

# Homily

## 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT – C

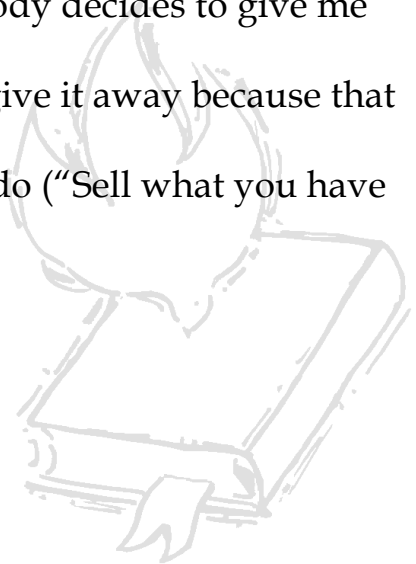
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
August 02-03, 2025

Eccl 1: 2, 2: 21-23  
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9  
Col 3: 1-5, 9-11  
Lk 12: 13-21

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So what I am about to tell you is pretty much going to alienate pretty much everyone listening to what I am about to say. What I have learned from a former parishioner is that for the homily I am about to preach, for those who understand what I do, no explanation is necessary (except many who tell me I give too much of my money away) and for those who do not understand, no explanation will suffice. I get that. With that as a prelude, this is my homily for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time...

So I had decided in my priesthood that if somebody wanted to gift me with what I call “hamburger money,” if somebody wants to take me out to dinner, then I am fine with that. If somebody decides to give me the “motherload,” then I will not keep it; I will give it away because that is what I believe the gospel message tells me to do (“Sell what you have and follow me” – Mt 19: 21).



For someone like me, I believe that my vocation is to take care of all of you; *your* vocation is to take care of your spouses, your kids and the people who are important in your life. If you have the opportunity to help your parish along the way or help your community, then go with God. As for me, you are my family; you are my community. As long as I am here, I take care of you.

A few years ago, my father passed away and my father gave me an inheritance. I really do not like the idea of an inheritances because in the history of the world, the subject of “inheritance” often turns siblings against each other and good people often become ugly. We learned that lesson from the first book of the bible, starting with the book of Genesis and working your way forward.

As we read the stories of the bible, we know that in classic Jewish tradition, the oldest son of the family received the name and at least half the wealth of the father. Yet, in the stories we read from Genesis forward, manipulation and cunning sometimes confronts this classic tradition. The younger son of Adam & Eve was named Abel; the older brother Cain killed Abel because Abel found preference with his father.

Isaac was the younger son of Abraham; as the story tells us, the older son Ishmael was kicked out of Canaan and Isaac received the bulk of the inheritance. Jacob was the younger son of Isaac; Jacob convinced his older brother Esau to give up his inheritance over a bowl of Lentil stew (that must have been one fantastic bowl of stew!). Joseph was the second youngest son of the twelve that Jacob fathered. Jacob favored Joseph over the other eleven so the other eleven brothers threw him into a pit, sold him off to Ishmaelites, told Jacob that someone killed Joseph and then Joseph ended up going to Egypt as a slave.

I have just come to the conclusion that sometimes when it comes to the subject of the inheritance, people act in a way contrary to the story of love. As a result, I did not want to act like that; I want to remember people for the way they love rather than the money they possess.

Thus, I was trying to figure out what to do with this gift from my father who just passed. If you do not know this already, our Border Town Parishes are not exactly considered the richest parishes of the Joliet Diocese (if you want the rich, prestigious Churches, you go to Naperville, you go to Joliet, you go to Downers Grove, you go to

Woodridge and such like that). I also knew that to find good help at our parishes, we needed to extend ourselves a bit and show those who serve us how much we care for them.

In my experience with country parishes, when staff members are working here and if they are any good, they usually are not working exclusively for the salary, because we do not offer much of one. Much of the time, these good souls do good because they love God and they love their Church.

In my heart, I honestly believe the people who are serving our parishes (from John Reamer and Kim Emerson to Artemio Ojeda, Ema Elvir and now Debbie Absher) all love their Church and they all want to give themselves to the Church to answer God's call of service. I also believe that no matter how the leaders of the diocese act, my responsibility is to extend myself in taking care of those serving with me (and on various occasions I have regretted that decision but would act the same way for them as God does for all of us). I try to make sure that people are loved and people are cared for, and we do what we can to help people out, especially the members of our staff. If I act in that

manner, (“do unto others” and “love thy neighbor”), at least I am acting like God, or at least I hope I am. In my heart, I believe that when you love others, people respond in kind and when we do, the next thing you know, we eradicate a \$330,000 debt, which we never thought we would eradicate and we are able to do the things we do when others think we could never accomplish anything.

Around the time my father died, maintenance guru Artemio Ojeda told me he had a dilemma and needed our help. Artemio confided in me that he owned a van that had been driven over 200,000 miles and Artemio said to me that he was not able to get to work with the van he owned. Further, this was the time when our maintenance guru at St. Patrick’s (Jack Noonan) passed away and we now had to address what to do at both parishes concerning this occupation. In response, I asked Artemio if he would like to work at *both* parishes and I would help him out. Artemio knew he could not work either job with the car he had because the car he had was going to break down. He said to me, how are we able to solve this problem?

