

Homily

2nd Sunday of Advent – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 06-07, 2025

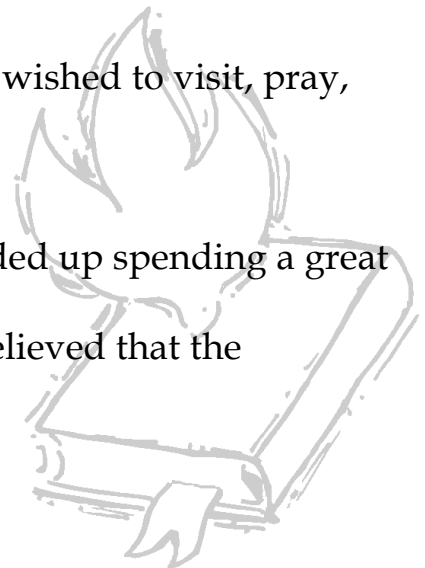
Is 2: 1-5
Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13: 11-14
Mt 24: 37-44



At the time I am
preaching this homily, I
was approached by a
priest from Westville, IL
named Rev. Timothy

Sauppé, who was told about the St. Anne tradition, the Novena and the relic that had cured scores of people. Fr. Sauppé, came to visit our parish and venerate that relic in the first shrine of the United States. Over the last few weeks, a good number of visitors have wanted to venerate the relic, whether it be from Whittlesea, Australia to Cicero Illinois. We also have welcomed priests throughout Illinois who wished to visit, pray, and venerate that relic.

One priest who wished to be anonymous ended up spending a great deal of time venerating the relic and honestly believed that the



intercession to St. Anne helped him overcome a concussion that he had endured. As a result, the priest donated over \$6,000 to upgrade the custom-made reliquary that held our relic of St. Anne (and a second donor gave us \$1,000 to purchase a case for the relic). The cost to create a new reliquary in today's age would be prohibitive so we were blessed that someone helped us fix and upgrade the one we have.

There are so many priests and religious that have come to visit here at St. Anne's very quietly behind the scenes and so many of them have been suffering. I've been receiving numerous phone calls from priests and religious these last few years who want to come here who want to talk who wanted to share their stories and wanted to receive the grace from God.

Just recently there was a priest who was suffering dearly. You know when we have folks that are here in the country areas people who work in these parishes where they do not have a support system where we do not have other priests in the area. Very few priests like to work in the country because rural ministry is NOT glamorous and you Are not going to climb the corporate ladder by ministering in the country, but

there is such great ministry to be offered to people who are just as holy and as sacred as the ones in the bigger cities. As a result, we do the best we can to take care of whomever approaches our doorstep, ordained cleric or otherwise. (In fact, one of our benefactors who lives out in this area was responsible for these video camera systems so we could record these masses for your benefits in here in these beautiful churches.)



As I was reflecting on the homily for this Second Sunday of Advent and this theme of “Stories of Light in the Darkness,” I have been referencing all kinds of individuals and all kinds of experiences I have encountered where that light shines through. Whether it be in a mother

like a Gina Novelli-Petrecca (Immaculate Conception) or a Lidia Cronk. (3 Advent), or even the mother who helped out a teenager who was suffering dearly with losing her mother (4 Advent) or a Little Italian Chapel that turned Italian Prisoners of War and Scotts living together in Orkney into friends that built a place of worship during a time of war (1 Advent).

In this particular case, I was thinking about the ministry of the ordained priesthood as well as religious life and how one specific priest suffered dearly in the midst of his vocation, left his priesthood and became a street beggar and then the way St. Pope John Paul II brought that lost priest back into the fold. This story has been reflected numerous times, but in this particular case, I would like to share the story according to one of the sources that I had encountered online.

As the story is told, a priest from New York went to Rome for an audience with St. Pope John Paul II. While he was in Rome prior to this meeting, he decided to visit a church to pray. As this priest was about to pass through the front door of the church, he encountered a beggar resting on those steps, which was and is not uncommon to see in many

parts of the world. That said, the priest knew something was different about this beggar.

