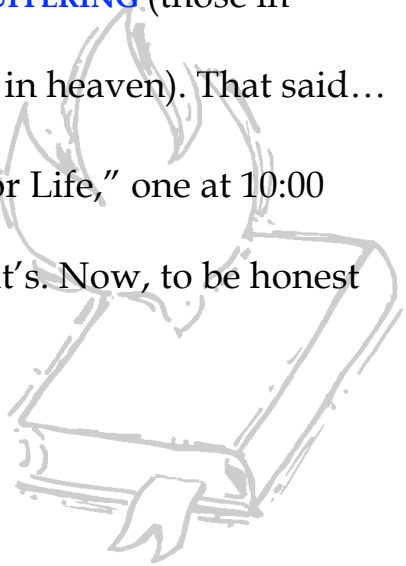
Homily
30th Sunday OT – A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
October 24-25, 2026

Ex 22: 20-26
Ps 18: 2-3, 3-4, 47, 51
1 Thes 1: 5-10
Mt 22: 34-40

There are two stipulations for the homily I offer today. First, focusing on a theme on which I return over and over again (it is said that if you attend enough masses from a same priest, you will hear the same theme over and over again), what I say is NOT a condemnation on anyone – take what I say as a general theme about society from every age, NOT AB OUT YOU. Second, I have come to realize that when I pray, my preferred way of doing so is by doing it alone, knowing full well that "The Communion of Saints" is praying with me (this is next week's homily – **"THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS"** references the **CHURCH MILITANT** (those living on earth), the **CHURCH SUFFERING** (those in purgatory) and the **CHURCH TRIUMPHANT** (those in heaven). That said…

This weekend, we sponsored two "Rosaries for Life," one at 10:00 a.m. at St. Anne's, and one at 12:00 noon at St. Pat's. Now, to be honest



with you, just like the Online Masses, not many people are investing in those prayer opportunities, but so many ways, I am not worried about who participates in these activities. I am offering these services for my relationship with God, regardless of how many people show up to pray. Again, I do these things because I know that **THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS** joins me in prayer each time.

So, even when I am the only physical body in church, I am certainly not praying alone. This understanding gives me comfort to know that God is with me when I am doing these things.

Nevertheless, when the faithful in general do not participate in these prayer opportunities, when we offer these type of services programs and the community at large does not take advantage of what we offer, I end up hearing the same concerns by catechists and liturgists and leaders of our community alike. When we offer programs like Christian Initiation for Adults or parish socials for our community, many program coordinators lament with me by saying, "Father, why do people not show up to what we are doing? We put a lot of time offering these

socials and prayer services – why do people not take advantage of what we are offering?"

To be honest with you, St. Anne's, outside of their fish fry and their golf outing events, do not have many activities for the parish – this weekend, we offer an Open House for our Religious Education kids, but even registration for that program is low, according to DRE Kim Emerson. I know very well that Kim works very hard in these offerings – we have ten children in a two-year First Communion Program and another fourteen in the two-year Confirmation Program but most of those kids attend other churches on a regular basis.

At St. Patrick's, to be honest with you, anytime we hold some type of social even, the result is what I call "the one-and-a-half-hour principle." If we sponsor an event, we are lucky if people stick around for an hour and a half, and then, like pumpkins at midnight, many go home after one and a half hours. That is fine – we do not serve alcohol at our events and longevity at socials often is based on alcohol – that is how people have been conditioned to socialize; that is how some people function at

these types of events things. With alcohol, some parish events continue long into the night. This parish, we start something at 5:00 p.m. and, without alcohol, we are done by 6:30 p.m. That is just the way that these parishes happens to exist.

So many people lament the lack of attendance at our services and socials, and they say to me, "Why are these people not getting invested in their parish?" As I reflect on this, I often think that after thirty plus years hearing this same question as a priest, that inquiry seems to repeat itself over and over and over again in my life of ministry. After much reflection, I came upon this response, with a little help from today's scripture readings.

