

Homily - Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

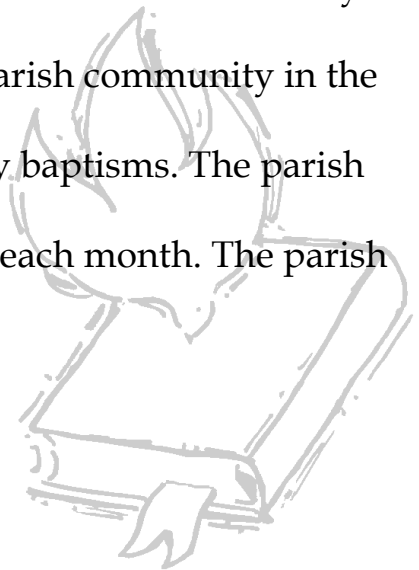
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 8-9, 2025

Ez 47: 1-2, 8-9, 12
Ps 46: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9
1 Cor 3: 9c-11, 16-17
Jn 2: 13-22



A month or so ago, I was asked to celebrate a funeral Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Joliet, IL. At the Church's founding, the parish ministered to the German community in Joliet but as time passed into the 1960s and 70s, a huge influx of Hispanic folks had populated the area

Today, Mount Carmel Church, which is an institution that is led by the Carmelite community, by far is the largest parish community in the city. Each month, the parish celebrates over forty baptisms. The parish celebrates multiple weddings and quinceañeras each month. The parish



community has become so large that they have three or four funerals sometimes every week and the priests cannot keep up with all the services.

Periodically I am asked to drive up to Joliet and celebrate services in Spanish at Mt. Carmel, whether it be baptisms or funerals and such to try to assist the priests who are really struggling to keep up with the workload. The parish offers a great number of sacraments but are limited in the number of priests who can speak the language so I do my best to help out the parish when I can.

When I served in Joliet, I actually did some research concerning the Diocese of Joliet and its history. Since I was pastor of the oldest parish in the diocese (St. Patrick's, Joliet), I came to learn that when the first parish was established in 1938 (namely, MINE!), one bishop (Most Rev. Gabriel Brute) from the Diocese of Vincennes in Indiana (now the Archdiocese of Indianapolis) was assisted by four priests who covered the entire state of Indiana and the eastern third of Illinois (which included the Chicagoland area before it was established as a diocese in 1843). The percentage of priests to parishioners back in 1838 is about the

same as it is now because now we have so many people living in Illinois but we also have so few priests; we really do have to keep praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, not to disparage our clergy but to build them up! (If we do not, we are not going to have priests for these sacraments and then we are not going to have parishes).

When I drove over to Mount Carmel Church in Joliet,, I noticed that when the new church building was established, it initially was a Jewel Food Store which was purchased by Most Reverend Joseph L. Imesch for one million dollars. Bishop Imesch offered the building as a diocesan gift to the people of Mount Carmel Church, with the instructions that the parishioners of Mt. Carmel were to take ownership of the building and renovate the inside of the building to make it look like a church.

Literally the next day after the building was purchased, a whole slew of Hispanic workers entered the newly purchased building with their construction equipment and renovated the inside of the church into its current form. As time progressed (and that is what twenty years ago), the people of Mt. Carmel decided that they wanted to renovate the outside of the building to make it look more like a church.

As a result, the parish is conducting a two million dollar capital campaign to put a new façade in the front of their building because they wanted to give it more of a church type feel. By far, they have the largest attended Masses during the week at that particular location so it makes sense that the faithful want a church that *looks* like a church, thus the new façade. The faithful want to feel like where they pray is a holy and sacred place and not just a grocery store where they happen to celebrate Mass.

I feel blessed that we do not have a two million dollar capital campaign. I feel blessed that we have accomplished so much with so little. Every parish that needs to upgrade their facilities like we do, to maintain what they have and sometimes to begin capital campaigns for projects that need to get done, is very time consuming and often very stressful for the staff and the parishioners. As with all buildings in life, once you build them, then you have to maintain them.

