

Homily

25th Sunday OT – C

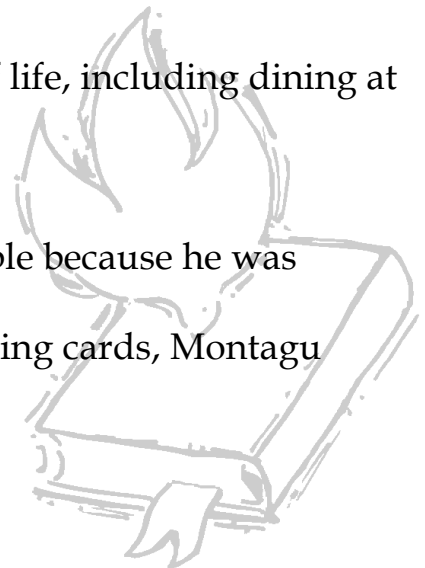
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 17-18, 2022

Am 8: 4-7
Ps 113: 1-2, 4-6, 7-8
1 Tm 2: 1-8
Lk 16: 1-13



Today's border town picnic homily is inspired by a man named **John Montagu**, my hometown, and what we are doing here at St. Patrick's and St. Anne's Churches. As the story goes, in 1762, John Montagu (the fourth "Earl of Sandwich, England") had quite a reputation about himself to being a gambler. He loved to gamble both day and night and he refused to leave the gambling table because he very much enjoyed this human activity. Montagu spent all his time at the card table and he did not have time to do the basic other things of life, including dining at a table or eating at a restaurant.

One day, Montagu chose to sit at the card table because he was running a really good streak of luck. While playing cards, Montagu



realized he was getting hungry. Rather than leaving the card table to refuel himself, Montagu called over one of his attendants and ordered the attendant to take a slice or so of roast beef and stick it between two pieces of bread; the attendant was then told to bring this meal to him.

As Montagu continued playing cards, he subsequently ate his newly created dinner. That meal, which was associated with John Montagu in 1762, was named after his title, the Earl of Sandwich.

When my hometown was established in 1855, the founder of the city decided to name it after John Montague, where this small town of 5,400 people inherited that name. Currently, the city of Sandwich, IL is the home of a McDonald's restaurant, a movie theater and a Gene's Chicken Carryout, but not much else.

In his life, John Montague was a very cunning and intelligent person within the secular world; with human cunning and reason, the Earl of Sandwich was able to satisfy himself to remain at the gambling table. In today's scripture readings, we also are taught about all the ways that people can be cunning and defective in the First Century (sand certainly

today!) and how many in our society hold fast to human tradition and all those things that *will not* get us to heaven.

In what we do on earth, we engage in so many mundane things of life – eating, drinking, sleeping and all the basic necessities to keep our bodies alive. As a result, when people take those mundane things to excess (such as gambling, drinking, smoking and for me... eating!) then we succumb to the ways of the human world.

When we are conditioned by the human world to do the same to each other, to follow the example of disrespect and cunning, being harassing and deceitful and all those kind of things where the devil guides us rather than God, we then create the world as our God instead of the one who created us and the one who can bring us home. Our scripture readings today both from Amos and the gospel of Luke show us that those who are cunning and deceptive know exactly how to bring people down and know how to get what they want on earth.

Look at the result of this type of cunning, especially in third-world countries? In those areas where those in power manipulate the weak,

the result is that 90% of the wealth in those countries is owned by 10% of the population and those without basic human means suffer as a result.

The point of stewardship is that when we learn to share what God has afforded us, then the passage from Genesis 14: 20 makes all the sense in the world. In that text, Abraham gave 10% of what he owned to Melchizedek; this serves as the template of what God expects of us to do in this world. The point of stewardship is giving thanks to God for what we have been provided and then *to give it away* for the sake of others, using our resources to care for our families, to take care of the poor, to take care of the needy and *to be like Christ*. This is the way we have to live if we ever want to see the kingdom of heaven.

