

Homily – The Memorial of Ss. Joachim & Anne

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

July 26, 2025

Sir 44: 1, 10-15

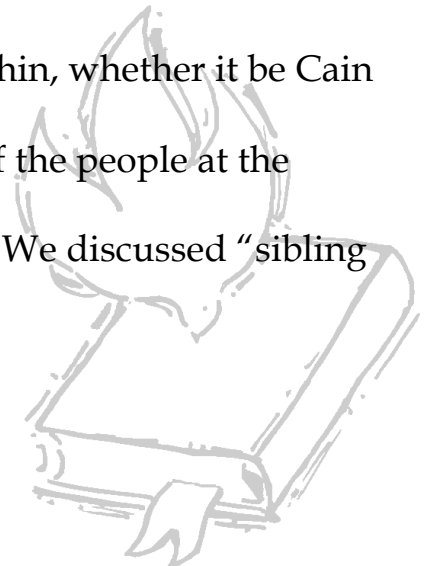
Ps 132: 11, 13-14, 17-18

Mt 13: 16-17

Ss. Joachim & Anne – Online Homily

As we come to this point of our Novena and Feast Day Journey, I have been walking with all of you through the stories of the Old Testament, trying to connect the story of the Chosen People's disobedience to the Lord's covenant to the life of Blessed Mother Mary and her parents Joachim and Anne. We have discussed how Mary (this new "Eve") was able to maintain the Lord's covenant when Eve could not; as Fr. Lawrence Boadt was quoted to say, "Infidelity to the covenant, as given through Moses will lead to disaster and destruction."

In our journey through the Old Testament, we have read a lot about the disaster and destruction from the stories within, whether it be Cain killing Abel, the great flood and the scattering of the people at the Tower of Babel who wanted to be equal to God. We discussed "sibling



rivalry” in the Old Testament, ending with eleven brothers throwing brother Joseph in a hole out of envy, telling their father Joseph was killed and selling Joseph to a group of Ishmaelites who took Joseph to Egypt as a slave; we also read how Joseph subsequently became a type of “prime minister” in Egypt and saved his brothers during a time of famine.

We discussed how a Pharaoh in Egypt was cruel to the chosen people who lived in that country since the time of Joseph, how God saved the people from the Pharaoh and took them out of Egypt, how the Chosen People lost their faith in God during this Exodus and how only two members of the original six thousand men freed from Egypt stayed faithful to God in order to merit the honor of re-entering Canaan. We learned that once the Chosen People reached their Promised Land, the judges and kings who were supposed to follow God’s covenant instead were lured by violence, infidelity, anger and betrayal, which led to the Chosen People being exiled from their Promised Land, only to return fifty years later to rebuild their land and relationship with God and lose it again some six hundred years later.

Throughout my reflections on this Old Testament story, I thought about the classical work from Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol and the rehabilitation of a good man gone evil. As I reflected on the stories of the Old Testament, after all the stories of destruction, after seeing all the horrible things that result from a life of Chosen People badly led, the case of this unhappy man, of this unfaithful people, might be my own my life at times when I sin, when I have sinned.

In A Christmas Carol, after witnessing all the errors he had committed in his life with three ghosts by his side, Ebenezer Scrooge turns to the last of the ghosts and laments, “The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now. Merciful heavens, is this the man they spoke of, neglected, robbed and hated? Can you not show me some tenderness?”

Ebenezer Scrooge says to the ghost of the Christmas future, “Can you not show me some tenderness? Where is the love? Where is that presence of God that is going to draw me back?” On the last day of the Novena, we spoke about Wisdom Literature; we spoke about “Sophia,” this beautiful image that parallels Christ in the New Testament.

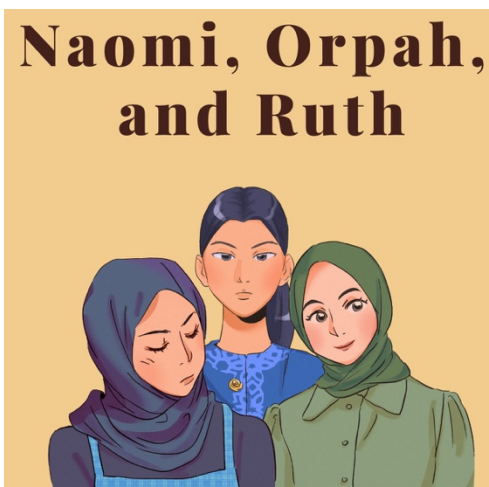
Among all the disaster and destruction, this image of “Sophia” is so wonderful and so beautiful. Inspired by an image from “The Divine Comedy” by Dante Alighieri, there is nothing else that we as Christians who truly believe would like to do but gaze into the lovely eyes of Sophia, of our God, to spend the rest of our existence gazing into the eyes of the one I love. Where is Sophia located in the Old Testament where I can see that love of God in the midst of violence? I remember how, in *The Song of Songs (Solomon)*, which offers this poetic response to the person in love with God...

