

Homily
Holy Thursday - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 02, 2026

Ex 12: 1-8, 11-14
Ps 116: 12-13, 15-16, 17-18
1 Cor 11: 23-26
Jn 13: 1-15

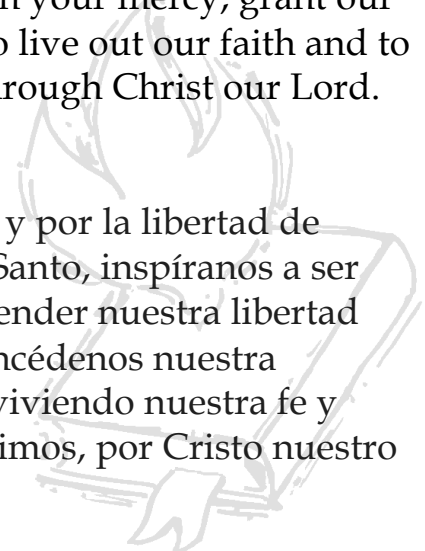
**JOSEPH CARDINAL
ZEN ZE-KIU, SDB**

Rite of Bishop



Loving Father, thank you for the gift of life and for the freedom to love and worship you. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, inspire us to be your witnesses. Grant us the courage to boldly and joyfully stand in protection of our freedom. In your mercy, grant our religious freedom so that we may continue to live out our faith and to transform the world into which we all live through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Padre amoroso, gracias por el don de la vida y por la libertad de amarte y adorarte. Por el poder del Espíritu Santo, inspíranos a ser tus testigos. Concédenos la valentía para defender nuestra libertad con audacia y alegría. En tu misericordia, concédenos nuestra libertad religiosa, para que podamos seguir viviendo nuestra fe y transformando el mundo en el que todos vivimos, por Cristo nuestro



Señor. Amén.

In no way am I able to understand how the Church has endured in various countries throughout the world, knowing full well that various figures and institutions within human history often does whatever is possible to destroy. Just like all of you, I read about the situation in Israel in the Middle East and how that particular land has suffered greatly for thousands of years because people could not find peace with each other.

At the University of St. Francis, I often reference the story of St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and Islamic Sultan Malik al-Kamil (1177-1238) were able to become friends when, during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204) St. Francis travelled to Jerusalem to try to make peace with the Sultan. As some historians tell the story, the Sultan first had the intentions of killing Francis of Assisi but then, after meeting St. Francis, actually made friends with the man. For that one brief moment in history, there was a moment of peace within a country torn by war, both then and now.

Throughout different parts of the world, we encounter the same struggles with this particular subject. So, for me to talk about Joseph Cardinal Zen and what he has had to endure is not easy to do and certainly is fraught with danger. I also know that in the world of ethics, in the world of morals, that the law provides the minimal set of parameters by which we live so that people can get along with each other but if you are a person of faith, if you are a person of ethics, we go beyond the law and we do what is right according to our divine creator.

To find peace in an often-hostile world, to embrace faith during times of suffering, is not easy. If you decide to go beyond the law to live the life, there is going to be a response and usually that response is not good.

Take Jesus from 2,000 years ago. Jesus knew that by revealing himself to be the Father's Son that he would have to deal with the world the way it was, a world that would not accept what the Son revealed to us... and the Son was nailed to a cross for it. So, what does Jesus do? Instead of hiding, instead of putting himself out of harm's way, the Father's Son

remains in the garden of Gethsemane, and he reveals to his apostles what they need to do after he leaves the world. First, the Father's Son washed their feet (as we read in today's gospel) and instructed them to do the same. As history shows us, eleven of the twelve apostles that learned that lesson also endured the consequences of holding on to this faith by losing their lives.

We commemorate Holy Thursday and Good Friday with an empty tabernacle to remind ourselves of what happens when God is not with us. Without God in our lives, we are lost and Churches in today's age become just as empty as the tabernacle in Church because people turn to the gods of this world instead of the Son of God who can get us to heaven. Without God, we are like lambs to the slaughter and that is the way of the world.

We also learn in the Gospel of John that as those baby lambs were being slaughtered 2,000 years ago in preparation for the Passover in the Gospel of John, this was the same time that Jesus was also sacrificed on the cross. That parallel from the sacrifice of the lambs to the sacrifice

with the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” is a testimony of what so many martyrs were willing to do to uphold a faith that has been challenged throughout the centuries, throughout millennia.

What God was willing to do so that we could get to heaven and for us to be able to proclaim that freely and without coercion is a blessing that we have in the United States. There are many people who would disagree with what we are doing today and these three days. Many people do not believe in what we are doing these three days yet, nevertheless, we still celebrate these three days because we go beyond the law. In this faith, we go beyond the physical senses, and we realize there is something more to life than death, there is something more to faith that goes beyond just following the rules of society.