So when we have a parish picnic, when we are trying to celebrate the social life of the faith of God, when people come together and they decide that they want to help us out, this is all a blessing to us because we are doing God's work in the proper way as Christ established on the cross, to live as a community of faith, to take those human activities and applying them towards the grace of God. So when the City of Momence

hosted a Gladiolus Festival at the beginning of August and we found out that the group at our parish had normally sold brats and hamburgers and such was falling by the wayside, another group of parishioners came forward and they worked with the Knights of Columbus to learn how to use the parish's corn steamer, to learn how to utilize the grill from the parish.

Towards this effort, senior parishioner Joe Krause provided the gas tanks for the sale as he usually did. We had a wonderful farm in the area that donated all our corn and sold the peppers and onions at a ridiculously cheap price to the parish for our sale. South Side Meats sold us the brats and gave us the hot dogs as a gift. The instructions I gave the new group who was cooking were simple – cook everything the previous group did for the sake of those who attended the event but then add whatever other foods the group wanted to make as well.

As a result, a whole new group of people came together to continue this Gladiolus tradition, adding a new touch of a Christian context by taking the ways of man and channeling them through the ways of God.

That kind of Christian spirit as a community is what this is supposed to be about. This parish picnic is supposed to be a celebration of all the wonderful things that have taken place at our parishes, and we give thanks to God for channeling it and directing it towards the world of the sacred as opposed to the world of the profane.

The world of the profane often consists of the mundane things of life with which we have to deal but the world of the profane also consists of the world of the cunning deception that is discussed by the Book of Amos and by our gospel reading today. There are lots of cunning people in the world, lots of deceptive people in the world, but if we want to get to heaven, we have to live just the opposite of that.

I was thinking that every time I focus on these kind of readings in scripture, I kind of focus on the opposite way we are supposed to live in contradistinction of the cunning. As the gospels and the scripture readings tell us, we are called not to live one way but the other – this is the theme of the “six antitheses” passages from Matthew (from Mt. 5: 21-48 – it is said to live this way but I tell you...). As the Lord tells us in

this “Sermon on the Mount” (Mt 5-7), “Blessed are you who are poor in spirit. Blessed are you who mourn; blessed to you who are hungry or thirsty. Blessed are you who are insulted and persecuted because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven” (Mt 5: 1-12).

Once we learn that lesson of humility, once we learn how to put the other in front of ourselves, once we learn that all the secular things we learned in the world, if they are directed by God and if they are child through God, all kinds of wonderful things can happen. As has taken place in our Border Town Parishes, the result of this sacrifice is that our parishes are trying to go young; because we welcoming to all kinds of people from all kinds of different languages and cultures, wonderful things have taken place.

We have seen during the summer from people who have contacted us from all parts of the country and all parts of the world, how this has made a difference in their lives. We are very blessed that they joined us and you join us and you are most welcome to join us at our picnic. So

many good souls from our parishes have volunteered to cook the hamburgers and hot dogs, to cook the brats and steak tacos as well as all the wonderful things that they do extra because we want to show you that put in the context of God, what this community does above and beyond the call of duty makes sense. Without God, we are lost, we are dust, and we remain at the gambler's table.

Let us realize that this is the key to heaven is to live, pray and play together, to love together, to treat each other with respect and dignity and love, and to come together as one voice, to take that message of God, to receive it lovingly, and then to share it lovingly with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.

Homily #2

At least once a week, I get a text message from María Saldaña, one of our parishioners who joined our Border Town Community about six years ago. I ended up translating this letter badly in English; this is what she wrote.

Beloved Lord, thank you for your life. Thank you for the life of Father Peter Jankowski. He is in your hands, Lord, you have control. Come to his aid and you'll be with him at all times for his health, strength and wisdom. Lord, you provide everything for him. Take care of his spirituality. And holiness always place that joy in the hearts of Deacon Roberto Rivas. And for Father Peter Jankowski, may that divine Grace Shepherd your flock.

