

Homily **3rd Sunday of Advent – A**

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 13-14, 2025

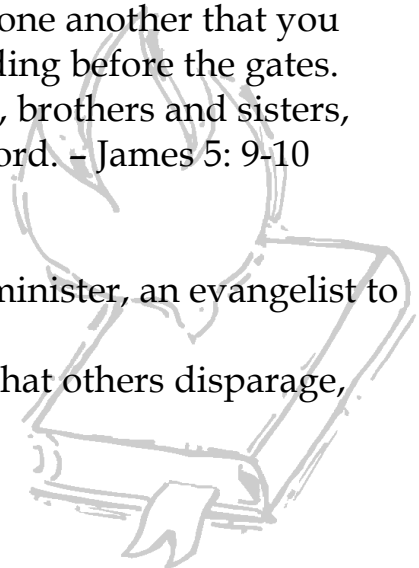
Is 35: 1-6, 10
Ps 146: 6-7, 8-9, 9-10
Jas 5: 7-10
Mt 11: 2-11



Strengthen the hands that are feeble. Make firm the knees that are weak. Say to those whose hearts are frightened, "Be strong. Fear not. Here is your God. He comes with vindication." – Is 35: 3-4

Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. – James 5: 9-10

When you decide that you are going to be a minister, an evangelist to the marginalized, to the forsaken and for those that others disparage,



you are not going to give lip service to those who are suffering. Instead, you are going to open your heart to them.

Recently I talked to St. Patrick's parishioner Leighann Sokoloff, who volunteers extensively at our local Harbor House. I also was speaking to Betty Wielgus and Bev Witvoet concerning the St. Anne's Food Pantry, which we host twice a month in St. Anne, IL. I talked to the Sisters of St. Joseph (Las Hermanas Josefinas) and the Central Vilaseca Daycare Center, which has served the poor in Joliet for over fifty years with love, even though they have not seen one new vocation enter their community as a response to their love. The Franciscan Sisters of Joliet who also have been serving that area for over fifty years recently announced that they ARE NOT taking any new vocations into their community because no one is coming forward and they do not have any younger sisters to provide a sense of community for prospective novices.

In this world of ministry, we essentially try to help people who are suffering, those who are dejected, those who are down, knowing full well that we ourselves are going to get shut down and marginalized.

Because our ministry is a thankless one, many in our local communities are not going to join the ranks of the ordained or religious.

None of this is unique – many times, whatever good an ordained cleric or a religious does might be taken away because the same thing happened at the time of the prophets. This type of ambivalence and hatred is what happens today with those who serve as well. When people in the faith act that way, when people try to tear our servants down and to build themselves up, scriptures tell us what happens to those kind of people and how God is going to treat them... “The measure by which you measure is the one that is measured to you” (Mt 7: 2).

Regardless of how you are treated, the minister tries to find a way to turn the page, living a life of love and hoping that example of faith will bring God back into the lives of the people you serve, knowing there are many in our communities who suffer greatly because they think they are forgotten. At least in my experience, living this way is quite difficult, but it allows people to see God’s light and helps Churches grow in the process.

There was a married couple of my acquaintance, relatives of mine named Mike and Lidia (or Estella Cronk) who had been married for twenty years but never received a blessing for their marriage at the time they approached me about their marriage. Mike & Estella lived in Illinois, ran a successful business and were philanthropists in so many ways for the sake of the poor in Illinois.

Estella bore a child from her first marriage to a daughter named Melissa. Estella raised Melissa to the best of her ability; when Estella's first husband died, the mom comforted her daughter as only a mother could at a time of loss. Mike and Estella were married civilly for twenty years, but for whatever reason, they never got their marriage blessed in the Catholic Church.

On the day of the wake for my aunt and godmother Concetta ("Connie") Mazzulla, daughter and granddaughter Melissa, pulled me aside and asked me, "Is it possible for you to do something so that Mike and my mother could be married properly in the Catholic Church?" At the time, I was taken aback with this request – normally, I do not talk about marriage liturgies during the day of a wake.

After I composed myself, I talked the situation through with Melissa. Celebrating the marriage of Mike and Estella was not going to be a difficult one to handle – as the previous spouse had died, Lidia was free to marry in the Church. Over the next couple of months, Mike, Lidia and I worked through all the paperwork and shortly after, we offered a marriage liturgy at the parish where I served as pastor.

In my experience, I try to do the best I can with the couples I encounter, offering sacraments for those whom other priests have rejected. I do nothing wrong – I follow the rules according to the rules of the Church, assisted by the former Vicar General of the Diocese, Fr. Joseph Tapella. The unique gift I can offer the world as a priest is grace through the sacraments, allowing God to offer the most intimate gift our Lord imparts, that grace offered through the sacraments. As a priest of almost thirty years, I do the best of my ability to connect people with God in this most unique way.

As a result, a couple months after the passing of my godmother, Mike and Estella drove to my church on a Saturday night with their family present. At that Saturday night Mass a few years ago, we celebrated a

beautiful marriage service during the evening liturgy. Two months later, Mike & Lidia renewed their vows at Ditka's Restaurant in Oakbrook, IL in front of family, friends and the community of Our Lady of Angels in Humboldt Park where Mike & Lidia directed much of their philanthropic efforts.

From that point forward, Mike and Estella and I continued our relationship in a new way, helping the needy both in Chicago and the Joliet areas. I came to find out how generous Mike and Estella were in Humboldt Park, taking care of the needy in that community, something that carried into the parishes I served.

I try to follow Mike & Lidia's example in my own life, knowing full well how I get chided when I am being generous to the communities I serve with my own monies. Parishioners say to me, "Father, why are you giving your money to us – we should be taking care of the parishes with our own money?" I respond by saying, "You do realize that Envelope #1 at both parishes I serve is *my envelope* and that, as long as I serve these communities, that I must serve as an example as the spiritual and administrative leader of the parishes under my care?"

