph Ratzinger, who eventually was the last pope to actually have attended the second Vatican council. After the council, he said,

"Soon, we will have priests reduced to the role of social worker and the faith reduced to political vision. Everything will seem lost but at the right time, at the most dramatic stage of crisis, the Church will be reborn. It will be smaller, poorer, almost catacumbal, but also more holy. For it will no longer be the Church of those who seek to please the world but the Church of those faithful to God and His eternal law. The rebirth will be the work of a small, seemingly insignificant yet indomitable remnant, past a purification process. Because this is how God works. Against evil, a small pack resists." (Bishop Joseph Ratzinger – later Pope Benedict XVI, 1969)

The other quote comes from the fourth-fifth century saint, St. John Chrysostom, named "the golden mouth" on behalf of his wonderful teachings and homilies. St. John once said, "If you knew how quickly



people would forget you after your death, you would not seek in your life to please anyone but God” - St. John Chrysostom (d. 407)

When people say to me, “How can we live about without this human person or that person?” my response to them always is, “The only ones without whom we cannot live if we want to get to heaven is our Lord Jesus Christ and his Father, united by the Holy Spirit.” I was thinking about this because as we were celebrating our 145th Anniversary of the St. Anne Novena, I thought about when this celebration first started in the way we do in 1880.

Does anyone remember which pastor served our Church in 1880? [“If you knew how quickly people would forget you after your death, you would not seek in your life to please anyone but God” - St. John Chrysostom (d. 407)]. If I am correct, the answer to this question is Rev. M. Letellier (1871-1883). In looking back at the former pastors of St. Anne’s that I compiled earlier this year, I could not find a picture of Fr. Letellier; the earliest picture of a former pastor was Rev. E. J. Tallion, who served St. Anne’s from 1932-1936.

This means that Fr. Letellier started the Novena celebrations in 1880, around the same time when a young French lad from Bourbonnais named Achille Bergeron attended the festivities with his family and saw the power of the relic first-hand. When Fr. Bergeron was ordained a priest, he was inspired to bring his faithful parishioners by train to St. Anne, IL where they experienced the power of the relic as well. As a result, a bunch of miracles took place in the early 1900s, which are noted in the back of St. Anne's Church by the crutches and wheelchair left behind, most notably of Matilda Cunnea, whose father donated a stained glass window in the side chapel of our worship space.

As with most things, the Novena started to crescendo and then fell into a decline, leaving behind what Pope Benedict might reference as a "remnant" of the thousands who used to flock the city to pray on July 26. As I tell this story, some of you may recall Fr. Bergeron; none of you remembered Fr. Tallion (St. John Chrysostom was right from 1700 years ago)! Few if any remember them and I suspect that few if any would care for them, except for God, who knows what is in all of our hearts.

This year, when the weather report took place and it was calling for 70-75% chance of thunderstorms on Saturday, the weather apps would change the forecast every half hour some radically different forecast. As a precaution just to err on the side of caution and dealing with the diocesan insurance office (and also the fact that it was sweltering hot and humid outside), we decided to celebrate our main liturgy *indoors*, knowing and realizing that a lot of people would not be showing up just because of the fact of the weather report for the day. We also knew that the people who *would* show up were your fanatics of the Novena, those diehards who really love the St. Anne Novena.

I got a phone call last night from a woman who said, "Father, I was coming down I-57 looking for the 1-17 and I couldn't find it." I replied, "Where are you right now?" And she said, "South of Champagne." I said, "South of Champagne? What did you do?" She said, "I went to Exit 117 (instead of the exit for Route 1-17) just like you told us to do." And I said, "Okay, well, I have a feeling you just missed the St. Anne Feast Day because it is 8:30 at night and nobody is here!"

What ended up happening yesterday is that we waited until the last minute and decided to celebrate the Feast Day Mass inside out of an abundance of caution; we took the chance that we had enough room church for the people attending the Novena. As the Mass began, we came to realize we had just enough room to accommodate everyone. Mind you, the balcony was not full at the 10:00 a.m. Mass, but the first floor had just enough room; we ended up lining chairs up and down the aisles of the worship space. , lining them up left and right.

