

Homily

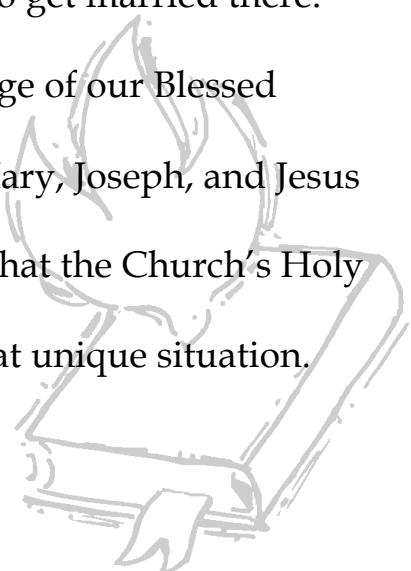
Holy Family - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 27-28, 2025

Sir 3: 2-6, 12-14
Ps 128: 1-2, 3, 4-5
Col 3: 12-21
Mt 2: 13-15, 19-23

On the weekend on which I am preaching this particular homily, I am celebrating two, count them, *two* wedding liturgies here at St. Patrick's Church, a few days before Christmas. I love Christmas weddings because instead of the bride presenting her flowers to the statue of the Blessed Mother or the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe after communion, some couples prefer to offer their flowers to image within the nativity with Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus.

Some time ago during the time when we were kind of locked into our homes and we were not allowed to leave, there was one parish in Indiana that allowed one of the couples I knew to get married there. Because the nativity stable was blocking the image of our Blessed Mother in the church, the couple went over to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus and knelt in front of that nativity to pray to ask that the Church's Holy Family would take care of them, especially in that unique situation.



Since that time, this couple has had two children and have asked me to baptize one of them, which I am going to do on December 29.



In the course of the ministry I do, I have celebrated what others might consider, "Modern Family" marriages, the unconventional ones that are valid and legal to do but not necessarily following the path that our conventional marriages happen. Sometimes I celebrate marriages for couples that might be fearful, considering the current political climate. Sometimes I celebrated weddings where "the cart is before the horse," if you know what I mean.

For me at least, whenever I can get help to make what might seem like the impossible possible (thanks to Fr. Joe Tapella from the Diocesan Tribunal Office for helping me with these along the way), I was thinking about both couples who are getting married this weekend at the parishes I serve. One of these couples told me that because there was a previous marriage involved, the difficulties of getting an annulment and the fact that this could was dealing with immigration issues, they also shared with me how blessed they were that one of their daughters just graduated from the University of Notre Dame and the other daughter just graduated from Kankakee Community College; both seem to be doing very well and the parents wanted their marriage and their children to do right by God. (Note: I do not do politics; I do faith. I minister to the person in front of me, no matter who that person is. My responsibility is to share God's love to make sure that people know who come to me know that they are welcomed and they are loved.)

Frankly, because I started Hispanic ministry three times in three different parishes in my almost thirty years as a priest, there is a great deal of fear in the communities I serve for obvious reasons, if you

understand the current political climate. I try to reassure those I serve that my responsibility is to love them in God's name and NOT to be afraid. In the course of the ministry I offer, I often discuss two types of fear that exist in the world – the fear of what happens when you do something wrong and fear retribution and the fear of love that when you stand in front of somebody with whom you dearly care, your knees are shaking and your body is trembling, when you are so in love with the other that you do not want to spend any other time with anyone else... THAT is a kind of fear as well. That love is a kind of fear we should have for God, that God loves us so much, that God is willing to give his life so that we have a chance to live.

So I celebrate the weddings of these two couples, telling them that they are loved and we care for them in God's name. In addition, I also take care of a great number of annulments for those in our communities. I celebrate a great number of "Modern Family" weddings as well. We anoint the faithful every month, where other priests may not. I offer these anointings to show our faithful that they are special and they are not alone.



**SANDRA LEE
“SANDY” DOLL
July 17, 1947 –
December 26, 2025**

**Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let your
perpetual light shine upon her...**

In this light, I reminisced about a couple people in our community who are actively dying. One is named Sandra. She asked me to visit her in the hospital just recently; she was not doing well. She said to me, “Father, will you please make sure that you celebrate my funeral liturgy when I pass away?” I replied by saying, “Absolutely.” I said to her, “Do not fear. We will take care of you.” Even though when Sandy died her family did not honor her request for a proper funeral, I spoke to the siblings and we will make sure we do memorial Masses and during the summertime when all the family can get together; we will do a proper funeral liturgy for Sandra and her family. In addition, I promised

Sandra that I would remember her at the Masses I celebrate, which I certainly will do with the Online Masses.