Six years ago, María did not have a place to go; she did not feel welcomed at the other parishes she was attending, so she tells me. As a result, María decided to pray with all of us. Her mentor (Deacon Roberto Rivas and his wife Ana) established a retreat house in the area called, "Camino y Esperanza" ("The Way and Hope") over in St. Anne< IL. About fifteen years ago, the Rivas Family purchased an old school on Wichert Road and converted it into a retreat house. When they could

not find a parish to support them in the area, they found a home with us in the Border Town Community.

As a result, the group from CyE began to sing at our noon Sunday Masses in Spanish. Because of this, María decided that she wanted to do her part to help at the parish in thanksgiving for us welcoming them into our community. María decided that, as part of her stewardship to our parish, she was going to clean both of our rectories at both of our parishes. As a house cleaner, María decided to offer us her skills and her volunteer service as part of her “time and talent.” María could not offer much else in the finance department, so she offer us her talents in this specific way.

I have mentioned María’s gift of service in the past because what service she has offered both parishes would be equivalent financially to about \$6,000 in savings a year, which would be equivalent to two parishes two collections at St. Patrick’s, and about four collections over at St. Anne’s. Maria’s now has come to a point where she has been hospitalized for treatment of her illnesses and she cannot clean our

rectories anymore. María feels really badly about that but she continues to pray for us and continues to send me these daily text messages.

Even though María laments that prayer is all she can offer us, I often tell Maria that prayer is the *best* thing anyone can do for us. Concerning the people who pray the rosary prior to our daily and weekend Masses (maybe some of you might feel compelled to join us in our “Rosary for Life” on Saturday, October 25th at 10:00 a.m. at St. Anne’s, or 12:00 noon at St. Patrick’s), Maria feels badly that she cannot hold up “her end” at the parish, but you know, her prayers are what our parishes really need. Eventually, if we get to a certain part of life where the reality of age and health kicks in, maybe some of us cannot offer the same kinds of talents that we once could when we were younger but María has reached that point of life where she cannot serve us anymore by cleaning our houses, which is why we need to start looking at the next generation and getting the next generation involved.

That is why we look at the pews right now, and we look at the numbers the diocese wants us to count to keep our parishes open; that

number often determines what parishes stay open. The bishop's office often looks at the financial records of any given parish, which parishes are solvent and how we are supporting the priesthood and religious life to determine the future of all the parishes.

If we look at the scripture readings this weekend, we have the solution to how we resolve these challenges and to keep our parishes afloat, although the solution I know a lot of people want to embrace. The first reading from the First Book of Kings is about Naaman the Syrian, the outsider, who essentially is showing us how, often in life, the outsider is the one who has the faith of God rather than the people who are in the inside.

Our gospel reading today is about a Samaritan who is considered the outcast in Jewish society because Samaritans decided to intermingle with outsiders as opposed to the Chosen People who did not. As a result, many Jewish faithful subjugated them, they marginalized them, they shut them out. Yet, of the ten lepers that our Lord healed, it was only the Samaritan who came forward to give thanks, the outsider, the

one considered last among the Chosen People.

The gospel of Luke often works this way, focusing on the poor, the outcast and the outsider rather than those on the inside. For Luke, a few major themes weave themselves through this gospel. First, the theme of the power of the Holy Spirit is highlighted – the Spirit entered the Blessed Mother’s womb; that Spirit pushed Jesus to baptism and into the desert to be tempted by Satan. That Spirit pushed Jesus to ministry, pushed Jesus to the cross, left Jesus at the cross, and descended upon the disciples in Luke’s sequel called “The Acts of the Apostles.”

Second, Luke’s gospel serves as a type of First Century history (not by our standards but by Luke’s). The gospel reveals a “history” about all the things Jesus did and how the Holy Spirit worked through Jesus in his life on earth. According to Luke’s history, the same Spirit then descended upon the disciples to take that ministry “to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1: 8).