After the priest had finished praying inside the church, he returned to the entry way of the building to converse with the beggar. It was then, when he stopped to pay attention, that the priest realized that he actually *knew* this disheveled man – both had attended seminary together!

It was then that the beggar priest revealed his story to his former classmate, how he had been ordained a priest and how he had crashed and burned in his ministry and subsequently left his vocation. The beggar priest was lost, like a ship without a sail and did not know what else to do but ask for money each day to stay alive.

The priest listened to his friend's story and lamented his condition, not knowing what to do. Later in the day, when the priest had an audience with the pope, the priest stood in the line of people who were processing past the Holy Father. Normally in these formal situations, the pope would shake each person's hand and give them a blessed rosary as a sign of faith. Niceties would be said.

In this particular case, this priest broke protocol to speak to the Holy Father. In addressing the pope, the priest confided that he had met a former classmate who left the priesthood and was begging for money on the front steps of a church he visited. The priest asked the pope to offer prayers for his friend. The good, saintly pope shook the priest's hand, thanked him for the story and went on his way.

After the formal introductions took place and the receiving line was led out of the room where the pope greeted them, one of the pope's attendants pulled the priest aside; the Holy Father wished to speak with him further. The soon-to-be St. Pope John Paul II the great said to this priest, "Find your beggar friend and bring to my house tonight so that we can share dinner together."

The priest was taken back – in no scenario he imagined would the pope invite him to dinner. A bit shaken, the priest ran back to the church where he was praying and the beggar was sitting. He found his former classmate and relayed the pope's invitation to dine with them.

According to this story, the beggar replied, "Look, I do not have any clerics. I have no money. I am filthy. I am unclean. I am not in a

condition to visit the vicar for Christ at his dinner table. Listening to these excuses, the priest assured his friend that they would work everything out together. Taking the beggar to his room, the priest helped his classmate clean up – to take a shower, comb his hair, brush his teeth and make him presentable. The priest then gave his classmate a set of his own priestly clothes (clerics) and did everything he could to help this beggar get ready for this special meal.

Later that evening, the two clerics arrived at the papal apartments as they were instructed to do, sat down and ate a nice meal with St. Pope John Paul II. An hour or so later after the dinner had concluded, the Pope asked the priest to kindly leave him alone so Pope John Paul II could speak to his classmate. The priest waited outside and met his friend after his visit with the pope; his friend was crying.

Later in the evening, this priest learned as to what had happened when he left the room. According to the story, once alone with the beggar priest, Pope John Paul II turned to the former cleric and said, “Would you hear my confession?” The beggar priest replied, “I am no longer a priest.” But the pope replied, “Once a priest, always a priest.”

The beggar told the pope he was not in good standing with the Church.

The pope replied, "I am the bishop of Rome. I can reinstate you right now," which is what he did.

The Pope then knelt before the beggar priest and confessed his sins. The beggar priest barely got the words of absolution out before he fell on his knees and with tears in his eyes asked the pope to hear his own confession. Once the beggar priest was forgiven of his sins and restored to the Church in a state of grace, the pope asked the other priest to come back into the room.

The pope asked this priest where he found the beggar. The priest told the pope the parish in which the beggar was sitting. The Pope then responded, "For your first assignment, I want you to serve as an associate pastor back at the parish where you were begging with a special outreach to your fellow beggars on the street." To this day, this beggar priest serves as an associate pastor in that church, welcoming those who are lost back into the fold.

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they have forgiven them. If you hold them bound, they are held bound" (John 20: 23).

Sometimes we forget that priests are people, too, that priests like me need your prayers because what we do is not easy. We priests live in a glass house; some people are always going after us. This is the way of the world. People attack priests because priests are easy targets; priests cannot fight back. All we have is the love of God trying to do what is right in God's name, knowing that we fail just like everybody else.

