

Homily

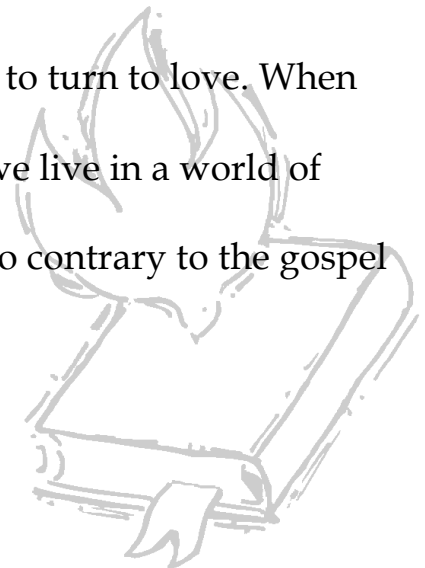
4th Sunday of Advent - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 20-21, 2025

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

Our readings this Sunday reference a really bad king named Ahaz who refused to follow the direction of Isaiah the prophet. He was not going to call upon the Lord. He was not going to ask for God's intervention. He was going to go on it on his own. He believed that he was his own God in a sense. And because of that, Isaiah warned Ahaz of the consequences of living that way. That a new king would arrive, a king named Emanuel, who would come and redeem that which Ahaz had destroyed.

We experience this NEGATIVE message in every age, including this one. When become our own gods, we forget to turn to the to the one God that makes a difference (Dt 6: 4). We forget to turn to love. When we become our own god, then all of a sudden, we live in a world of hate; all of a sudden, the things we do become so contrary to the gospel



message. We end up paralleling the life such as Ahaz – we become NOT worthy to care for anything.

In this story from Isaiah, Ahaz abused his power as so many kings had done before him. When the kings became so corrupt and so contrary to the way of God, they lose what they have. You can make any excuses you want about why things are corrupt in today's age but, in reality, not much is different from the Old Testament times – God tells us that we are responsible for our own destruction when we are unfaithful to the covenant. We are responsible for losing what we have when we do not live a life of love.

That said, when we DO live a life of love, when we let God lead us and guide us instead of being self-directed, when we allow God, this Christ-king, this baby in the manger who has come down on earth to model for us the way we are supposed to live, when we live like him, then we have a chance for eternal life. Because God only allows into heaven those who want to live like God, want to live like Christ, who put away the human values of the world and replace them with values

of love and charity, then what we have been preaching about the Light in the Darkness makes all the sense in the world. I reflect on this theme because God is a God for all people, especially those people who are the “least” in the kingdom and are treated as such, those who are vulnerable and cast out, those people who suffer, those people who need God more because people have taken more from their lives.



For this last Advent reflection of 2025, I would like to focus on what took place a few years ago at St. Patrick’s Church, a week before Christmas. One of our parishioners named Dianne Marcotte approached

me, sharing a tale of suffering concerning a teenage high school senior who was living alone in her apartment. As Dianne shared with us, the teen was having very difficult problems in her life. Just before Dianne approached us, she found out that the teen's mother had decided to move out of the apartment, leaving the high school senior fend for her own. From what I was told, this teenager had to work two couple jobs after school just to keep up with her rent and was really struggling to make ends meet. Without her mother, this teen was off on her own. She was trying to make it, but as a teenage student in high school trying to finish her last year, this teenager desperately needed help.

Dianne was hurting terribly – how could someone do this to a student about to graduate high school? Dianne came to us and asked if there was anything we could do to provide a little light in the darkness of her night. At the time she asked, I was communicating with a few people who had helped us out with all kinds of charitable donations. As all these donations were rolling in for Harbor House, our local Food Pantries, the Centro Vilaseca Daycare Center and the Manteno Veterans'

Home, we had just distributed everything we had to these organizations. We had taken care of the needs of suffering parents, poor families, veterans who had served their countries, all kinds of different causes as well as the food pantries which fed hundreds of people in this area without any kind of recognition whatsoever.

In this particular case, this one teenager who never asked for help, at least not from us, this teenager was suffering. I had never met this girl, nor will I ever meet her. Because of her situation, this teenager lamented with those at her school that could help and those people came to us. Like a good Samaritan, Dianne Marcotte was one of those teachers; she came to us for help. How could we refuse? What is the purpose of celebrating Christmas when this example of why Christ entered the world was asking for help?

As Dianne shared this experience about this high school senior, I had just received a message that he wanted to help people in our community. As a body of Christ, whether the person lives within our parish or outside of it, we are all supposed to work together as members

of the body of Christ to build this kingdom. When we shut people out, we lose an opportunity to learn about love, as became apparent to me from a little Italian Chapel, a pope who embraced a beggar priest, school communities that supported a family from a rival school and a couple of philanthropists who served a good number of people they had never visited.

