

Homily

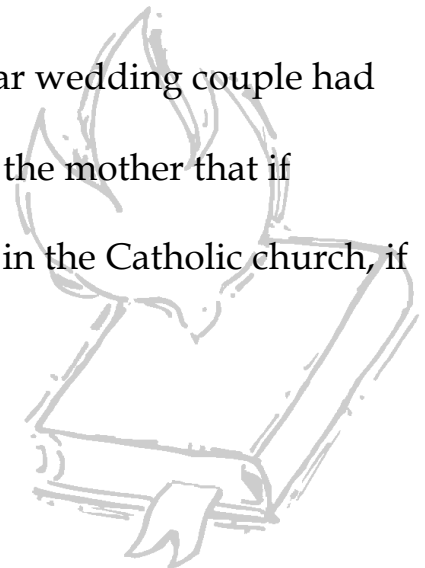
21st Sunday OT - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
August 23-24, 2025

Is 66: 18-21
Ps 117: 1-2
Heb 12: 5-7, 11-13
Lk 13: 22-30

Prior to the time I recorded this homily, a friend of mine ended up sending me a picture of her daughter who ended up getting married in the country of Italy. You know, when couples get married in a foreign country to their own, often they do so to be in the presence of beautiful scenery and such. I remember celebrating the only Mass I celebrated in Italian, a wedding service for my cousin Giuseppe (Pino) and his wife Beatrice on a church on top of coastal mountains off the Mediterranean Sea. I get it – these scenes overlooking mountains and rivers and backdrops for their pictures are often absolutely spectacular to view and to reminisce for years to come.

Me being a priest, knowing that this particular wedding couple had not gotten their marriage blessed by God, I told the mother that if daughter and son-in-law wished to get married in the Catholic church, if



they come to me, then I would help them out and try to do the best I could to get them right with God.

On the Saturday I am preaching this homily, I just celebrated a quinceañera for a girl named Esmirelda, a dwarf of a fifteen year old who has been ostracized by her classmates in Joliet and felt embarrassed having her Mass in her hometown, so we took care of her in Momence, of all places. We have done the same for other weddings and baptisms – on Sunday, we have our sixth baptism in the parish; a few years ago, we celebrated *fifteen* of them at the 4:00 p.m. Mass and still got the families out of church in forty-five minutes!

In my experience, we often celebrate more sacraments in our small little communities because of our desire to offer grace to those who are rejected by others. In some ways, we end up having more weddings at our place than others would – I even heard that I was “investigated,” so to speak, by the folks in Kankakee because of what we do – I always follow the rules but the creative way we follow the rules helps us save some souls that get rejected by others in the area.

In my last assignment, I came to find out that we ended up having more weddings in a parish that was the eighth largest of thirteen churches in Joliet than anyone else because we offered that *bienvenidos*, that *hospitalidad*. We offered a welcoming to people that others did not, to tell them that we would accept them where others would reject them.

Actually, within the last couple of years at St. Patrick's, and even at St. Anne's, there have been situations where families with special circumstances came to us from outside the area with needs that we could address. A couple years ago, a woman named Stacy and her fiancé named Chris were married first at St. Patrick's and then renewed their vows in one of those "beautiful settings" as I discussed – we followed the rules of the Church but then we also gave them what they wanted in an outdoor setting.

Last month, a woman named Kelsey wanted to get married in Cincinnati by the bishop of the archdiocese – when the bishop retired, no priests knew the couple, so they ended up getting married in a hotel up north in Oakbrook. On their way back to Ohio, Chris & Kelsey stopped in Momence to have their wedding blessed. There are many

couples who attend our weekend services who know how we have made unique situations blessed by God because we figured out a way to open that door for them so they could receive the grace of our Lord whose door was shut by others.

For me, I very much hold to the passage from 1 Corinthians which is read at practically every modern Church wedding we celebrate. If I am *not* making this grace possible for the people I serve, then I am nothing but a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. If I am not with God, then what is my purpose in life? And what is my purpose in this vocation? If God is not guiding me and leading me, I am a lost sheep. If I want to enter that door, as referenced in the gospel, as say, “Lord, Lord, open the door for us,” how can I expect God to open that door if I do not live like Christ?