Three priests helped me celebrate Mass that day. A Chicago priest representing the Haitian Community celebrated the 10:00 a.m. Mass, Fr. Jim Heyd. Each year, Fr. Heyd usually brings busloads of his faithful to this special Mass; during the homily, Fr. Jim offered a historical sermon about the history of the French Canadians who lived in the United States. At the end of the Mass, Fr. Heyd processed outside our very hot and humid campus to lead the faithful in a fifteen-minute procession with the relic. I thank publicly Mr. Todd Navratil (St. Anne's Chief of

Police) who made sure our three processions of the relic that day were led by a police escort.

Before the procession began, Fr. Heyd stood outside the steps of church and offered a blessing with the relic of St. Anne in tow. One of our sojourners told me that the blessing Fr. Heyd offered was SPECTACULAR and asked for a copy of that blessing; Fr. Jim told me that he would do what he could to get it to me. Needless to say, the Haitians present at the Mass and so many others were elated that this “shepherd” led the community in prayer.

Before he left, Fr. Heyd gifted me with icons from the Vietnamese community he also served, stating that his goal next was to bring his Vietnamese faithful to this day as well. I mentioned to Fr. Jim that the power of that relic did not serve just the French and Haitian communities; the following weekend, a family from Melbourne, Australia was coming to visit us specifically to attend our Masses. I told Fr. Jim that Bill (the husband from Australia) sent me an e-mail stating that his wife Mary suffered through COVID a few years back and

watched our Online Masses from the other side of the world to give her strength. The family specifically wanted to fly to the United States after visiting Hawaii and New Mexico to attend our Masses and thank us for supporting her through this ordeal.

I also received a note from Fr. John Peters, CSV (the pastor emeritus of St. Patrick's Church in Kankakee and the celebrant of the St. Anne's Day Mass in 2023), is a Cleric of St. Viator who had custody of that relic for almost one hundred years until Fr. Jim Fanale left the parish in 2019 after celebrating his 50th Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. Fr. Peeters wrote (I paraphrase), "You chose wisely to celebrate the Mass indoors because it was sweltering hot outside and the people who were inside were comfortable."

Bishop Christopher Glancy, CSV (the current pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Kankakee and the celebrant of last year's St. Anne's Day Mass) accompanied Fr. Peeters and concelebrated the Mass with Fr. Heyd. Bishop Glancy also was very happy with the turnout and the manner in which we could fit everyone inside a very comfortable

church. The Most Reverend said that the setting was very cozy and comfortable and those who attended felt like the parish was their home.

When we the last time this special Mass was celebrated inside the Church, in God's house? How many of those who suffered were praying in a comfortable setting and not having to suffer because of the heat? One advantage of celebrating the Mass inside the church was that we were able to record the Mass and put it Online at our "Border Town Parishes" YouTube site (which currently has over eight-hundred videos to watch and over five-hundred subscribers. Not only were we able to record the Mass but we also were able to upload it to our YouTube site for others to watch in the comfort of their own homes.

As a gift, Fr. Jim presented me with a Vietnamese icon and asked us to pray for those living on the other side of the globe; now we pray for the Vietnamese community with the Australians and anyone else watching our liturgies.

For our Latin Mass community, Fr. John Rickard celebrated the Mass at 12:00 noon, in the extraordinary form (the way the Mass was

celebrated prior to Vatican II). Fr. John contacted me earlier in the day, lamenting that he was having a bit of car trouble, so I was prepared to celebrate the Mass in his place. Luckily, Fr. John figured out how to arrive at the parish in time to celebrate that Mass. Ironically enough, one of the members of our Hispanic community also had car trouble that day – they had a flat tire with no spare in their trunk. Police Chief Todd Navratil was very busy that day, leading processions, helping change tires and being present at all of our processions of the relic.