As I reflected and prayed about Artemio's dilemma, I decided to solve the problem by taking the inheritance that I was given by my father and I used it as a down payment on the truck he currently has. With the help of former business manager at St. Pat's (Mary Tolmer). I then took out a non-interest bearing loan from St. Patrick's Church and I used my university money to pay the parish back for the loan on the truck. In the end, I paid the entire \$20,000 on the truck that Artemio currently drives. I ended up getting diocese to insure the truck. I ended up finding out Artemio was having problems with the driver's license so I got Sylvia Tejada to solve this problem with Artemio.

Now Artemio takes care of the truck like it is another child of his; he really is proud and felt blessed that we took care of him with this gift. I told Artemio that the truck belongs to the parishes, but he would serve as its caretaker. To this day, Artemio has been a faithful steward towards that truck and so much good has taken place because of that gift.

Now in some circles, that *group* of people were very happy that I took my money and spent it on the truck. In other circles, those who were

unaware of what I did and may be a little unenlightened concerning the way I choose to live, this group of people called the bishop's office and stated that I was a liability to the diocese. As a result the then-director of personnel for the diocese named Nancy Siemers (who is no longer working in the diocesan office, BTW) calls me and challenges my \$20,000 gift (I hope the leaders of the diocese DO NOT talk to charitable donors like they talk to me!). Nancy said I was being accused of being a liability of the diocese. I responded by asking how I was a liability of the diocese. This was how the conversation went...

"Where did you get the money for the truck?"

"I robbed a bank."

"Where did you *really* get the money from the truck?"

"I took the inheritance from my father's estate, used it as a down-payment for the truck, then taking my university money, I repaid the non-interest bearing loan on the truck."

"What about insurance?"

"I used the diocesan insurance."

“Did Artemio sign a waiver to that holds harmless the parish and diocese if something happens with or in the truck?”

“We took care of all the paperwork.”

“Then what is the problem?”

I said, “I do not know. You called me.”

In my view, if this is the way we treat charitable people, we would lose what we have and lose more parishes than we have. I guess there is a segment of our community that is untrustworthy by nature or, perhaps, so many good people have done so many bad things that no one is trusted at face-value anymore for the good they do.

I believe that if you love others, there are a lot of people that are going to hate you because people are people – if people can nail God to a cross, they will do this to anyone. I also believe that for those who know you are being sincere in what you do, if you show people that you truly care for them in the name of God, for those who understand, they will give back.



One person knew I was being sincere and wrote a check for \$10,000 so we could take care of an air conditioning problem... and that person had no affiliation to St. Anne's at all. One person has given me \$50,000 a year for the rest of my life and I have told that person that as long as I am leading the parishes I serve, the money goes back to them. Over at St. Patrick's, a woman named Valerie told me she graduated from the Academy in 1962, became friends with the former secretary at St. Pat's named Joanne, who also graduated the Academy in 1962 and saw what we were doing. She said that she understood what we were doing and was giving the parish \$10,000 each year from her estate as a "thank you" to the parish as her gift to us.

Because of the way we have done things, we have upgraded St. Pat's roof with practically no money from the parish. The major projects at the gym (replacing windows, creating first floor bathrooms, renovating the second and third floors) were done at little to no cost. Robert Piquet from our Hispanic community has volunteered to demolish and rebuild two walls in our sanctuary at St. Pat's for the cost of materials only, as Joe Kraus did for our balcony walls.

There are so many people in our parishes, so many people in our community who have been so exceedingly generous *because they “get” it*; they understand what I am doing, why I am doing what I do and they are following that example. They and I know that in about 50 years, in about five minutes, nobody is going to remember me and nobody’s going to remember you. They and I know that people will not remember... *but God does remember... and that is enough.*

Look at the names of those who donated towards our stained glass windows and our crucifixes in our churches. Few, if any, remember them. Many have forgotten about them... but God remembers. I call this “the theology of invisible fingerprints.” There are a lot of invisible fingerprints in this parish from people who were not worried about how much they gave or who would remember. They gave because they love our Church. You and I need to do the same and if we do that, and if people buy into what we are doing, then all of a sudden we continue to build the kingdom of God.

At my last parish someone must have not trusted us because my successor was instructed to crawl from the rafters to the basement of the

church, trying to find out “where I hid all the money.” The answer is to whomever asked my successor to do this... I did not have any money to hide. I do my part and others do theirs – God knows what we do and many understand what we do but others will never understand – this is the gospel message as well

The question is what we do with the gifts our Lord has presented to us. Do we hoard the inheritance for ourselves or do we give it away to others? If you are a good parent, if you are a good citizen, if you are a good Christian, you know what you have to do. The blessings that you have are meant to be given away. Movie characters like Frodo from *The Lord of the Rings* or Harry Potter from, *The Harry Potter Movies* all hold the same theme. The theme is that the person least likely to have the gifts are the ones that receive them because they are the ones that will give them away. That is the model.

From that lesson, applying that lesson to the faith, shows us that all kinds of good things can happen for those who do not hoard the inheritance but give it away. In that light, keep doing what you are doing. Make sure that we always take care of those we are

commissioned to love. If we live that way, then you might understand why I try to support Artemio Ojeda, Ema Elvir, Debby Absher, John Rehmer and Kim Emerson the way I do, I give to them so they can give back to the Church and model the life of faith, based on their talents and gifts, because that is what the gospel tells us to do.

What I give you today is a practical application of what we have just read in our scriptures. Let us learn that lesson well, let us live it and then let us embrace the love God offers us give it away freely and lovingly to the people that we meet. This is our prayer.