As a result, we end of having to address the non-glamorous issues in life like Mt. Carmel does, whether it be the plumbing or the heating or the electrical. For any building (house, business or church), you have to

take maintain the roof and the tuckpointing and the garden and the maintenance around the landscaping. If we care about the buildings we have, then we need to keep up with those repairs and upgrades for those buildings that serve us.

We also realize that when we forget to maintain our Churches, our property but most importantly *our faith*, then we lose what we have... and this happens everywhere. People forget about God; people forget about the importance of keeping God in our lives to lead us and guide us. People forget that God's house is a symbol of our faith and what respect we give the faith.

Then, if hates takes over love, is that we become self-directed instead of letting God lead us and guide us and then these buildings lose their purpose and their value and, all of a sudden, the buildings that are symbols of hope and God's love crumble metaphorically or otherwise.

The message is the same in Joliet as it is here at St. Anne's or at St. Patrick's in Momence. Eventually, whether we like to hear this or not, the buildings are going to eventually to crumble no matter what we do; the buildings are going to be torn down or the buildings will crumble

due to natural disasters, wars, hate or whatever excuse might come up. We have learned that even the four major basilicas in Rome (St. John Lateran, the first and most important of the four basilicas, St. Paul Outside the Walls of Rome, the Basilica of St. Mary Major, and of course, the Basilica of St. Peter), have been built, have been torn down and have been rebuilt again for all kinds of reasons. All four of those basilicas have evolved through all kinds of transformations and constantly they have to be renovated.

Every time I travel to Rome, one of the four basilicas is going through some type of construction. Even in Rome, these buildings need constant maintenance, knowing very well that one day each of them will fall.



I was thinking about Notre Dame Basilica in Indiana as well all the other basilicas and churches throughout the world that have been destroyed by natural disasters or by wars or whatever it may be, and how they seemingly take forever to rebuild, if they are rebuilt at all. I was thinking about the architect and

designer Antoni Gaudí, who began construction on the Basilica of the Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) in Barcelona, Spain around 1890. His design of the building was spectacular – the building project was coming along but slow-going.

Then, in 1927 Gaudí died and the basilica project remained stagnant for almost a hundred years. It was not until the 1990s that the country of Spain decided to continue the work that Gaudí had begun 100 years prior, hoping to complete the project by the 100th Anniversary of his death in 2027. Alas, the contractors realized they were probably not going to finish the project by then.

That said, if you have ever been over to visit that basilica (I had the opportunity to visit it twice), you will encounter an absolutely spectacular place of worship. The eighteen spirals outside the buildings are meant to represent the twelve apostles, the Evangelists, St. Paul, our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. There is so much symbolism behind all that structure in Spain that is a wonder to behold.

I was thinking about where I went to visit the miraculous staircase in New Mexico a year or so ago. The miraculous staircase of a church that

no longer is being used; the diocese of Albuquerque realized no matter how beautiful the church was, maintaining it became really difficult. So, a new church building was erected next to the church with the miraculous staircase and the diocese sold the older church with the spiral staircase to new owners. Now, the old church is being maintained by a secular organization (which is kind of like what is happening at St. Rose in Kankakee).

We realize that these buildings are very fickle, very feeble, very vulnerable and eventually are going to fall down. That said, the temple of our body is much different. If we believe in Christ, then on the last day Christ is going to raise our temples up as he did his on the third day.

The concept of “Church” is not about the building; it is about the people. And if the people are strong, if the people are living the faith, then the Church continues to grow on earth (but will never collapse – this is God’s institution, mind you!). When two or more are gathered in God’s name, there is Church (Mt 18: 20)! That is the gospel message; we realize that we should never take our buildings for granted but more

importantly, we should never take our people for granted. We should never take God for granted; God is in every single consecrated Catholic church within that tabernacle and that tabernacle lamp shines God's presence in that church making every Church just as sacred as the basilicas in Rome because every tabernacle with God inside is God's house.

As Jesus tells us, if we have respect for the temple of our bodies and the temple of others, then that body will rise on the last day as Jesus did on the third day. That is why we need to hold on to Christ. That is why we have to stop focusing on the human things so much and focus on what is divine and how God is the only way possible to get to heaven. Let us realize the message that God presents to us in every consecrated church with every tabernacle containing the presence of God. Let share that message of hope with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.