I have a responsibility of living that faith and if I do not live that faith, how can I expect anybody else to live it? How can I expect other people to live the life of sacrifice and service unless I learn how to set the example myself? In the end, I am nothing and the parishioners I serve are everything. As the spiritual head of these communities, I must learn how to love the people I serve and tell them that, no matter what, God is with them through me. I tell my parishioners that the only obstacle to getting to heaven is not God but it is us; it is me. If I block myself off from God, I cannot get to heaven; if I do not live this life of sacrifice for the people I serve, then I am nothing but a noisy gong or clanging symbol (1 Corinthians 13).

So, when somebody like Mike and Lidia wanted to get married and daughter Melissa was asking me for help, of course I was going to help them! After that wedding, I began to see clearly the kind of good that Mike & Estella had done for our community and I feel compelled to do the same, based on my own talents and gifts.

I also came to learn that there were many projects at the parishes I served that we could not have done on our own, projects where Mike &

Estella assisted us in so many ways. Over at St. Patrick's Church in Joliet, the rectory windows were in absolutely horrible condition; there were holes in the windows where air was coming through; the windows were not properly ventilated. In response, Mike and Lidia decided after their marriage to take care of repairing all the windows at St. Patrick's Church in Joliet just as well as they did here at St. Patrick's Church in Momence. Over at St. Anne's, in Estella's name, Mike donated one of the air conditioning units to our church to keep the church functioning properly for the people that we serve.

When Mike's wife Estella died in 2018, he continued to work with me behind the scenes to help the parishes I served in his wife's memory without recognition, without people knowing what he was doing. I would like to think Mike did these things because when he saw the light in his life, the gift of his wife whom he married in the presence of God and our community, Mike wanted to give back to the people for whom he cared and the people I served.

Often Mike has said to me, "Can you pray for my family? Can you pray for my kids and my grandkids? Can you pray for the people who

are suffering? Can you pray for the residents and the staff of Our Lady of Angels?" To these requests, I often reply, "Absolutely, because this is what we Christians are supposed to do. We are not looking for 'quid pro quo.' We are looking for God's love so we can give it away as Christ did for us." I have learned that when we give that love overflowing, no matter who it is, no matter how we get treated (and our scriptures tell us very well that no matter how generous we are, we are going to get trashed by society), then good things happen as a response to that love.

We also know that living the Christian life has consequences. Look at St. John the Baptist, the subject of today's gospel. He lived the life, he defended the faith and he literally lost his head by living the life. Jesus called John the Baptist "the greatest man born of a woman" (Mt 11: 11). Herod killed St. John the Baptist because this last great prophet before Jesus challenged Herod about marrying his brother's wife and his wife got revenge on John the Baptist for defending the faith.

When you love, when you allow that light to come into your life so that you can make a difference for others, look what happens. Life is not going to be easy and you might be abused or even killed for defending

the Christian life (Lord knows I am!) but you also open the doors to allowing the faith to grow and taking care of those in need. *That* is the beauty of this faith and that is the reason that the suffering becomes worthwhile – if the light shines in our hearts and if we can see that light, then come what may, wonderful things can happen.

If we choose to envelop darkness upon the people we serve, to put that bushel basket over that light, that is on us. If we allow that light to shine through, then God shines brightly within us as well.

So when we offer special collections as we have done for the Vilaseca Daycare Center with the toys and the coats, when we take donations for Harbor House and take care of those who protected us at the Manteno Veterans' Home, when we load up the local Food Pantries with trucks upon trucks filled with food donated by our local grocery stores and charitable organizations, then we understand why Mike & Lidia took care of those institutions for which they cared – because this is what God called them and us to do in a Spirit of love.

Last year, I recalled driving up to Oak Brook, IL where the local Costco Food Store donated over fifty pumpkin pies the size of Texas that

we just started distributing to anyone we could. We distributed the pies to our local churches, the local food pantries, and then we were chucking them into parishioners' cars as they were driving to and from our churches. As long as we keep living like Christ and taking care of those most in need of God's mercy, we have a chance for salvation. However, if we decide that we are going to put the bushel basket on top of the light, if we are going to try to extinguish that light, if we are going to live in a spirit of hate to bring those around us down, then we are going to be stuck in Advent and Lent for the rest of our lives.

Jesus tells us that if you live in love, if you want to live like the prophets, you want to live like John the Baptist. As a result, our life expectancy is going to be much shorter (I certainly know that), but you are going to spend the rest of your life with God by living a life of love. This is what I learned from Mike & Lidia Cronk.

Do we want to live in a life of condemnation and marginalization and darkness where we shut people off and tear people down and never see the light of heaven or do we want to sacrifice and suffer and live like

Christ and John the Baptist, knowing that our life expectancy is going to be shorter but our life in heaven is going to be everlasting?

To honor this particular couple who showed me the light in a unique way (and still do!), for what they have offered the people I serve and the institutions for which they care, I would like to honor their “invisible fingerprints” within communities they have never visited by offering a special prayer on their behalf, for families in honor of those who have given their lives and given their love to the needy of the world, not expected anything back in return except the love of God in their hearts and that light that will shine with them in heaven. So we pray...

We bless your name, O Lord,
for sending your own incarnate Son,
to become part of a family,
so that, as he lived its life,
he would experience its worries and its joys.
We ask you, Lord,
to protect and watch over this family,
so that in the strength of your grace
its members may enjoy prosperity,
possess the priceless gift of your peace,
and, as the Church alive in the home,
bear witness in this world to your glory.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

This is our prayer.