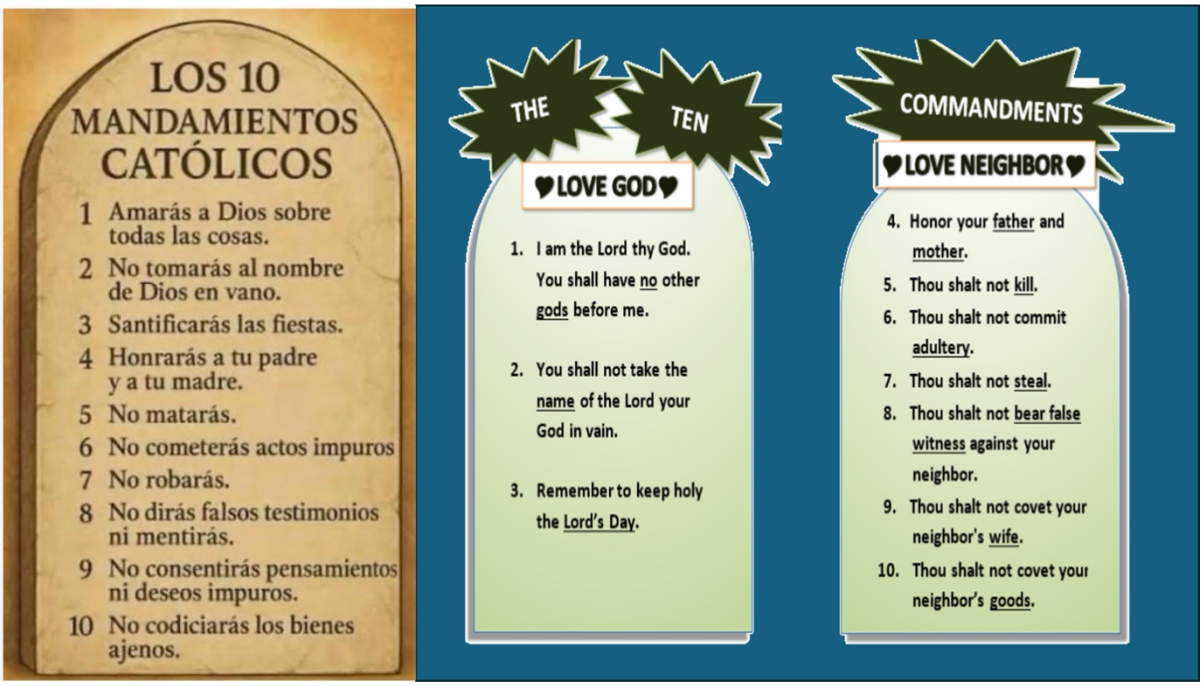
In the history of the Church, God, our Father, the one who created the heavens and the earth, who created Adam and Eve, has constantly been betrayed by those whom he created. Even at the beginning of creation, Adam and Eve betrayed our Lord's trust (with a little help from a serpent), as did their son Cain when he killed Abel. This same betrayal was repeated by the people during the time of the flood and

during the time when the Tower of Babel was created. After God established these "Chosen People," this covenant was broken by eleven brothers who threw their own kin into a pit and lied to their father by saying that brother Joseph killed while selling their brother off to a bunch of Ishmaelites for slavery. While in slavery, Joseph was essential in helping the Pharaoh save the people from Egypt from famine and when Joseph's own brothers arrived in Egypt seeking food and assistance, Joseph protected them during the time of famine.

Later on, during the time of the Exodus, a new Pharaoh came to power who was cruel to the next generation of Chosen People, a Pharaoh who was subjecting and enslaving God's people because he was afraid of him. In response, God called Moses (a name literally meaning "out of the weeds") to lead the Chosen People out of Egypt, that place of slavery, and lead them back to Canaan during a forty-year journey.

As bible scholars tell us, Moses led the Chosen People out of the out of Egypt, that place of slavery and brought them to the foot of the

mountain of Mount Sinai, where the majority of the book of Exodus takes place. For one year, the people sit at the foot of Sinai, while God speaks to Moses.