Third, Luke’s gospel reveals the ministry of what scripture scholars call, “the radical disciple” who does not stay complacent with the

people who are in front of them, but goes out and seeks others. By going to unchurched regions of the world, this means that the disciple often will get beaten, will get scourged, will get killed by the people in the pews within the faith and the people outside the pews in Gentile, unchurched territory. As a harsh example, the convert Saulos Paulos (St. Paul) made that sacrifice and, as a result, the church grew within the first three centuries after our Lord's death.

Luke is the gospel of the outcast, of the people who felt like they were not welcomed and marginalized. Luke is a gospel for the young; it is a gospel for people who feel that they have something to contribute but sometimes they do not feel welcomed.

If we want to follow the discipleship according to the gospel of Luke, then we must become radical disciples who go out to take care of those who do not feel like they are loved, then we find the secret on how to save a parish and how to build the faith, by embracing the outsider, the person who feels like they are the outcast, and we make them feel welcome in our church by embracing them, by loving them, by getting

them invested.

So when María Salana told me that she's not going to be able to clean our rectories anymore, I talked to somebody from the next generation named Freddy Franco and the members of the Hispanic Community. Freddy Franco lives in Hopkins Park and attends (and plays guitar) at the Masses both at St. Patrick's and St. Anne's. I will tell you that 90% of all the services outside of our weekday and weekend Masses that we offer are in Spanish, including the seventh baptism in four weeks that celebrated at St. Patrick's. At 2:00 p.m. on this weekend's Saturday, musician Sandra Lutz was getting ready for Mass the following day, and she participated in the Spanish baptism we offered that Saturday. Freddy told me that he was going to start a "Martha Ministry" at our parishes, cleaning our buildings as a service to our churches.

We have come to learn that a whole bunch of nice people are going to clean the rectories at both parishes, the halls at both parishes and the church building at St. Anne's as well. Freddy is going to get people involved in this ministry and has taken that upon himself. We look at

the faithful of our next generation, we look good souls like our new secretary Sonia Fonseca, who is taking over the mantle of Ema Elvir, who is returning to Mexico to care for her mother at the end of the month. We need the next generation to get involved, not just because we want to save the parishes, but we need to save souls starting with theirs... and ours. We have to extend ourselves outside of our comfort zone and to make everyone feel welcome if we wish to do God's will, according to the gospel of Luke..

When we understand the message of what it means to be a radical disciple, we also know that we are not going to be liked by those who will not open their hearts to the outsider; we are going to be despised by many people for going this way. In this particular gospel of Luke, we are obligated to live this way if we wish to enter heaven and allow the church to grow.

So today on this parish picnic weekend, two challenges are set before us. Number one, to take those "Time and Talent" sheets that are inside your bulletins this week and prayerfully to consider what you can do to

be invested in your local parish. Number two is to get other people involved. Invite the marginalized, invite the outsider, invite the person who does not feel welcomed and to get them involved as well, to tell them that they have values, not to tell them that they have to do things our way, the way it is always been done, whatever that means, but to welcome people with new ideas and new directions.

There are many in our community who want to contribute, according to their talents and gifts. So I ask you prayerfully to consider what talent you wish to offer in our community to fill out those forms, return those forms, and then get other people involved. Get other people to come to Church. When we do that and we follow the discipleship message that the gospel presents to us (which is not going to be easy and is going to be fraught with danger), life is not going to be easy for us (Lord knows I know that in the last six years doing what the gospel of Luke tells me to do). That said, this sacrifice of welcoming the outsider is part of the ministry and that is why a lot of priests have challenges in their life and a lot of priests are suffering. That is why we need to support and pray

for the priesthood in a religious life to support those who take on this particular task. Because at the end of the day, a lot of these priests go home alone and they feel that they do not have the support.

So we need to support the outsider and we need to love them. We need to tell them that they have value, and what they are doing is important. What you are doing is important. Once we understand that, and once we start living the gospel message according to the way that Luke wants us to live it, then we have a fighting chance to allow this church to grow. It is up to us opening our hearts to those from the outside, those we would not normally welcome to allow them to come in, to allow them to live this gospel message based on their talents and gifts, to be receptive to all of this, and to share this invitation to every single person that we meet. This is our prayer.