

Homily
20th Sunday OT – A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 15-16, 2026

Is 56: 1, 6-7
Ps 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8
Rm 11: 13-15, 29-32
Mt 15: 21-28

Since we are celebrating my birthday we celebrate this weekend, I need to confess that I have no idea when I was born; technically, I am celebrating birthdays “306-310” this next week. I have told this story before... My mother said I was born on August 15, 1965. My birth certificate says August 16th. My baptismal certificate says August 17th. Two doctor records say August 19th and 21st. I have no idea when I was actually born... or if I even exist! As we just celebrated one-hundred years old for Ruth Sparenberg last month, I need to say to Ruth that I have celebrated three times as many birthdays as she had in her life! I just have to resign myself to live with the knowledge on earth that I will never truly know when I was born.

As I have been recording and uploading these Online Masses and reflecting on the ministry God has asked me to share within the thirty years of the priesthood and sixty-one years of my life, I have come to

learn that the bible's so-called "good news" is not all that good at times. Today's gospel illustrates this point - a few weeks from now, Jesus is going to say that tax collectors and prostitutes have a better chance of getting into the kingdom of heaven than the rest of us (Mt 21: 31 – see the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time). Two thousand years ago, Jesus even told the people of so-called faith that the Syro-Phoenicians and the Syrians, the Samaritans and the outsiders, had more faith than they did; as a result, the so-called people of faith tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. Eventually, some leaders of the Sanhedrin were successful in killing this Jesus, known as "the Christ."

As I was reflecting on the writings of St. Paul concerning his own ministry, I was recording an upcoming Online Mass and came across a passage that was very apropos concerning my own life. From his writings, we read from St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians

I am caught between the two.
I long to depart this life and be with Christ,
for that is far better.
Yet that I remain in the flesh
is more necessary for your benefit. (Philippians 1: 24-26)

I reflected on what St. Paul is trying to say here – he knows that he would rather live with the Lord in heaven than spend time with a broken humanity on earth. In their respective writings, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Bernardette and so many others reference this sentiment as well.

Sometimes I get into that view myself – why cannot I just spend my life with God in heaven rather than being immersed in the struggles on earth? I spend a great deal of time “spinning my wheels” in all kinds of different ways for your benefit, whether it be celebrating Online Masses, celebrating an overflow of sacraments and taking care of administrative needs that are necessary to make the wheels spin but take me away from the one activity that gives me the most grace – spending time with God in prayer.

Just this weekend alone, the spinning of wheels resulted in me celebrating two baptisms and a quinceañera at St. Patrick’s (in addition to celebrating a 4:00 p.m. Mass at Patrick’s and a 7:00 p.m. Mass at St. Anne’s), another two baptisms at St. Anne’s 9:00 a.m. Sunday Mass and then offering blessings at St. Patrick’s Sunday 12:00 a.m. Sunday Mass

for the benefit of a two-month old, a three-year-old, two parishioners celebrating birthdays and a religious sister celebrating her 52nd Anniversary of her taking vows for the sake of her religious community. It seems that my life is full of “run, run, run,” and take care of the needs of a whole bunch of faithful in this community. do all this stuff.

Like St. Paul, I often come to ask myself, “Is everything I am doing in the spinning of wheels at the expense of my energy and time all worth it? Does all of this work have any meaning? May ordained and religious faithful who served in this area before me like Fr. T. U. Demarais at St. Patrick’s or Fr. Jim Fanale at St. Anne’s offered a great deal of ministry at their respective parishes but have since been long forgotten. At my last parish, Monsignor Philip Kennedy served in Joliet at the same parish for over forty-three years. Very few in our community talk about him anymore; most do not know who he was, just Frs. Fanale and Demarais. So many priests and religious do all these wonderful things for the sake of the faithful and their memory go by the wayside like everybody else who has preceded us in life.

So I ask myself again: is it really worth spinning my wheels as much as I do? Parents might ask that about raising their kids and grandkids. Is it really worth it? The answer to our respective ministries is “yes, of course the ministry is important” because the people to whom we minister are exceedingly important... and there is so much more work to do in our respective ministries. Living out a Christian vocation is not easy. My vocation is like any other vocation – it has its joys and struggles.

I keep reminding myself that, during their own time on earth, so few listened to the prophets and the martyrs. From history, we remember how St. Paul and St. Peter were beaten constantly throughout his own journeys, only to be martyred subsequently for their good work in God’s name. We know from two-thousand years ago that some leaders in the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus killed and they were successful in doing so, at a huge price. This type of rejection and humiliation for living the gospel message is the way it is; this is just life.