Regardless how we are treated, we priests are also called to live this ministry to the best of our ability, come what may. Priests need your prayers. Priests need the help of others to get through the day.

What I have done to protect kids, what I have done in our society to fight the \$5.5 billion dollars of sex abuse payments for clerical abuse to children has made me an outcast in many ways; I have been called "dead to the diocese" because of the life I have chosen to lead (<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2017/01/17/joliet-priest-says-diocese-failed-to-follow-protocol-to-protect-children/>). Making this grave sacrifice is part of the gospel message as well. Living the gospel

message will cause you to be scourged, to be hated and insulted, but in the end, you will persevere (Mt 10: 22).

Many priests have that feeling of being hated and of being lost, both in the Diocese of Joliet and throughout the world. Priests need your prayers because in a time of darkness, people come to these priests looking for a sense of light.

There was one particular individual who came to me recently who told me about her plight and how she felt rejected by her own family. The woman said that the words that we provided to her were helpful so that she could get through a tricky situation. For me, that is what makes the priesthood so worthwhile. Even though we take the arrows and the bullets from the people of our society metaphorically, through all of that, we also offer hope for those who are seeking it.

Today, I ask you to pray for your priests as I offer this special prayer on their behalf, for all priests and religious and all those invested in the religious life. The prayer is offered as such:

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help

our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns as the eternal high priest. Amen.

This is our prayer.

The Beggar and Pope John Paul II
Posted on [February 14, 2013](#) by [Geoff Heggadon](#)

A Priest from New York went to Rome for an audience with Pope John Paul II. Whilst in Rome, before his meeting he decided to go to a church to pray. As he walked through the door he saw a beggar sitting on the steps, which is not uncommon, and yet he sensed something familiar about him. When he had finished praying he walked back out and decided to speak to the beggar, at which time they realized that they knew each other and had gone to Seminary together. The beggar revealed how he had been a Priest and had 'crashed and burned' in his vocation.

Later, when the Priest had an audience with the Pope, he joined the line of people who were processing past, and when his turn came, he gave in to a holy impulse and fell to his knees asking the Pope to pray for the beggar he had met earlier, telling him of how he was a Priest but had now fallen on hard times.

The Pope gave the Priest an invitation to bring the beggar to dinner with him that evening. The Priest immediately went from St Peters to the small church and found the beggar was still on the steps. The Priest told the beggar of the invitation they had been given from John Paul II. The beggar said that he could not possibly do such a thing, but the Priest insisted telling him he was not going to this meal without him. He then took the beggar to his hotel room and gave him a loan of his razor and some clothes.

The two men arrived an hour later at the Papal apartments and sat down and ate a nice meal with the Pope. An hour later the Pope asked the Priest to kindly leave him alone with his friend. The Priest found out, later that evening, what had happened when he left the room:

The Pope turned to the beggar and said, "Would you hear my confession?" The beggar replied, "but I am not a Priest anymore!" The

Pope then told him, “once a Priest, you are always a Priest.” But the beggar told the Pope that he was out of good standing with the church. The Pope replied, “I am the Bishop of Rome, I can reinstate you right now,” which he then does.

The Pope then knelt before the beggar and confessed his sins. The beggar-Priest barely got the words of absolution out before he fell on his knees and with tears in his eyes asks the Pope to hear his confession. Once the beggar-Priest was restored to Christ and in a state of grace, the Pope asked the other Priest to come back into the room. The Pope asked him which church he had found his friend at, upon learning he then told the beggar-Priest, “for your first pastoral assignment I want you to go to this church and report for duty, because you will be an associate there, with a special outreach to your fellow beggars on the street” – and to this day that is where the beggar-Priest works, helping the dispossessed.

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

(John 20:22 & 23).

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.
Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments.
Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.
Set their souls on fire with love for your people.
Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.
Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.
Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.
Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.
Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest.
Amen.

