

Homily

3rd Sunday of Easter – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 18-19, 2026

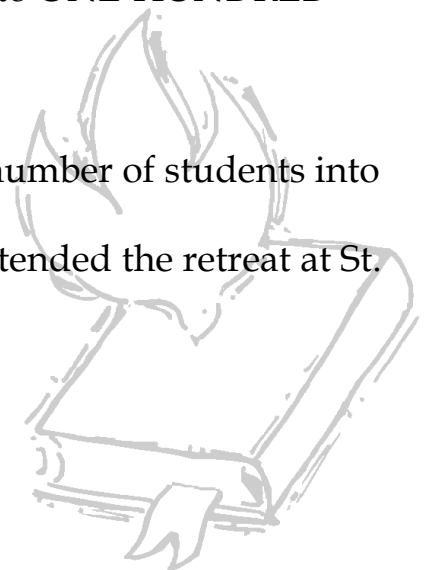
Acts 2: 14, 22-28
Ps 16: 1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
1 Pt 1: 17-21
Lk 24: 13-35



Unbeknownst to me, John Rehmer (St. Patrick's Director of Religious Education) told all the leaders of catechism programs from Catholic parishes that were located south of I-80 about a teen retreat we were holding for our confirmation students at our Border Town

Parishes. I only thought I would be offering a retreat for thirty or forty junior high students; instead, the number grew to ONE-HUNDRED TWENTY STUDENTS!

Because the group was so large, we split the number of students into two different retreats. Forty of those students attended the retreat at St.



Anne's Church on March 7th; the other eighty students attended the retreat at St. Patrick's on March 14th.

I wanted to bring both sets of kids to church at the end of their respective retreats, with their families present at the Masses, to end our time together to summarize what we did together and to show the parents what their children were able to accomplish. Normally junior high students, the way they are, are like an egg which I reference on the retreat. Each person is like an egg – the person covers themselves with a thin “shell” called their personality; if the shell is opened, then others see what is really inside and that can be both frightening and uplifting, depending on the other person.

We cover ourselves with this shell in life, because we do not want people to know what is inside, because sometimes, whether that egg is hard boiled, soft boiled, or raw, we cover that personality with the shell. Often, we are afraid of what other people are going to feel about us when that life is exposed for the world to see. If the person is not nice, how they respond to who we truly are can be cruel. When you fall in love with someone, when you have a great friendship, when you can

expose yourself to the other person emotionally and otherwise, that person sees who you really are and the hope is that they accept you and that they love you for who you are.

This is the theme and point of the Confirmation retreat and is what we are trying to teach these students. We are trying to teach the students that God loves them for who they are. God loves them regardless of their *Sitz im Leben*, their situation in life. At one point in life, each of us adults lived as a teenager and living as a teenager is not easy. Living as a teenager is very fraught with danger because of peer pressure and because of all the hurt we experience growing up.

Then in the normal course of life, teenagers eventually leave their parents' home and go out into the world on their own. For many, this may seem like a type of freedom, but each person eventually realizes the world is what the world is. The world can be affirming and the world can seem bleak, with the violence, the wars and all those terrible things that happen. When we leave our homes, our futures are uncertain, which can be uplifting or very terrifying.

We teach the students that in these moments, no matter what happens in the world, God is love and this Church is *their* home and this Church is *your* home. We try to encourage the students and help the students learn this lesson well. As a way to do this, we have an activity called *Nuclear Meltdown*, where we give each group of teens a couple carpet squares that are “lava proof,” according to this activity. The purpose of this activity is for each group of students to get their team to the other side of the lava pit, using the two carpet squares in their possession.

The whole point of this activity is that, unless competitive sports, the purpose of this activity is to get the teams to work together, to line up ALL the carpet squares in a straight row, so that everyone wins! As I explain to the students at the end of this activity, I did not say that the *first* team or the *best* team gets to the other side. Rather, I tell the students to get to the other side without any other instruction.

Very seldom do the students understand what we are trying to do on the first try, to line up all the carpet squares in a straight row. That said, if all the students work together in this activity, then the next thing you know, you end up having yourself a church, which is why I end this

activity with the scriptural passage about “many members but one body of Christ with God as the head, united by the Spirit” (see Romans 12: 4-5 or 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27).

At the end of this activity, hopefully we have softened up the kids so that they get along with each other, they learn how to work together, that all of us with different gifts, with different *Sitz im Lebens*, with different situations in life and they work as a team to help each other through the retreat. We teach the students that if we pool our resources together as a body of Christ, if we work together with Christ as the head, then all of a sudden, great things happen and perhaps we can help get *everybody* to heaven.

At this St. Patrick’s Retreat, parents from our Hispanic community (who knew nothing about what we were going to do), ended up participating with the kids. At the end of the retreat, when we asked the students write wonderful things about each other on a pad of paper we attached to the back of each students, the parents ended up getting involved and writing affirming comments on the students’ backs

because they *got* what we were trying to do – we were trying to tell each student that each one was important; each one had value.

After this activity, we then have the students sit down to read what others wrote about them. We then hand each student “love letters” written by their parents and sponsors, to make a personal appeal to how valuable each student is. Then, for that one moment, that one moment when that shell was broken, each student realizes how much they are loved. Then, when the students enter Church at the end of this retreat, with all these people who wrote letters about them in a worship space that serves as a “full house,” the Mass seems like one from olden days when the church used to be full like this every Sunday, like you might find on a Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday Mass of old.

For posterity’s sake, we recorded the Confirmation Masses for our communities and we put them online for you to watch. We learn and see the power of love that can exist in a community, even for a moment, that Jesus is in our midst. Sad to say, after these Masses return to our mundane lives and often “forget” about the power of that moment that the students are able to experience on retreat. We often forget that, like

that wonderful moment at the end of our Confirmation retreats and Masses, *Jesus is still with us*, right here, right now, in the scriptures, in the Eucharist, in the priest and in the people... we just take that moment for granted. Jesus was here with the students on March 7th and March 14th... *and Jesus is with each of us right now.*

So many times in life, we do not see that love of God because we take that presence for granted and forget about the importance of God standing right next to us. *That* is why these confirmation retreats are so important to tell the students that we care. We care about them and we care about you in God's name, because the Holy Spirit lives in every single one of us. As soon as we open our hearts to that Spirit and let that Spirit shine, then we realize how blessed we truly are, to share that spirit with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.