There was another person named Ruth Rehmer, 96 years old. Her nephew John Rehmer, our Director of Religious Education, would bring his aunt communion faithfully every Sunday because he loved his aunt that much. Ruth wanted to be here at the parish to celebrate these Masses with us but because of her age and her condition, she could not. do this. When Ruth passed, I told the family that Ruth represented so many in our parish that love her Church “from a distance” and prayed constantly for the benefit of our community.

I just received a card from one of my other parishioners who lives in Manteno who watches these online masses through her iPad (and we know who you are!). At our Online Masses, we constantly tell her how much we think about her. At Christmastime, this person sent me a card and said, "Thank you for celebrating these Online Masses." During the Online Masses, I mention how she and so many others around the world (including good souls from the Philippines, India and Australia) are praying with us in our little slice of heaven. All of us are in solidarity by celebrating these Masses together Online because they know, and you know, that you are not alone. We love you very much that we extend ourselves out at these Online Masses.

When my father actively was dying at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, he said to me, "Make sure you do not abandon my wife and my child when I did." My own mother died in an auto accident back in 1988. My father remarried a few years later and his wife Maria added thirty years to his life so he could raise a second family in yet another "Modern Family" wedding. When my father had suffered with cancer during the last few years of his life, his wife Maria remained

dedicated to staying by his side and taking care of him, come what may.

My father said to me, "Please make sure that you do not abandon Maria and my son." This is the first reading from Sirach – you love your father all the days of his life. You take care of him, no matter what happens. You may not agree with him; you may not always walk the same path as him, but you love him.

When my father died on February 14, 2021, I kept that promise. I still visit the family every week. My dog spends more time with them than she does with me because that is the point – you make sure you care for the ones you are commissioned to love.

I think about these examples of family because in today's gospel reading, Joseph was fearful that Herod was going to kill his son along with any two-year-old or younger in Bethlehem, trying to get rid of this new savior, this new Messiah. As a result, Joseph fled with his wife and child to Egypt and settled in Nazareth because of his fear. I think about these scripture readings where St. Paul tells us in Colossians, "Do not be fearful. Whatever you do in word and in deed, do in the name of the Lord." I think about people who are dying and the funeral liturgies

which I celebrate for them. In addition to the two wedding liturgies I celebrated on December 20, there also were two funeral liturgies I celebrated the week prior to Christmas as well.

When I celebrate funeral liturgies, my “default” gospel reading comes from the one according to John (Jn 14: 1-6), where Jesus says to his apostles, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God. Have faith in me also. For in my Father’s house there are many dwelling places... For I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” If God is with us, we are still going to have the problems of the world. If God is with us, we still are going to have to be fearful of what people are going to do to us because of the gospel message. That said, *if God is with us, then we are never alone.*

I was just writing to one of my colleagues across the pond this week. I told him that what I am doing at the parishes I serve is not easy; what I am doing is fraught with danger. What I am doing has consequences because like John the Baptist, I decided to take a stand and as a result, metaphorically or otherwise, I am going to lose my head to the bishop’s office (I never said I would be obedient to mortal sin, which seems lately

to be their way of life). Regardless of what happens, I also know that God walks with me every step of the journey. Not that the sad things are not going to happen, but if we keep God close to us, then we are not alone. As long as God is in our hearts and as long as we know we are doing this out of a spirit of love, then God will lead us and guide us. If this is our disposition, then we have peace, knowing that we are doing right by God and doing right by our family to take care of our moms and dads and our metaphorical children and our communities that we serve.

For this reason, we need to tell those around us, "Do not be afraid, for God is with you always until the end of the age (Mt 28: 18-20)." "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith also in me" (John 14: 1-6). I tell wedding couples that when two are bound together, let no man separate (Mk 10: 9). My role is to represent God and the community in your lives, through these sacraments, and I will do what I can to take care of the people who are here and who are cared for and who want God's love. That is what a holy family is about. No matter what happens, we will always have our differences, and people will

always be mad at us and the world will hate us for what we do. As long as we follow the admonition from St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians today, the words that are used every time we end the blessing of a house and a home with the holy water and the salt and whatever we use to put God's presence in that house in a special way.

Please know that these words stay with me that should also stay with you. "Let the peace of Christ control your hearts. The peace in which you were called to be one body. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as in wisdom you teach and admonish one another. And whatever you do, in word and in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3: 12-21). Give thanks to God. Give thanks to the Son who gives us the Holy Spirit to bond the human family and to share that Spirit with the people that we meet. God bless all of you. This is our prayer.