The sound of my lover! here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. See! He is standing behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. My lover speaks and says to me, “Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come! For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come! My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, Let me see your face, let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” (Songs 2: 8-14)

As I was reflecting on this imagery in preparation for this homily and paralleling that image with the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge from hate to love, I reminded myself of another Old Testament book not referenced in these series of talks to which I am really drawn, a book that puts aside all the violence and grave sin referenced in the Old Testament, focusing instead on the love of a grandmother and great-grandmother that really puts everything in perspective for this particular priest. The book in question is the one about the character of Ruth from the book in her name.

In the historical texts of the Old Testament, after the five books of the law (the “Torah” or the “Pentateuch”), we come upon the books of Joshua and Judges and how the Chosen People, now returned to the Promised Land, continue in many savage ways to reclaim the land once lost. We read how the Chosen People fight to regain this land and all the destruction that takes place as a result. We read in 1 & 2 Samuel as well as 1 & 2 Kings about how that unfaithfulness continue to fill the hearts of the leaders of the Chosen People who kept forgetting about their promises to God in favor of desires of the land, of man and of the devil.

In the middle of all these stories between the judges and the kings, we come upon this little beautiful passage we have from the story of Ruth (which is located between Judges and the first book of Samuel). The book of Ruth connects the story of the Chosen People returning to the Promised Land and the unification of the land by Kings David and Solomon, Ruth's great-great-grandson and her great-great-great grandson.



As the story begins in the book of Ruth, both the protagonist, her sister and law and her mother in law all lost their respective husbands during a time of famine. The matriarch of the family was named Naomi; Ruth's sister-in-law was named Orpah (if you ever figured out how Oprah Winfrey got her name... originally, her name was Orpah from the Old Testament; people kept mispronouncing the word Orpah to Oprah and the name stuck!).

As the story was told, Naomi lost her husband and had no way to support herself nor her two daughters-in-law. As a result, Naomi

instructed both Orpah and Ruth, “Go back to your homes; I will return to Bethlehem where I used to live and I will start my life anew.” After this instruction, Orpah decided to return to her family while Ruth made a promise to Naomi that has been referenced by many a song since:

“Wherever you go, I go.”

Towards the end of the first chapter of this story, I was really affected by Naomi’s words to these two women when she told them, “May the Lord guide each of you.” Naomi said to her daughters-in-law “Go back each of you to your mother’s house may the Lord show you the same kindness that you have shown to the deceased and me may the Lord guide each of you to find a husband and a home which you will be at rest.”

As the story continues, (Naomi) kissed them goodbye but they wept aloud. Orpah went home but Ruth stayed with Naomi; Ruth would not leave because she was dedicated to taking care of the one who took care of her. As a result, both Naomi and Ruth stayed returned to Bethlehem together in the land of the Moabites.

In Moab, Ruth encountered a gentleman named Boaz. Ruth decided that she wanted to become his wife, so, as was customary when a woman wanted to become a man's wife, Ruth laid at the foot of Boaz while he was sleeping, a kind of "betrothal" between a woman and man. When Boaz saw what Ruth had done, he decided to take her as his wife and the two lived in peace for the rest of their days.

As we learn from scripture, Boaz and Ruth had a son, a child named Obed. Obed had a child named Jesse; Jesse had seven sons; his youngest son was named David. If you know of the "Jesse Tree" custom that many people celebrate each year during Advent, the symbolism begins at the foot of the tree with father Jesse, leading up to the top of the tree, one generation after another leading to the Star of Bethlehem and Jesus Christ, the savior of the world.

Without the story of Ruth, we would not have a connection to the story that ties the lineage of all these chosen people together from the time of the beginning, all the way through the kings, all the way to St. Joseph and his adopted son Jesus. Because of Ruth's dedication to her family and that love she had for her family, we would not have had

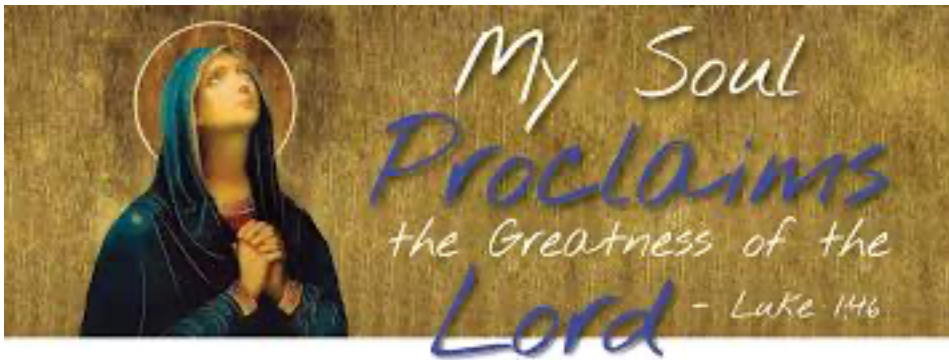
Obed or Jesse or David. This grandmother, who could have abandoned her mother-in-law as the story was told, in a moment of tenderness and kindness decided to stay and to care for those that cared for her.