For both of our processions, six altar servers with their cassocks and surpluses held the canopy and processed with cross and candles for a journey that I promised would last at least fifteen minutes after the Masses. I reminded the faithful that if sojourners in the past could walk that procession on a hot, summer day in full length dresses and Sunday going to meeting suits, we could handle the procession in cassocks and surpluses this year!

Because I did not have to celebrate any Masses this day, I decided to serve in a way not done for some years at the parish. Knowing that St.

Anne's Day would fall on a Sunday the following year and I probably would have to celebrate *all* the Masses, this year I chose to hear confessions throughout the day, *which took three hours of my time!*

As I heard these confessions, I sat in the side chapel and was amazed at the line of faithful who stood waiting to have their sins cleansed. A few people said to me, "Father, it has been sixty years since we had confession on St. Anne's Day." I replied that the one thing I can do as a priest unique from the good folks in the pews was that I could offer the Lord's grace through the sacraments; this year we were able to celebrate FOUR of them on St. Anne's Day. I do not know if we did not offer confessions for the last sixty years (Chris Sutherland told me that she remembered priests lining the curb of 6th Avenue to hear "sidewalk confessions" on St. Anne's Day in the past, there was a lot of hurt that was going on in the community and people who wanted to have their sins forgiven.

In addition, many souls that came forward asked for special blessings and special healings through venerating that relic. I was amazed at the

number of souls that came through the really bad weather to join us so God would bless them in this particular way. Offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Anointing the Sick and hearing so many confessions are three specific and very intimate ways in which the faithful encountered God, which is the definition of the word “sacrament” – an encounter with Christ. Allowing the faithful to encounter God in these three specific and intimate way is the most important thing that an ordained cleric like me can do. When you see people brave the weather to receive that grace, you become inspired, knowing that the sacraments serve as the entry way to heaven and ordained clergy like me get to witness that encounter in so many different ways.

For those who were not able to come, we uploaded the Mass on to our YouTube Channel, which also was a blessing – I do not think any St. Anne’s Day Masses up to this year were put Online so that we could allow those at home and abroad to witness the miracles that took place with that relic. For those who did choose to brave the weather and come to our services, I truly believe that these good souls understood the

importance of what the Mass does for us; the Church called the Holy Liturgy, “The source and summit of our Christian life.”

In addition to hearing confessions, I also served in a role that a priest received as one of the first steps to his ordination prior to 1962, the role of *porter* – we might call this the bearer of the door or maybe even an usher in today’s age. One element of our Catholic faith that often gets overlooked is the ministry of “welcome” – ad nauseum I speak about the importance of Bienvenidos y Hospitalidad (welcome and hospitality) in our community; the person whom the faithful first encounter at the door serves as the first line of defense between the world outside (Mircea Eliade might refer to that world as “profane” or “mundane”) and the sacred world inside the church; the minister who welcomes shows the person entering the manner in which we pray are served in the church. In this respect and because I was able to do it, I served as the *porter* for those entering the church.

In this role, I ended up bringing the chairs down the aisles of the church so people could sit comfortably to pray. I welcomed the visitor.

On behalf of the parishioners of St. Anne, I told these visitors that they were loved. I was doing exactly what every single ordained cleric is supposed to do, the first level of what we do as “useless servants” of the Lord – to do what we are supposed to do as ordained clerics. Sometimes this ministry is taken for granted or even neglected.

(I often say that the secretary or a Church office plays the same role. The secretary is the first encounter with Christ one has in a parish office. If you find a secretary that really cares about any person that walks through the office door, then they reflect how much the parish truly cares. Currently, we have a secretary that likes to hug every single person that comes into the office; one of my staff member calls her the “Mary Poppins” of the Border Town community. Ema Elvir took charge of the event and helped out with a wonderful group of people who “got” what we were trying to do – welcoming the next generation to

help with setup and cleanup and assisting those in need on that particular day.)