In this faith, we are put on this earth for a reason. We are put on this earth because God is testing us to see how we will respond to the ways of temptation. How will we fight off the devil? God has done everything

possible to bring us back to the faith, despite us being unwilling so often to follow God.

As a result of this disobedience, we chose to leave the Garden of Eden. God wants to bring us back to that metaphorical garden; he *wants* to lead us to heaven. The Father's Son was willing to endure the pains and sufferings of Our Original Sin and pay the price for our weakness so we would have a chance to join God for the rest of our existences.

As a result of defending this faith, many martyrs throughout the world, so many people have sacrificed to defend this faith, including Joseph Cardinal Zen. How do we find a way to bring peace in the world and live the life of faith, knowing full well of what would happen if we did, if he did? The question remains for us - are we willing to do the same? Are we willing to promote religious liberty to defend the teachings of the faith, knowing full well of the opposition that results from us living this life?

I wish to offer this Mass for all the previous pastors and religious that have served St. Anne's and St. Patrick's, the Clerics of St. Viator and the diocesan priests and the various religious who have walked through the doors of these churches and the homes of our parishioners, past and present. We pray for those individuals who are willing to make that sacrifice to take the promises and vows of poverty, chastity, obedience (and in some cases, cloister and silence) as well as so many other sacrifices because they believed that much in what God has done for us and has done for them.

What are you and I willing to do during this Sacred Triduum and beyond? The three days have been set aside so that we put more focus on God. Yet, there are a lot of people that take this faith for granted, who attack this religious liberty we have been afforded and so many within the faith (and those outside of it) take for granted. The people who invest in the Church, the people who celebrate these Masses with us, in other words, you and me... sometimes we understand what we are doing here and sometimes we do not. However, there are so many

people who try to drive us away from the places of faith and living this life that we kind of forget about what these three days represent. which is why we have to have a stronger resolve to live this faith and to be true to God.

I wanted to conclude this particular homily on holy Thursday the start of our Sacred Triduum by offering a prayer of religious liberty that was presented by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops who support and love our Church, who, in a small way, support those like Cardinal Zen who have sacrificed their lives so much for the cause of the faith. For me, this prayer is a reminder to be true to God, to realize that the world may not agree with what we are doing but we are not supposed to be of this world. Jesus says this in the Gospel of John, Chapter 18. If this were my world, the world would stand up for the Father's Son, but as it is, this is not God's world. Jesus *wants* to lead us to the new Promised Land, the Jerusalem in heaven. To conclude this homily, we offer this prayer as the starting point for us to embrace that new path that our Lord has established for us.

OH GOD, OUR CREATOR,
from your provident hand,
we have received our right to life, liberty,
and the pursuit of happiness.
You have called us as your people
and have given us the right and duty
to worship you, the only true God
and your son Jesus Christ.
Through the power and working
of your Holy Spirit,
you call us to live out our faith
in the midst of the world,
bringing the light and the living truth
to the of the gospel to every corner of society.

We ask you bless us in our vigilance
for the gift of religious liberty.
Give us the strength of mind and heart
to readily defend our freedoms
when they are threatened.
Give us courage in making our voices heard
on behalf of the rights of your Church
and the freedom of conscience of all people of faith.

Grant, we pray, oh Heavenly Father,
a clear and united voice
to all of your sons and daughters gathered in your Church
in the decisive hour of the history of our nation.
So that with every trial withstood
and every danger to come,
for the sake of our children, our grandchildren,
and all who come after us, the great land
will always be one nation under God,

indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OH SEÑOR, CREADOR NUESTRO,

de tu mano bondadosa hemos recibido
el derecho a la vida, a la libertad y a la
búsqueda de la felicidad.

Tú nos has hecho tu pueblo y nos has dado
el derecho y el deber de venerarte a ti,
único Dios verdadero, y a tu Hijo, Jesucristo.
Por el poder y la obra del Espíritu Santo,
nos llamas a vivir nuestra fe en el mundo
llevando la luz y la palabra salvadora del Evangelio
todos los confines de la sociedad.

Te pedimos nos bendigas mientras cuidamos
del don de la libertad religiosa.

Danos fortaleza de mente y corazón para
estar siempre dispuestos a defender
nuestras libertades cuando son amenazadas.

Danos valentía para que se escuchen nuestras voces
en defensa de los derechos de tu Iglesia,
y de la libertad de conciencia de todas las personas de fe.

Te pedimos, Oh Padre celestial, que
en esta hora decisiva de la historia de nuestra nación,
y reunidos en tu Iglesia,
des a todos tus hijos e hijas una voz clara y unida
para que con cada prueba que encaremos,
y cada peligro que superemos,
– por el bien de nuestros hijos, de nuestros nietos,
y de todos los que vengan después de nosotros –
este gran país sea siempre “una nación, bajo Dios,
indivisible, con libertad y justicia para todos”.

Te lo pedimos por Jesucristo, Nuestro Señor.
Amén.

This is our prayer.