In this particular case, the person who wanted to help lived in DuPage County. His father came down to visit us in Momence a few years ago, offering plumbing services that should have cost us tens of thousands of dollars to build two bathrooms on the first floor of our parish gymnasium but did the work as a volunteer service to our parish. We had no business building bathrooms on the first floor of our gymnasium; that project would have cost us \$75,000 to do it in the conventional sense. This person's father ended up taking care of all the plumbing in the bathrooms and offering everything out of the kindness of his heart. As a result, the project cost St. Patrick's Church less than

\$10,000 to build these bathrooms for the sake of our seniors, for those who could not climb stairs and for people who had special needs.

The son of this father had heard about what we were doing in our Border Town Parishes and wrote to me, that particular year “What can I do to help your parishes?” As his response, this son chose to donate a whole slew of gift cards and gifts that he had received in the past but had never used – he figured he could all the gifts he accumulated but did not use and offer those gifts to our parishes. Whether it be kitchen appliances, furniture or a whole slew of gift cards, son Josh dumped “the motherload” on our parishes by driving down to St. Patrick’s in Momence and laying all these gifts under our parish Christmas Tree.

When Dianne Marcotte approached us with this tragic story, at least to us, the one way we could provide a glimmer of light to a teenager in need *was to give her everything that son Josh had given to us*. We asked Dianne to visit to the rectory one week before Christmas before school closed for the break, we bundled everything Josh gave us that was

placed under our office Christmas tree and presented it all together so Dianne could give it to this teenager.

All of a sudden in the office, when Dianne saw what we were about to do for this teenager, she began to cry. When Dianne cried, our parish secretary began to cry. When the secretary cried, everyone in the office started crying because at that moment when somebody felt like they were lost and something this good could happen for the sake of another to show symbolically that we care, at that moment everyone's in the office were breaking in love. For that one moment, those in our rectory office saw through the obstacles of life, through the clouds of life that can prevent any of us from seeing the Lord and all of us sudden, a light shone through.

Because of a kind act from an outsider who did not know practically anyone in our community (except for me), people saw that in that one moment a ray of light in the form of a good person who wanted to do something good for a member of our area who really needed a light in the darkness.

After the crying subsided (please – *do not cry* in front of this priest... I break down easily), Dianne took the gift cards, the furniture and these kitchen appliances and brought them to the apartment where this teenager was living alone. After the girl stopped crying (and Dianne cried again), she asked who provided all these things to her. Dianne did not tell her because I never told Dianne who gave all these gifts.

I never found out what happened to the teenager, but I would like to hope that she knew for that one moment during that one Christmas season, she was not alone. For me, this was the best gift we can give at Christmas – faith and hope, packaged in great love. The gifts did not come with accolades, they did not come with the noisy gongs and the clanging symbols, but in the quiet of the night, we were able to do something for a person in need that has inspired me to do the same when we received truckloads of food for the needy in our area and we were able to distribute that food to a great many hungry individuals in our communities.

Similar to this teenager, those we feed have not been recognized; we have no idea who they are. We do these acts because this is God's command – "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13: 34-35). Every person is created in God's image through God's likeness. Every person is special.

For that reason, we pray at Mass today to realize that when we quietly offer this love, when we kindly extend ourselves for the sake of the other, so much good can happen. For this teenage girl, knowing that an outsider can do so much good for us if we open our hearts and let the outsider come in, I would like to conclude today's homily with a prayer for families that was offered by Pope Francis some years ago, which is our ultimate gift this Christmas season, especially to the young people of the world who think we do not care, that no one cares for them, even though we very much do. We pray for the youth of our world so their hearts might be opened to allow this Messiah to lead them and guide them to the greatest gift that they could ever receive the gift of eternal life. So we pray today...

A PRAYER FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, to you we turn in humble prayer. Look with favor upon all young people, bearers of hope for the Church and the world. Jesus Christ, companion of youth and young adults, bless the paths of discovery and discernment, through times of joy and experiences of hardship, with the constant love and support of your Church. Jesus Christ, alive in the hearts of all your people, grant that we may “journey together, young and old... to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophesies and enable hope to blossom.” * Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all humankind, open our hearts to encounter all young people, to accompany and be in community together, and as one Church, embark upon our holy mission. Jesus Christ, in the company of the Father and the Holy Spirit, graciously hear our prayer and be with us forevermore. Amen. – Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 19

This our prayer.