

Homily
5th Sunday of Easter – A

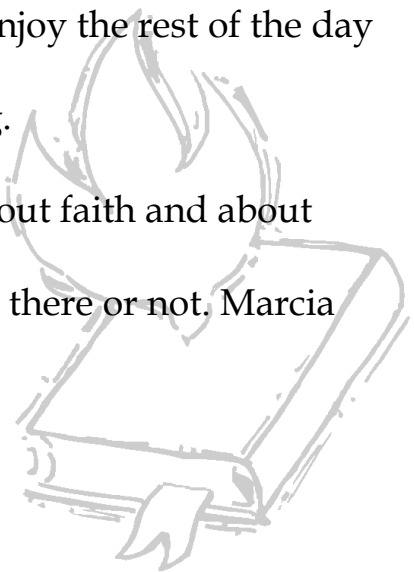
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 02-03, 2026

Acts 6: 1-7
Ps 33: 1-2, 4-5, 18-19
1 Pt 2: 4-9
Jn 14: 1-12

I preface this family by telling you that one of the parishioners at St. Patrick's named Marcia Tedford passed away a few months ago in late January; her funeral took place at St. Patrick's in early February. Marsha attended our daily Masses very faithfully; she was that devoted. Marcia was a parishioner at St. Patrick's; her daughter Jackie Bruhn is a parishioner at St. Anne's Church.

When I asked the family to share stories about Marcia's life with me, I remember Jackie telling me that her routine remained the same. Each day, Marcia would wake up, attend Mass at St. Patrick's, go to breakfast at a place in town called Yanni's, return home, enjoy the rest of the day and then wash, dry and repeat the next morning.

Marcia and I often had long conversations about faith and about heaven, and about whether she was going to get there or not. Marcia



kept asking me, “Am I worthy? Am I loved? Will I get to heaven?”

When Marcia kept asking me those questions, I thought to myself, “Are *any of us* worthy to get to heaven?” According to what I understand about the faith, if you really think about it, few of us are worthy to get to heaven but God offers that gift to a select few anyway who live a humble life and allow God to carry them the rest of the way.

I came to realize that, on a daily basis, Marcia really was having a struggle wondering if she would make it to the other side, as many of us do. When we think about the mortality issues of life, we ask the same questions that went as far back (and beyond that) to Babylonian times and the Epic of Gilgamesh, an all-powerful leader who realized he was going to die just like everyone else and struggled reconciling with the fact that he was going to die.

I mention all of this because when I celebrated Marcia’s funeral, I was thinking about her daughter Jackie and all the wonderful souls that attended that Mass. As I celebrated this funeral with all the good people who honored this woman’s memory, I was thinking about how Marcia,

when she was saying to me, “Will anyone remember what I have done or how I have been?” Hopefully, Marcia glanced to during that moment on her way to the other side of life and saw those who paid their respect to a person that they loved. Marcia had idiosyncrasies – we all do! – and I suspect that if we focus on those idiosyncrasies and judge a person exclusively on the odd or off-putting things that someone else does, then we doom ourselves, knowing full well that God will treat us in the same way we treat others.

During that funeral Mass, I was thinking about how much effort daughter Jackie had made in making sure that that funeral was a special one for her mother. The month of the funeral, I had time to speak to a sweetheart of a woman named Ruth Thornton, who sat next to Marcia constantly at the morning liturgy, who would pray with her and build a relationship with her, and very much-loved Marcia Tedford. Just before Easter, Ruth pulled me and asked if we are still praying for Marcia. I told her, “of course we are, just as Marcia is praying for us.” It was then that Ruth asked if she could give me a blessing after I gave her one –

outside of the sacraments, which might have been my great highlight during Holy Week this year. I was told that Ruth blessed a great number of people in our Church - Ruth took her life experience and channeled that through the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of those she encountered.

On Easter Vigil morning while I was blessing the baskets of food to be served on Easter morning, I was talking to a group of Hispanic ladies who had come to get their baskets blessed and they said to me, "Father, do you know where Marcia Tedford is buried?" I replied, "If I am correct, she is buried over at St. Patrick's Cemetery and directed them to Cotter Funeral Home and the local sexton of our cemetery, Roger



"Bones" Hess. On our parish website, you can access the layout of both parishes' cemeteries, where information is given to you about the exact locations of every person

buried in each cemetery. The former director of Catholic Cemeteries named Richard Tapella helped us with this project a few years ago.

The Hispanic ladies then asked me, “Do you think it would be okay if we went over and prayed for Marcia on Easter weekend?” I was taken back by this request – I did not know the ladies knew Marcia that well nor did I ever think they wanted to visit her grave to pray with her. The ladies even gave me a picture of them posing with Marcia at one of our morning liturgies. I did not know how close the ladies were to Marcia and how Marcia felt about them until I saw that picture.

All of this really affected me during Holy Week, because while the ladies were talking to me about Marcia, I recalled the questions Marcia asked me. “Do you think God loves me? Does anybody care about me? Will anybody remember me?” During my reflection on this during Holy Week, I thought about how Marcia’s daughter Jackie felt about her, how Ruth Thornton felt about her and how a group of Hispanic ladies that got to know Marcia during their years here at the parish felt about her. If Marcia really paid attention to the love that was directed her way, then

she could have answered her own questions from those who loved her every time she entered our Church.

What really gives me hope is that there is a great deal of love in the world that we take for granted. Marcia was loved. Marcia had this good heart; Marcia also had her idiosyncrasies, as we all do. Even though Marcia “put on that shell” that I reference during teen retreats, hiding the love and fear that lived within, deep down Marcia wanted to be close to God and wanted to be close to this community... and she was, even if she could not see that love herself.