When the bishop asked me to serve these parishes in 2019, I already knew that a lot of people in the country felt like they had been rejected

and left out; many in these periphery communities felt castigated and marginalized. I also know that coming out to the country was, in the view of so many ordained clergy of the diocese, a so-called “dead end” position. Why come out here to minister when neither St. Patrick’s nor St. Anne’s were “rockstar” parishes where people who want to climb the corporate ladder *would not want to be*?

To answer that question... this weekend alone, I celebrated a Friday Funeral service for Better Sanders, a Quinceañera Mass for Amalia Abad, four baptisms, a blessing of a two-month-old, a three-year-old, a birthday blessing and a blessing for a religious sister celebrating her 52nd Anniversary as a religious sister. Concerning the funeral, our closing hymn for the Mass was “Joy to the World” in August because Betty insisted on keeping the Spirit of Christmas in her heart throughout the entire year. Concerning the quinceañera parents of Analía Abad approached me to say that they were rejected by other place of worship, so the family came to us.

The family said to me, “We do not have a lot of money and we are in desperate need of help.” I get mad when people tell me this – the

sacraments should not be conferred to make anyone rich and I am in the ministry of grace, not simony. At these services, I can also videotape the wedding or the quinceañera and put it on YouTube just like we would upload our weekend Masses in English and homilies in Spanish.

Last week, I was recording outdoors a video for the parish picnic on September 13th. I had a one-and-a-half-hour window to record this Mass; that was the only time the whole week where we had sunshine and I wanted to get this Mass recorded in advance. After the Mass, I asked business manager Debby Abshire to walk around with me to record at different places in the campus where everything that got done from individuals who felt rejected at other churches, were welcomed at ours, and wanted to offer their time and talent towards projects we normally could not afford but were made affordable from those offering Christian service.

I humbly believe that the success at our parishes is the result of those who welcome others to our home, God's home, and then the outsider being welcomed invests in our parish life. Whether it be the parking lots, whether it be the renovation of the buildings, the renovation of our

church buildings and so many other ways (the prayer life of the Church being the most important), our parishes have become active, relevant and very necessary for those living in the eastern part of Kankakee County.

This last couple weeks, the leader of Alcoholics Anonymous told me that the AA group from Beecher lost their meeting place last March because the roof of their facility was blown off during the windstorm. Since the AA group had no place to go, we let them come over here to St. Pat's to use our Alumni Gym and Activity Center. As a way of saying "thank you, the Alcoholics Anonymous upgraded our electrical system in the gym and installed air conditioning on the gym's second floor, which once was used as a shower room. Today, that former shower room has become a nice place for meetings with air conditioning, which is really nice.

All too often, good souls in the area feel like they are not welcome at the Churches in the area; some feel like they are castigated and left out. Some people feel like nobody cares about them. I had a family that approached me over at the other parish last week and told me they do

not feel like they are loved in the community. I replied to them, “You are always going to be loved here because no matter what happens out there, *God is here* and in this house of God, you will encounter a place of love. In God’s house, you will find a place where you are forgiven of your sins unconditionally. This is the place where we are going to take care of you.”

Because we told a group of good souls who did not feel welcome in their community that they would be loved in ours, I invited them to a Special Liturgy in Spanish on Saturday night. Because of this Mass (among other things), our collection at Anne’s reached \$2,000+, something that needs to happen every week for the parish to survive but has only happened once in my seven years at the parish (outside of Easter and Christmas) ... and that happened this weekend!

All of this fits in with our gospel story about a couple who felt like nobody cared for them, that nobody loved them either. From ten years ago, I encountered a man named John who was rejected by numerous parishes in Joliet until he came to us. John suffered from blindness so a seeing-eye-dog accompanied John throughout his travels. As John told

me his story, my heart was broken. John said that he entered various churches in the city and because he was different, people shut him off. People s mocked him behind his back but he heard what they were saying anyway. Many disparaged him and treated him badly.

I have come to learn that this kind of attitude happens a great deal when you do not fit the mainstream or what some may reference as the “clique” or the “popular group.” I have come to learn that when the “clique” or “popular group” or the “cool group” (or whatever someone wishes to call them) feel like they have some kind of power in society, they think that they have a right to tear others down. John felt this way; this guy felt like he was alone.

When John shared his experiences with me, I told him, “Come to us. We will take care of you.” So John started attending Masses at my last parish in Joliet and he would bring his dog. Some of the kids thought it would be funny to toss Cheerios down the middle aisle to see if the dog would go after them away and shy away from his master. I said to John, “Do not worry about this. You just come to us and we will take care of you.”

There was a woman at my last parish named Darlene, who was treated in the same way as John was. Darlene was castigated. Darlene was shut out by the “cool group.” When Darlene wanted to donate a statue of the Blessed Mother to the parish where I once served after the outdoor one was vandalized, the leaders of the parish said “no” to her.