I thought about that image because we see that example of tenderness interspersed within the Old Testament

Story. In the following passage of the bible from 1 Samuel, we encounter the story of Hannah, who wished to bear a son and dedicated her life saying that if the Lord gifted her with a son, she would present him to the Lord in thanksgiving.

After this son was born, Hannah offered a prayer at the beginning of 1 Samuel which parallels the story of our Blessed Mother offering a similar type of prayer in the gospel of Luke when entering the house of her cousin Elizabeth after the baby stirred in her womb. Mary's great *Magnificat* is prayed every evening by priests and religious as part of our evening prayer. Both prayers parallel this image of tenderness, mercy and love necessary for the story to reach its loving apex.



Hannah
prays, “My
heart exalts in
the Lord my
horn is

exalted by my God; I have swallowed up my enemies; I rejoice in your victory” (1 Samuel 2: 9ff.). Mary prays, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant” (Luke 1: 46ff.).

The prayers on which we reflect from these three women (Ruth, Hannah and our Blessed Mother) reflect three acts of kindness, tenderness and love that were bestowed by God through these three women. These three prayers, in a way, tie this entire story from the Old Testament to the New that offers us a moment of hope in a world full of darkness, where people feel marginalized, cut off and discriminated. With these prayers, these three women decided to turn to God, to turn to their families and to tell them that they were loved.

In a way, these three prayers result in uniting the Chosen People and continued this Jewish lineage from the last great judge (Samuel) who selected the new king of Israel (David) that would unite all the tribes together and the Mother of God who brought forth the new David as the savior of the world. Because of this unbroken line, this “New Adam,” this “New David” was able to give us in today’s age a chance for salvation by dying on that cross and by rising on that cross.

There is a wonderful metanoia experience (moment of love – change of heart) that takes place when all three of these women offer their respective prayers to God, asking God for an intervention so that a child may be born and in thanksgiving for the child they bore); it was the women in this story that made this tenderness and salvation possible; without them, we have no Samuel, no David and no Savior of the world.



In this light, I also was thinking about St. Catherine of Sienna way back when all the popes had decided to flee Vatican and travelled to Avignon, France. After almost seventy years of the popes hiding in seclusion for fear of their lives, St. Catherine travelled to

France and pleaded with Pope Gregory XI to return to the Italy and restore the papacy to where it belonged. It was through that tenderness, that love that heart of the woman, that makes the return of the Church to Rome possible. Because of that love, because of that tenderness, we were given a chance for salvation.

We can talk about all the terrible things of the world and the bloodshed and the battles and the schisms and the crusades and all those tensions that existed in the history of the Church and the history of man. What *really* what brings us to God is *love* and that is what I personally attribute the feast of Joachim & Anne, the couple whose feast day we celebrate each year on July 26. Because Joachim & Anne asked the Lord for intervention, they were gifted with a child called Mary. Because Mary responded to archangel Gabriel, “I am the handmade of the Lord, let it be done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1: 38), she became the vessel for Jesus to enter the world.

It is so important for us to understand that the moms, dads and the grandparents of our lives make all the difference in the world. Ruth made a difference; Hannah made a difference; St. Anne made a

difference and *you* make a difference! The moms and dads of our community offer their love for their children and their grandchildren not necessarily by the acts of power and strength but also by the tender act of love; single people can do the same for the sake of the children of the next generation as God has loved us.

As I offered last year, I wanted to conclude this homily with a prayer to grandparents attributed to Pope Benedict XVI, who gave this prayer to us as a reminder to the importance of grandma and granddad who often are taken for granted but make all the difference in the world if they choose to do so and if we choose to see this love. I wish to offer this prayer on behalf of all our grandparents, to all our parents and to all moms and dads of our community who dedicate their lives to taking care of their children, an awesome responsibility that is often neglected or taken for granted in our world but something we embrace today on this special feast in honor of Ss. Joachim & Anne...

Lord Jesus, you were born of the Virgin Mary, the daughter of saints. Joachim and Anne, look with love on all grandparents. We ask you to send your blessings upon them for they are a source of strength for

their families, for the Church, and for all society. Support them as they grow older.

May they continue to be for their families, strong pillars of the gospel faith, guardians of noble family values, and living treasures of sound religious traditions. Enable them to be teachers of wisdom and courage that they may pass on to their grandchildren, the ability to hear God's voice speaking in their hearts.

Lord Jesus, help all families and members of our society value the presence and role of grandparents. May they never be ignored or excluded, but always encounter respect and love. Help them to live serenely and to feel welcomed all the years of their life. Amen.

- Pope Benedict XVI

This is our prayer.