To be honest, this passage from Luke, as paralleled in Matthew 25, is a passage that the Poor Clares from the Annunciation Monastery in Minooka constantly make me read, especially in light that the sisters are like the virgins who need to be prepared to welcome the bridegroom. At least once a month, I am asked to proclaim that reading, since the good

sisters often focus on the feast days of virgins or religious where the Mass references that passage over and over again. This passage is a constant theme that sticks in my mind because as a Catholic priest, I am supposed to do everything possible to get God into other people's lives, which is, perhaps, why we have thirty good people or so who receive sacraments every Easter Weekend.

As a priest, I will do everything possible to bring these sacraments to you. I try to tell people in our communities, if you need someone baptized, if you need someone to receive the sacraments, if you need someone to get married, come to me. I will try to help you out because that is what God has commissioned me to do, to offer the sacraments. As I have preached on many occasions, I try to offer these sacraments liberally, often creatively and, like Christ, I try to do so lovingly.

For this reason, I would to think that is why so many people have responded the way they have by being generous to our parishes, not just financially, but by being invested spiritually, because we have opened the door for them when others have not. I have been writing in the News & Notes that I send out each week to our community each week

(and you are most welcome to receive them if you just send me an email) that as a result of us welcoming in so many good souls, we are reintroducing all kinds of devotions that we have been lost at our parishes. These devotions are not new to the church, but they are new to our communities because they have not existed here for so long. The Consecration to the Sacred Heart, the Novena for Pentecost, the Novena for Guadalupe and the Novena for St. Patrick – all these novenas and prayers and adoration and all kinds of devotions have been added to the mix.

Last month, I was talking to the family who wanted their family consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and they say, “Why don’t you make more of an effort to talk about that at Mass?” My response is that the Sacred Heart, the Holy Spirit and the presence of God already lives in our community, but until somebody really tells me they want it sealed in their hearts, I am just going through the motions. Sometimes I want to do offer these prayers and Novenas (which I will do with the World Rosary for Fatima in October), but sometimes people do not listen or want to invest in the customs of the faith.

At times when I feel the wheels of life are spinning and I feel as if no one is listening, I feel like the rich man and Lazarus; I feel like the prophets of the Old Testament. I can talk about the faith and her customs, I often drone on about it, yet people still do not listen. For me, this is one of the difficult aspects of faith. The hard part is that we are going to people of every nation and every tongue, we are entering unchurched communities who often feel unwelcomed by others as we are trying to bring them into the faith.

This is the constant challenge and the whole purpose of inviting people to receive these sacraments, to offer the Lord's grace and making that grace part of their lives. When people do accept that grace, then we have a chance to save them through the work of the Holy Spirit. When people accept this grace, we have a chance to do something absolutely spectacular, and, as a result, the church grows. More importantly, by doing this, we are saving souls. When we are trying to save those souls, the Church in response is becoming very relevant to the people of our era.

The fact is, by going the path in which we are, we have eradicated our debt at St. Patrick's. The fact that we are doing all kinds of wonderful things in our parishes and we are getting young people involved is the other part of this, trying to bring young people into the parish, to bring families, not dismissing those who are older, but when those older people end up moving on with life, who is going to pick up the baton? Who is the next generation?

So, if we give all of our families the opportunity for Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Holy Orders and marriage, we give them the opportunity to receive these sacraments, then hopefully these families respond to God and the community by becoming more invested. This now seems to be what is happening in our parishes.

We are at that time of year where we are preparing to celebrate our community picnic on September 21st. At this picnic, we are bringing people together, getting people to be invested in the faith and invested in love. Just as importantly, because God commissioned it this way, people getting invested with each other in God's name. so we can build this church. If there is any way you can help us, if there is any way you

want to participate, feel free to contact us. If you want to learn what is going on in the parish, contact us about our weekly News & Notes or having us send out bulletins. However you can support us would be absolutely spectacular because this Church is the gateway to your salvation and, just as importantly, it is about mine because I am responsible for making sure that this grace of God gets out to the corners of the earth, starting in these local parishes.

Please know I will do what I can for you. All you have to do is ask for the Lord's grace and I will try to do what I can to help. This is why I have a good connection with the priests in the diocese who want to help and build character and build souls and build the church. This is what we do to get to the kingdom of heaven. Follow the gospel. Do good. Avoid evil. If we follow God's plan, the doors to heaven are going to be very wide for us to enter. If we live the other way, then we learn from the scripture God's response when the unfaithful say, "Lord, Lord, open the door for us" and God responds, "Amen, it is as if I never knew you."

God knows you. God knows what is in your hearts. I want to know you. I want to know what is in your heart so I can fill it with grace in

God's name for both you and the people that we meet. This is our prayer.