What a blessing that many from this community here at St. Patrick’s, and even with her family at St. Anne’s, really cared about this woman, months after she left this world; Marcia has not been forgotten.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... (for) I am the way and the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” - Jn 14: 1-2, 6

To experience how this community cared for that particular individual who thought that no one would remember her, it really stirs

my heart to see this kind of response for a member of our community. This response of love makes me reflect about *all* the other members of our community, those who feel they might be forgotten, that people might have dismissed, or people metaphorically crucified because of who they are or how they live.

During Holy Week, I received a call about a gentleman named William Brown; as you might know, his brother David passed away a couple of months ago and we celebrated his funeral Mass a short while ago. David was responsible for providing me with the prayers of the St. Anne Novena that have been used at the Church for years prior to my arrival. William was suffering because he and David lived together for so long and they depended on each other. William had lived with his brother for decades, and after his brother's passing, now what was William going to do?

As we celebrated the funeral Mass for David, William's family wheeled him up to the front of church next to his brother. At the funeral, we gave William a special, preferential treatment at the Mass. What I

remember about David is that first, he and his family were responsible for bringing me the text for the St. Anne Novena that had been used for decades at this Church and second, that his family wanted to support William during the loss of his brother and friend.

I was making a joke during that particular funeral, that the nurse who was taking care of David was kind enough to bring a thirty-cup pot of coffee into David's room for the family to share. William told me that he and David would drink a 30-cup pot of coffee in about forty-five minutes and that the pot was not big enough for the family. I am not sure that drinking thirty cups of coffee in forty-five minutes is such a good idea – Lord knows I have enough food and drink problems in my own life – but nevertheless, to have those kind of stories and to remember our loved ones, as much as we do, gives me hope in the world that you are loved, especially by those we do not recognize but are praying for us on a daily basis.

I also remember that at the cemetery, William was not able to leave the car to pray for his brother because of his condition. I remember that

when the family informed me that David's brother and close friend was remaining in the car during those prayers, I made a point to sit with William in the car with him in the back seat and me in front of him in the driver's seat and I celebrated the Rite of Committal in the car for William's sake before I repeated the prayers at the graveside.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... (for) I am the way and the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." - Jn 14: 1-2, 6

In today's first reading, we recall in the Acts of the Apostles how St. Stephen was willing to sacrifice his life for that cause. We talked about St. Stephen during our Lenten Reflections this year, when we focused on him and so many others were reviled, despite their great faith.

What really helps me is that there are so many people in our cemeteries who have stories to learn and how we could grow in faith if we actually paid attention to those stories. This is what I do in my university students; I have them go out to the cemeteries to learn the stories of the people who have died. Students tell me that many graves

they visit do not look like someone has tended to them for such a long time. Maybe those people, like Marcia Tedform, might think that they seemingly are forgotten. Then the students do research on these good souls (there is a website called "Findagrave.com," that really is helpful in this cause). One student wrote a reflection on this project that parallels what so many of them wrote about this activity. The person said...

I originally thought that this assignment was going to be boring and did not see the value in it. After actually completing the assignment I realize that I was wrong. The feelings I had while walking through the cemetery alone helped me learn something about myself

Overall, my experience at the cemetery and talking to my neighbor who is a grave digger it was a good learning experience. It gave me more of an appreciation to the life I am living and that when things are bad they could always be worse. I saw a lot of United States of America flags which made me appreciate those who died fighting for my rights that I am able to have on US soil. It also reminded me that tomorrow is never promised and I tend to get caught up in life simply just being on the go all the time. This showed me that I need to take a step back at times to enjoy life and all of the little things that life has to offer.

All in all this was a very interesting experience for me. Never did I think I would take a day to go to a cemetery and walk around with one of my friends. Especially when I did not have anyone there to visit. But, I would not say that I regret doing something like this.

Some of these people may not have people visiting their graves and in a way we got to honor them. The more people I found, the more I wanted to learn about their story

Overall, this was a very interesting visit as this cemetery is right down the street from my house and I have never visited it before. Unfortunately, I have been to quite a few cemeteries in my lifetime, but I have never studied them as I did this time. It is interesting, and of course sad, to look at cemeteries on a deeper and more personal level and to realize that there was a once a living, breathing person under each headstone you pass.

I also wanted to reference a quote from Ed Laurent, another “idiosyncratic” resident of St. Anne’s, who funeral took place this weekend. Say what you will about Ed, he left a quote that resonated enough with his family that the family shared the quotation with me. He wrote, “The most enduring task one can undertake in his or her human life is to challenge oneself, mentally and physically, to accomplish goals that result in being a positive benefit to one’s family or to mankind.

Ed was right and could have taught Marcia the following – Marcia was loved. *You* are loved – our beloved deceased certainly are loved; we are in this life of faith together. the community of saints, living in debt. Even when I am celebrating Masses alone, I am not alone – according to

Church teaching, I am celebrating this Mass with the “Communion of Saints,” which now includes Marcia Bedford. Hopefully, Marcia is making her way to heaven through our prayer, and we are helping her out by praying the same rosaries for her as she did for us prior to Mass and during our Mass intentions, where we perpetually remember the faithful departed.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace. Amen.

May their soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the
mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

May the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, keep your
hearts and minds and the knowledge in the love of God and of our
Jesus Christ.

May almighty God bless you, protect you, and be with you always in
the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

This is our prayer.