In addition to the three sacraments we offered that day, I also had a chance to offer a fourth. As the Latin Mass community returned from their procession with the relic throughout the village, they were able to witness us celebrating an outdoor baptism that needed to be done because that one kind of slipped through the cracks. As the Latin Mass community returned to the church after their 15-minute walk, they



witnessed us blessing two special cabinets the Hispanic Community at our parishes built to hold a statue of St. Anne that we borrowed from the other parish I serve (St. Patrick's in Momence, IL) as well as the relic that would be

used in procession to the Spanish retreat center in the area. I ended up blessing the cabinets as well as the horses that would walk in procession of the “Cabalgada” (three-mile horse-drawn procession in a rainstorm!). The family of baby Ashley met us outside during this blessing so we celebrated the baptism outside the church as well.

So we celebrated this baptism in front of these cabinets with the Latin and Spanish Mass communities present. We were very blessed that only *after* the baptism did the torrent of rain begin to fall, a deluge that soaked me from top to bottom. Luckily, the statue and reliquary were



protected by the cabinets in this procession of the relic.

We went through the rain all the way to the Cerrito de Camino y Esperanza retreat house. Now, Eileen Rivas from the retreat house said to me she was worried that we would not have a lot of people attending the last Mass of the day because of the rain. When we arrived at the retreat house, Eileen was relieved... the place was *packed*. Fr. Jhobany Orduz, CSV celebrated the Mass in Spanish for the community. While he was celebrating the Mass, I was hearing yet *another* set of confessions and offering anointings in the back of the worship space. After communion, I was able to pray *The Litany of Saint Anne* with the faithful.

After the Mass, we celebrated yet *another* fiesta with music and all kinds of celebration. Throughout the day, there was enough food to last us until the next rapture. Regardless of the heat index, regardless of the bad weather, those who wanted to encounter this grace in such a special way were *not disappointed* on July 26! In total we were able to offer four different sacraments yesterday – the sacraments of baptism, anointing of the sick, reconciliation, and three Masses in three different languages in

honor of the mother of the New Adam. Those who invested in these sacraments were welcomed, were loved and were receiving the Lord's grace in so many different ways.

I have to tell you that I kind of cheated during the Feast Day; I am a terrible person. When asked, I took the relic out of the reliquary and placed it on the parts of the body that caused people to hurt because when someone tells me that they were suffering from cancer, arthritis, heart conditions or other ailments, these individuals needed to know God was with them, so we made it possible through the work of this relic – the blessings received were not only physical, but spiritual. We come to realize that every person ever cured in the bible eventually died – we all do – but the grace that our Lord offers us is everlasting and necessary for our salvation.

As a result, I *may* have taken the relic out of the reliquary and gave them the sign of the cross with the relic by touching those parts of the body just to tell them that God really did care about them. The “extra touch” is what we are obligated to do, out of love. We are *supposed* to be

a welcoming, loving, affirming community; as soon as faithful souls walk through the door, they need to know they are loved. Our ministry is not to tear people down, but to build them up; that is this gospel message. That is the theme of the first reading, where God will not neglect the faithful, even if there are only a few. God will still take care of them – God will not abolish them or us.

For this reason, we need to keep doing what we are doing because even the few of us who attend the Novena and Feast Day... they are the remnant; you are the remnant. You are the ones who have stayed behind. You are the ones who realize how important this devotion to St. Anne really can be. You may not remember all the pastors from the last 145 years, but they did what they were supposed to do and we must do the same.

When I recorded the video for the feast day of St. Anne, I actually resurrected a video from years ago where my predecessor (Fr. Jim Fanale, who celebrated his 50th Anniversary as a priest in 2019 and died the following year) welcomed everyone to the parish. So, I resurrected

that video and if you watch it online, you can say “hello” to Fr. Jim who we pray is now heading towards the direction of heaven. He prays for us as the “remnant.” Keep praying for the people of the community, helping them return to this sacred place, knowing that the doors to this church separate the sacred and the profane, the world of God from the world of man. If we do this together, if we keep praying, then we are receiving God’s grace... so we can give that grace away to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.