As Exodus tells us (since this is our first reading today), Moses climbs the mountain of Sinai, God speaks to Moses and presents to him a set of **TEN COMMANDMENTS** (the "major rules") that the Chosen People are told they must follow. These same ten rules apply for all the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, albeit followed in a different order, according to each religion. These are ten sacrosanct rules, the most important ones of the 613 listed in Exodus, Leviticus and

Numbers. The rules tell us to not have any other gods before you and not to use God's name in vain. The rules tell us to keep holy the Sabbath day – for Muslims, the holy day happens to be Friday, for Jews on Saturday and for Christians on Sunday. This commandment means that you must not put anything else ahead of God on whatever holy day that may be.

For us who believe the way we do in our Church… we have over 1.2 billion Catholics around the world – how many of those 1,200,000,000 Catholics actually *follow* the 3rd commandment? If I decide to preach today that way God did in the Book of Exodus or the way the New Testament honored the day of the Lord's resurrection, if I say to you that it is a grave sin to skip Mass on Sundays, how do you think people would respond? If we follow the pattern that happens at least in this diocese (perhaps in the parishes I serve), then you are going to have a whole bunch of people write to the bishop that I am a terrible priest, a priest that is telling us that we are going to hell (even though I never actually said this). If I say nothing about going to Mass, another segment of parishioners would call me a coward for not doing my job about

upholding the Third Commandment.

Either way, neither approach probably would make a difference to those who still would not go to church – once people are conditioned to believe what they want to believe (I call it turning into "little gods" and following whatever rules they want), then many times very little will change their minds. Yet, either way I approach this subject, I would be held accountable by God for not saying anything or even if I pushed the subject too strictly. In addition, those who say they are Catholics and yet are not following the Third Commandment will have to answer to the only demographic that counts on the other side of life.

Let us make one thing clear – I do not stand at the pulpit make up these rules and to tell you what I think. If I am preaching correctly, the rules I am told to preach are not my rules. I am not telling you what to do. I am just telling you what God told Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, what Christ told the apostles to do and what Church tradition demands that I do when I preach at these Masses.

So God gives Moses these Ten Commandments, the first three about

the way we honor God and the last seven concerning how we respect each other. We are taught to honor our fathers and mothers, not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to lie, not to desire a neighbor's wife and not desire a neighbor's goods. These are God's rules.

So while God is saying all of this to Moses, what do the people down below do on the foot of Mount Sinai? They decide that they were not going to listen to God, and they were going to build their own god, in the form of a golden calf. Moses comes down the mountain, sees the people he led out of Egypt with this made-up god and God gets mad and responds as only a disciplining parent would – he inflicts a plague on an unfaithful people.

We often learn in the scriptures (especially in the Old Testament) that sometimes God is seen as the loving parent, about which many like to hear preached at Sunday Mass, that God is about happy hugs, smiles. and kisses. Sometimes God is pictured as the disciplinarian, that God, just like any parent would do for an unruly child, will do whatever was necessary to get the child to get back on track. That is the way the Old

Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus offers a much softer touch, but he says the same thing – love your God, love your neighbor. Jesus is not as soft when he calls out the Pharisees and the Sadducees for being hypocrites, just like he would say about many of us leaders today. As we read in the scriptures, the Pharisees and the Sadducees responded by nailing Jesus to a cross; they rile up a lynch mob and do to Jesus what society thinks is acceptable today (albeit by different means), to destroy the messenger so that they can live the way they want. As we learn in the scriptures, the mob mentality thinks that getting rid of the one they do not like will get rid of their problem.

We also learn in the faith that when you have martyrs in the church who are willing to uphold the faith, all these good things happen, although martyrs sacrifice their lives on earth; when they die, the Church lives. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a grain of wheat but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12: 24).

When people follow the teachings of the Church, at least when

Catholics follow the Third Commandment as a starting point, they realize you may not always get what you want (Lord knows for the first fifty years of my life, I prayed to God that the Cubs would win the World Series and look how that turned out… then came 2016), but that is not the point.

The point is, when you pray to God, when you love God and love your neighbor, you may not always get what you want in that in the earthly way, but in the spiritual way, you know that God is with you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. We then know that no matter what happens in this world, God is in your heart to carry you to the other side.

