

Homily 26th Sunday OT – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 19-20, 2026

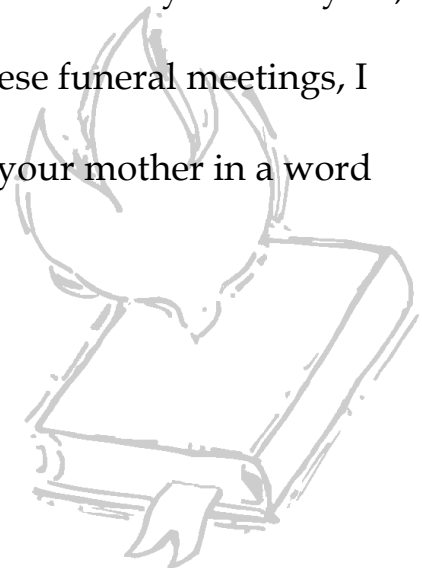
Ez 18: 25-28
Ps 125: 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Phil 2: 1-11
Mt 21: 28-32



Around the time I
was celebrating the
Online Mass I record
and produce, I also was
asked to preside at the

funeral of a woman named Betty Sanders, 90 years old, married to her husband, Leroy, for over fifty-five years. Leroy and Betty raised three children, six grandchildren, eight great grandchildren, and the ninth one was just born at the time I recorded the Online Mass.

Prior to the liturgy, Betty's family met with me like they normally do, and they told me stories about their mom. At these funeral meetings, I normally ask the family, "If you could describe your mother in a word or a praise, would you describe her?"



In this case, the family had a simple response... they would say, "Our mother was an angel," telling me all the nice things she did to justify that remark. The family told me that Betty never had bad things to say about anybody, that she always had a positive disposition and that she loved to make her "bake-less" cookies with her grandkids. Betty's children told me that their mother *loved* her messy kitchen and loved to stick toothpicks in whatever cake she made and took to the homes of families and friends; the toothpicks prevented the plastic from hitting the frosting but, as a result, often her relatives would have to fight through the toothpicks in order to have their dessert.

Betty's family told me that their mother would sacrifice herself for the cause of other people, always putting her children and her community ahead of her own needs. They said that Betty always was impeccably dressed, faithful in attending Sunday Mass, dressed appropriately for Mass, and she really loved God, her family, her church and all of you.

Like so many other mothers whose children spoke lovingly about them, Betty's family and friends were so positive about this matriarch in

church and so many individuals from the area came to Betty's funeral. When I experience the type of godly, motherly love as I experienced with this family, I find hope in what I do as a priest and learn from the person whose memory we honor.

That all said, there were a couple unusual requests that the family asked of us concerning the services. At the end of Funeral Liturgy, the wanted to distribute marbles, these glass stones, as a keepsake for those attending the Mass. I guess glass marbles are one of many traditions or customs that was important to Betty, and her husband Leroy. Over at the cemetery when I offered the Rite of Committal, some of those marbles already were placed in front of their gravestones as a symbol of their love.

The family also asked, at the end of the Mass, If we could play and sing, Joy to the World, the version that we would play on December 24th every year.

I thought about these requests because we normally do not play Christmas songs in August and September. We are still at least TWELVE WEEKS away from Christmas, almost an entire weather season.

If you think about it, though, we encounter a great number of television stations that play Christmas movies year-round, including this very week!. I used to play Christmas music in the middle of the summer, which drove my parents crazy.



For this homily, I decided to wear a Christmas chasuble, because I was thinking about Betty's example of faith. Towards that end, I wanted to reference a theme which I utilized earlier in the summer, a theme about "Christmas every day." In that homily, I spoke about how those in the secular world did not want Christmas every day because people would consider it tiresome, old hat, something that turns into the same thing every day.

Many people have the equal view of the Catholic Mass, people who get bored with this liturgy because they say it is "the same thing, all the time." This might seem true, if you view the liturgy from a human perspective.

From a divine perspective, though, to gaze into the eyes of the one you love forever, to give yourself completely to the people you love because they are more important than you, that person of faith would ask you, “Why would you *not* want to enter the world of love for the rest of your life?”

I often say this to myself when I am praying to God, “Why are you keeping me around for more time, God? Why cannot I just be with you for the rest of my existence?” St. Paul referred to this, as did St. Bernadette. St. Thérèse of Lisieux suffered so much and asked God to take her so she could gaze at his presence. Padre Pio suffered so much to encounter that presence. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord pleaded with his father, asking why his Father would make him suffer so much.