Darlene was a little bit upset when she was rejected by the leaders of the parish because she wondered why her money was not as good as anybody else’s. So Darlene contacted me and over the last ten years, she secretly has been helping finance this parishes I serve with her donations because she wanted to give to somebody back to God, because she wanted to feel like somebody cared about her.

Last month, I came to find out that this blind man, John, and this woman, Darlene, actually got connected with each other and next year they are getting married. Despite what others thought of them, they found and accepted each other and they found a place that welcomed them and loved them. John and Darlene found a place that was not going to shut them down. As a result, we were able to save two more souls in the church.

To me, the little things are why I am still a priest. We are taught that you do not encounter God solely at the Vatican or in the great basilicas or in the diocesan cathedrals. I do not want to shock you or anything, but you know that the same God you can find over there is right here in our tabernacles; you do not have to go to the big buildings and travel thousands of miles and spend thousands of dollars to find God. The same God there is the same God that is right here with us. God's real presence is right in front of us – body, soul, blood, and divinity. You do not have to leave the city to find God.

God is the only “rock star” that really counts in our lives and is right in front of us if we care to look. In this home, we provide a place where blind man is welcome, as is the Syrophenician, the Syrian, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the people of life who get rejected by others, especially accepting the people who are rejected by others. This is the home that welcomes you and me.

Maybe that is the reason I am here one more day is because someone needs to tell those living in what Pope Francis would call the “periphery churches” of a diocese that, even though others may despise them, God

and the Church welcomes them. This home is where the true, real wonderful ministry can take place for whom Jesus specifically tells us to minister. We learn especially in the scripture readings that people must not be rejected in *this* home, that *this* is a “table fellowship for sinners” that welcomes people and does not reject them.

We must be doing something right, which is why this Saturday alone we celebrated two baptisms, a quinceañera, a 4:00 Mass and a 7:00 Mass for the Hispanic community to celebrate the feast of the Assumption. That, to me, is the reason I stick around and that is the reason why I love being a priest. I do not like the politics in the Church; I do not like the bureaucracy. I do not like the daily toil of trying to keep up buildings, paying bills and addressing maintenance issues.

I also know that the liturgy we celebrate now is the source and summon of our life and is the reason I stay; what we do at this Mass is *the best and most important thing* we do in life because at this Mass, we get to offer God’s grace to the people of the world.

Why do I stay here in these periphery Churches? Because there are a lot of people in this area who say that they are lost, that they are

unloved, that nobody cares for them. So to these people I say, "If you want to get cared for, you come to us. We will take care of you. You will always be welcomed here. I will serve as your first line of defense because that is what I am supposed to do."

For me, I learned this lesson from the prophets, who were also rejected by judges and kings alike. That is what the saints and martyrs did for us – they stood in the line of fire delivered by those possessed by evil in the secular world. I keep going back to the story of St. Lawrence in the 3rd Century whose bishop (pope) was killed and the emperor of Rome said to him, "Bring me your treasures or I will kill you as well." In response, Lawrence came back to the emperor two days later with the poor, the lame and the crippled. He said to the emperor, "*Here are the treasures of the church,*" and he subsequently was executed for it.

Every single one of you is a treasure in this church. So if you know of people who need the sacraments, somebody who has been rejected by others, someone who feels they are not going to be welcomed, you come to me, you come to us, and we will take care of you. The little things, the

smiles, the kind gestures, the handshakes, the welcoming, all those things make a difference... and *that* is what builds a church.

God wants us to get to heaven. All we have to do is show up here. That is why I continue to stay a priest because God tells me there are more souls to be saved. So many good souls are abused. My responsibility is to tell them, *to tell you*, that you are special and that you are loved. I have to take the bullets in order that you are protected and that you can find God. I have come to learn that the ministry God calls me to live is not about embracing the grace; it is not about hoarding the grace. My responsibility is about giving it away. St. Paul preaches about this; our Lord talks about it. The word is called *kenosis* in Greek, a self-emptying (see Philippians 2, which we will cover next month).

What I do as a priest I am not doing this for you. I am doing this for God working through me to pour it out to you, to empty myself out of God's love and whatever energy I have to show you I care for you. My hope is that if I do this, if I follow our Lord's example, maybe good things can happen for all of you... and look what has happened around here because of that. It is because God works through you. God works

through me. The mission of our lives is to receive that love of God, receive the Holy Spirit, and then empty it out for the sake of others.

Please make sure that we do not hoard this grace but pour it out freely to every single person that we meet. That is why I like being a priest. That is why I like serving St. Patrick's Church and St. Anne's Church. That is why I am glad God gave me another day... and that is our prayer today.