Of course the problem is that people in this world do not want to hear this message, not in the Garden of Eden and certainly not today. People in this world want you to live according to the way of the people of this world, according to the little gods of this world. By doing so, look at the results of the people of this world. Look at how we treat each other during elections. Look at the way we treat each other among

countries, among cultures, within our own parishes and communities. Do people feel welcome? I have heard so many people from both parishes and so many different venues that at times they do not feel welcome – to "love thy neighbor" does not mean to love just those among your family and friends but to love thine enemy (Matthew 6). Sometimes the outsider does not feel welcome, coming into church.

Do we offer that hospitality and that love to every single person coming in, not just our friends, but every single person? This is our challenge. So if you take the role of a Christian, if you take the parent, and if you challenge people to get back on track and live a better life, then like the priest, the deacon, the bishop or the lay person who decides to live and preach that message, most likely you are going to end up getting in trouble. So many of us priests have been the victims of slander and libel by those who do not like the gospel message and, instead of martyring someone with the sword, the messenger get martyred with the pen or the sound bite. The messenger of this gospel will be attacked because many do not want to hear this message.

As a result, by *not* challenging people, so many in the world condition themselves to thinking it is okay *not* to go to church, *not* to live the life, *not* to follow the Commandments and to turn themselves into little gods instead of the only God that counts, and then go off in the world where in the end, when our lives are over, we are going to have to stand before the Lord, and we are going to have to become accountable for our actions.

Another message I preach incessantly at Mass, over and over again, is this – *God does not send us to hell; we send ourselves*. We send ourselves to hell by our actions that say to God, that we do not wish to live the life by the parameters God sets for us. We send ourselves by saying that we to not want to be with God by virtue of not following God's love, the manner in which we do not love. When we reach Matthew 25 during the last three weeks of our liturgical year, we focus on those young virgins whose lamps are full, who are ready, who are prepared to enter heaven. As for those who are not, they will knock and yell, "Lord, Lord, open the door to us," to which the Master will say, "Amen, it is as if I never knew you. What I am telling you are not my words or my thoughts;

these are the words and thoughts of our Lord Jesus Christ from the first passage of the 25th Chapter of Matthew's gospel.

The question is, are we like the people in Exodus, who, instead of waiting for God to lead them and guide them, decide to lead and guide themselves (and you see what happens in that case, even today), or do we come here and let God lead us, feed us and sends us forth to teach this message to others?

So, the diocese requires us to hold these October "number counts." The lament is that the October number count is low here at the parish compared to previous years and that the attendance for religious education is low as well, compared to previous years, and so on and so on. I also have heard is that the same statistic is applying to a good number of parishes, at least in the southern end of the diocese, possibly in the northern end of the diocese as well.

The question is, do we want to get to heaven? Do we want to follow God's way, or do we prefer our way? Do we follow the one God who has given us 613 laws in the Old Testament, 10 Commandments and 603

other laws in Leviticus and Numbers, or do we want to follow our laws and our ways, which is a guarantee *not* to get to the kingdom of heaven?

This is a simple question we need to ask, and the problem is, if I get up here and preach that message, many people will say to me, "Preach the gospel message, not gloom and doom." I try to stay positive and I try to tell parables as Jesus did in the scriptures but the stark reality is this – what I just preached today *is* the gospel message… but very few wish to hear it. If I do not preach this stark message, if I continually preach the love and joy and all that (which is fine; I preach this way a great deal) that a lot of times, then others will challenge me and say, "Where is the challenge of the gospel?"

Well, my dear brothers and sisters, here it is – I just preached it. That is what God is telling us in today's scriptures. That is what God is telling us in the 1st Reading from Exodus. St. Paul writes to us in 1st Thessalonians that we need to be prepared as if every day is our last. The people in Thessalonica are saying that Jesus has not come back yet, when is he going to come? Paul says, "Be ready, like watching for the

thief of the night, because you do not know when that time is going to come, but when it does, you better be prepared." That is the question we need to ask.

So we will count the number of people who are at each of our Masses this weekend. The number is probably going to be a low number and many will lament about that. My responsibility is to try and get people to heaven. Our responsibility as a community is to welcome people to church, every person, no matter who they are, tell them they are loved, to tell them they are welcomed and then to share this very difficult message with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.