

Homily

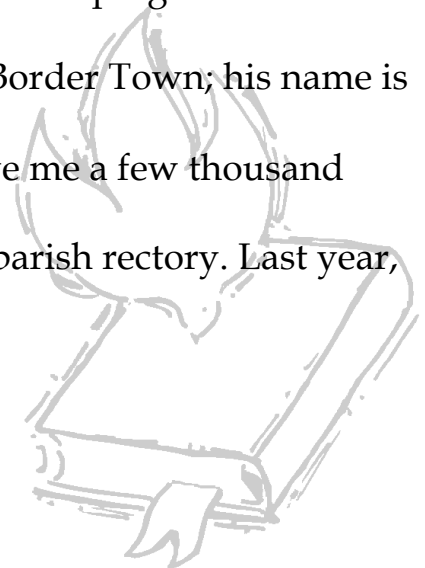
22nd Sunday OT – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 02-03, 2023

Jer 20: 7-9
Ps 63: 2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Rm 12: 1-2
Mt 16: 21-27

Enough time has passed that I can get away telling you the following story so that you understand that I really am trying to be sincere “to believe what I read, teach what I believe and to practice what I preach” (the deacon’s admonition during the ordination Mass). In the course of my twenty-seven years as a priest, I have asked a lot out of so many of you and there have been some wonderfully generous persons who have given of their time, talent and financial resources. We could not succeed in what we have done without them... or without you! Certainly none of what we do is possible without God.

There has been a family member who has been helping me behind the scenes with all kinds of projects here at the Border Town; his name is Mike. In the previous church I served, Mike gave me a few thousand dollars to replace about thirty windows in that parish rectory. Last year,



Mike gave me a few thousand dollars to install the outdoor sound system at St. Anne's Pavilion.

Earlier this year, Mike called me to his house when he decided to give me a 2011 Cadillac with 44,000 miles on it. He said to me, "If you need a car, I have a car for you." So I drove to Mike's house and was able to get a backup car for the parish; I did not want to say "no" to him just like I try not to say "no" to you – when generous people wish to be generous, you try to accommodate them.

When I drove to Oak Brook in order to pick up the car, Mike also gave me a personal check written to me for \$50,000. Now, I did not feel good about getting \$50,000, not because I was not grateful, but because what I do can never be about me; what I do has to be about God working through me for the benefit of the people I serve. I have told this to you over and over again. How can I preach to you about sacrifice, suffering and mercy if I cannot take care of all of you? I have to set the example that Christ has set for me. I need to model this life of sacrifice, suffering and mercy before I ask you to do the same. I cannot live according to man's laws, but by God's.

In my reflection, what our Lord preaches in today's gospel begins with me. These are the same readings that we heard some ten weeks ago during the Season of Easter. These same themes presented in Jeremiah, Romans and the gospel of Matthew parallel those readings from ten weeks ago.

As we discussed last week, the context of what we just read seven days ago is the Lord's passing on the "keys to the kingdom" and the very first thing that Peter does after receiving those metaphorical keys is patronize the Lord. In last week's gospel, the Lord offers to Peter the keys to the kingdom, declaring that Peter serves as the "rock" on which the Lord will build his church.

So what does Peter do in this week's gospel, immediately after being given the keys to the kingdom? The first thing Peter does is he rebukes the Lord... and the Lord rebukes him right back! Even popes can get rebuked by the Lord. Every one of us can be rebuked by the Lord.

No one is perfect; all of us make mistakes, including the popes. All of us, every single one of us, has to be accountable for our actions, including me. So if I am going to receive \$50,000 in God's name to better

the Church, I could have taken that check and put it in my own account; with the money, I could have purchased a nice car or a down payment to a house or I could have set myself up for a nice future. I could have put the money away for retirement.

I want to get to heaven, though. If someone is going to offer me this kind of grace, I have learned that this is the kind of grace that should never be coveted or hoarded; this is the kind of grace that *must* be given away. What I do *must* be about you. The ministry I offer always has to be about you.

By giving that money to the parish, we were able to reduce our parish debt in St. Patrick's from \$330,000 to \$143,000. In the last four years, we have reduced that debt by more than 50%. What I have learned in my ministry is that when I sacrifice, so do you; when I show I do not care, then neither will do. We are in this faith together; we are the Body of Christ.

For this reason, I dedicate myself to passing along those ulcer-inducing chips I keep receiving from Nick Skokna, along with those 5,000 pounds of Carl Buddig salami. For this reason, we take collections

for the food pantry, and we go to visit the sick, and we go to bury the dead and we go to pray for those who have asked for prayers. We have to do this because if I want to get to heaven, what I do *always* has to be about you – God passing through me, serving you.

In our scripture readings lately, we hear about what takes place when we are unfaithful and disobedient to God. When we are obedient, though, when we live like Christ, look what happens at our parishes. If we want to get to heaven, we *must* be obedient to the scriptures, obedient to the covenant, just like God has been obedient to us. God kept his end of this covenant; we now need to keep our end of the deal.

I know that what I am supposed to do, I do in secret; I am not supposed to be self-aggrandizing about my faith life. I realize in the gospel of Matthew, I am not supposed to do this, according to Matthew 6. That said, every so often when people write me letters and saying, “Father, what are you doing with all our money? Father, what are you doing this or doing with that?” I have to remember why I became a priest in the first place – I have suffered and made sacrifices to protect you and serve you and love you, even (at times) when you do not

reciprocate. To get to heaven, this I must do, not because I want to please you, not because I do not want to get bad letters. I must do what I do because God has commanded me to live like Christ – “If you want to be perfect, then go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mt 19: 21).

If I am not living the life, how can I expect you or anybody else to live it? Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach. This admonition has to be ingrained in us over and over again, just like the words of the *Our Father*, the *Hail Mary* or the *Glory Be*. We first must learn the words of prayer and then we must live the words.

For that reason, I celebrate the online Mass this weekend at the *Camino y Esperanza Retreat House grotto*, a beautiful location that models this kind of faith that I am called to live... and so are you. So let us live this faith life well together. Let us learn how to give until it hurts for our families, our friends, our community, our church, and for all people that we meet. This is our prayer.