The answer to all these questions was because they were called to sacrifice for you; I am here to sacrifice for you. This faith is not about me; it is about God working through me to take care of you.

If we condition ourselves to accept that mentality, if we allow this life of sacrifice, service, suffering and mercy to enter your heart and

certainly mine, then this ministry can never be about you or me... it has to be about God working through us and doing God's work.

As we all have learned (certainly I have), this ministry is not easy, because many people in the world are going to beat you down because of Christian charity, and the ministers of charity will have a much more difficult life as result (look at the lives of the prophets and the martyrs, and certainly our Lord); this is why so many good souls choose *not* to pursue this kind of life and coast through it to encounter less confrontation from others than if they did.

Yes, living the life of Christian charity, giving preferential treatment to the poor and the poor in spirit, results in a life of stress. That said, look what has happened in our Border Town Communities when we live this kind of way; look at all the wonderful things that have taken place when you consistently live out that "Christmas Spirit" that the Betty Saunders of the world try to live.

So many people in the world often compartmentalize faith like the secular people do in the world – when it is convenient, we bring out the Christmas decorations and then put them away; when we celebrate

baptisms, weddings and funerals (or when Christmas or Easter come along), many come to church out of some kind of duty and then pack the Church away for the rest of the year (or their lives). Many in the faith like to compartmentalize God because we like to compartmentalize a good many things in life.

When I preached at Betty's funeral, I mentioned how at Christmastime, businesses sell Christmas gifts as early as August, we often decorate our houses and communities in December and shortly after December 25 comes and goes, we take our decorations down and move on to the next activity in life. Many in the faith have the same attitude towards Easter – up goes the Easter dinner and as soon as it goes down, Easter is over. During the summer, many compartmentalize the faith as well – as an excuse, so many folks justify not coming to church as “taking a vacation from God,” not realizing that the whole purpose of our life is to show God whether we wish to spend the rest of our existence in heaven or not – taking a vacation from God shows we prefer the former from the latter.

When families begin the school year, many times families come to parish for First Communion and Confirmation classes, even though the only times parents come on Church grounds is to drop the kids off and pick up the kids without ever praying in church themselves. During the secular school year, we compartmentalize as well – we have our fall semester, our spring semester, fall break and spring break.

What the Betty Sanders taught me, which she reminds me of doing, is to un-compartmentalize our faith and live the same way year-round, as if the Spirit of Christmas and Easter took place every day. *This* is why I constantly reference Paul's letter to the Philippians; I constantly remind myself that this ministry cannot be about me; it has to be about you. I have to keep reminding myself that God has kept me on earth for one more day to celebrate one more Mass to make sure you know you are loved.

Just like Betty's attitude, ours should be the same as well – we must celebrate the Spirit of Christmas every single day, that same spirit, that same disposition, that same love. If we let Satan get to us, we have seen the results of that life within the world but if Christian Charity is our

motivating factor, if love is what allows us to move on with life, look what happens in the world. Look what happens in our lives. Look what happens in the faith. Our parishes, and the people who “get” what we are doing, is a testimony to what can happen when you love, what can happen when you put God first, and when you put everyone ahead of yourself.

According to Hans Urs von Balthazar, Jesus revealed himself as God by becoming *less* than everyone in the world; the less he became, the greater he was revealed. In order for us to allow God to see us, we have to become less; we must decrease. We must become useless servants. We must humble ourselves to the extreme in taking care of others, because when we do that, then others realize the sacrifice we are making, others realize that we are sincere, and then others might do the same thing with their kids and their kids’ kids.

For that reason, I think Betty Sanders and her family carried so much in their hearts. For the Online Mass, I took some of the flowers that were used at her funeral and I left them here in the church when I recorded

the Mass as a reminder of what Betty stood for her family and her community.

May we have that same kind of selfless attitude that Betty Sanders modeled in her life. May we put God first when we say “yes” to God every single day even when we do not feel like today is a Christmas or Easter Day. When we say “yes” to God and do what God asks us to do, when we are doing God’s will, we show God that we are ready to enter the kingdom of heaven. If we *lie* to God, if we lie to each other, if we try to deceive God or each other, if we are cunning, if we are deceitful, if we are not honest, there will be a reckoning in our lives, and that is told in the scriptures as well.

So let us empty ourselves out of our ego, our pride. Let us put God first, give everything we have, for the sake of everyone else, and see what happens. That is why I honestly believe we are doing as well as we are, because I am doing what I can to empty myself, just like you need to do the same for the glory of God. I try to take what we have of God’s love, empty it from my life and giving it to every single person that I meet in God’s name. This is our prayer.