

Homily

Holy Thursday - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

April 17, 2025

Ex 12: 1-8, 11-14

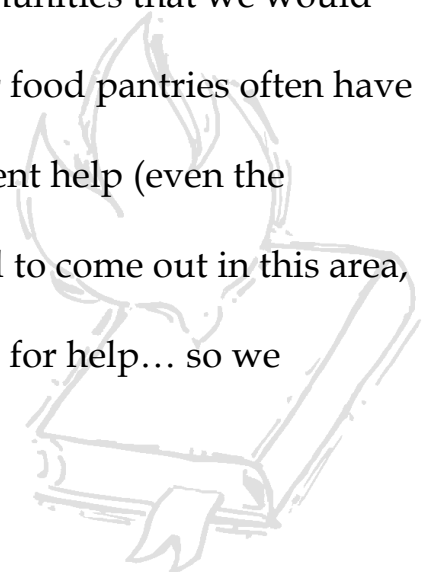
Ps 116: 12-13, 15-16, 17-18

1 Cor 11: 23-26

Jn 13: 1-15

A couple days after Christmas last year, I was getting myself ready for the Octave Masses of Christmas and the Mass for the Solemnity of Mary. I was planning to go on vacation for two weeks after the new year to re-energize the batteries and I was taking care of last minute details at the parishes I serve.

All of a sudden during my workday, I received an unexpected call from a gentleman named Nick Skokna. As I have told you before, Nick Skokna is my “potato chip guy” who has made it possible for us to bring hundreds of cases of salamis, pastries, chips, beverages and all kinds of fruits and vegetables to the Border Town Communities that we would not have been able to do previously. In fact, our food pantries often have told me that since they do not receive government help (even the Northern Illinois Food Bank, which is supposed to come out in this area, has refused to do so), they often ask us parishes for help... so we provided it for them!



When Nick contacted me a few days after Christmas, he told me that the Costco Food Store in Oakbrook, IL had overloaded themselves once again with pies, cheesecakes, pastries, breads, cookies, fruits and vegetables that were coming close to their expiration date. Since Costco did not have a place to distribute them through their normal charities, Nick called me to see if I would pick up these items instead.

Normally, this particular haul of food would be directed to a facility run by St. Mother Teresa's community in Chicago for the benefit of the poor and the needy but Mother Teresa's house in Chicago had closed after Christmas and Costco had no place to deliver this food. As a result, I rented yet another U-Haul truck (if you recall, at Christmas I preached my \$7,500 homily about the U-Haul rentals I made last year.

that I preached some time ago I rented my last twenty foot U-Haul truck for 2024 and I was on my way to Oakbrook, IL where Nick and I met to load all the foods into the truck for the sake of the Bordertown Community. After we completed the loading of all the leftover Christmas Bakery Items and such, I first drove over to St. Anne's Church where Betty Wielgus and I meet like "ships passing in the night"

- I park my car in the driveway, she parks right next to me and we unload food directly from my car into hers.

After Betty went off on her “Merry Christmas” way, then I drove over to Momence to unload the rest of the food into the rectory garage. It was then I contacted Diane Rumbach and any of the other food pantry representatives in the area to “rob me blind” in the garage, unloading as many of the pies and pastries and food products that we have for the needy of Kankakee County that we could

After we took care of all the food pantries, I realized that we *still* had a huge load of pastries and such left over. It was then that I directed myself to social media, where I invited the folks of the area to pick up whatever we had left in the garage to give them a really “Happy New Year.” I never saw as many cars sneaking in and out of the parish parking lot as I had that night! We were forced to open the food drive up to the public because the weather at the end of December was not conducive to keeping that food overnight (we had a warm Christmas, with 40-50° temperatures for the end of the year). By the end of the evening, everything we loaded into the garage was gone!

I have learned after three decades in this ministry as a priest that my role was to *live out* the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy in the area, to pray for the sick to bury the dead, to pray for sinners, to convert the sinners, to feed the hungry and to take care of the thirsty. As a priest, my responsibility was to visit the marginalized, to visit hospitals and prisons and places of care, to make sure that people are not alone.

To be honest, each one of us is supposed to do, according to the scriptural mandate to serve “the least of our brethren” (Matthew 25). In our very small way, we try to do the best we can. As a result, the needy now visit us more often and seek other needs from God, especially the spiritual graces that come from the sacraments. We are thinking out of the box by doing this; this type of evangelization does not always work that way but it seems to work for us, in my experience.

I have also come to learn that many whom we serve are not interested in the spiritual message – they are seeking food for the body but not necessarily the soul – John 6 makes this very clear to us when Jesus fed the multitudes, they wished to make Jesus king, but then Jesus explained what the purpose of his ministry was and most went away. In

this type of ministry, we learn that not many people are going to listen to the message we preach; they just want the food.

Nevertheless, we have to try to bring God's love according to God's plan to the people we serve – we have to do the best we can metaphorically and otherwise to wash the feet of every person around us and provide for them an example by which they need to live. Rarely does this approach work; in fact, it rarely does – many are called, few are chosen. Many say to me, “Why do you extend yourself out this much; why are you doing all of this, knowing that there are not many dividends that come from what you are doing?” The answer is that we are following what Jesus taught us during this Holy Thursday gospel, one that often is nice to hear but not put into practice as much as we should – MINISTRY IS HARD!!!

That said, the gospel message today is what God asks us to do as disciples, as people commissioned to go out and serve the Lord by our example of our life. Through this gospel, we are commissioned to follow Christ's example of service. As a result, we do what we can to take care of the poor and the needy; we do what we can to show people that we

love them in God's name, with the hope that if people understand that by this example maybe they will turn to God and maybe they will do the same thing that we do for them in God's name. Through Christ's example working through us by the power of the Holy Spirit, the needy will realize that there is a purpose and a reason for us living the gospel message and, as a result, these marginalized and forgotten return to their home churches and remind themselves about their value and purpose in life. We are here to take care of all of you because that is what God told us to do (which God commissions us to do at the end of each Mass we celebrate).

In the first reading from Exodus, we read about that sacrificial lamb at Passover that we Catholic believe starts at this altar and is fulfilled on the cross, that Jesus truly is the Paschal Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This Last Supper and death on the cross is the fulfillment of today's gospel passage from Exodus; Jesus is the Lamb once slain so we do not have to sacrifice any more lambs as part of our covenant with God.

If we follow the example of that lamb who gave us the example by

washing the feet of his disciples, feeding them and commissioning them to do the same by suffering for us and dying for us, then what we do over these next three days makes all the sense in the world. The gospel of John does not address the meal from the Last Supper narrative; rather, the text is a prelude to the focus of this particular gospel, to parallel Jesus' death to the slaughter of the baby lambs at Passover time.

We also learn from the gospel message that by living this way, we will be hated and we will be disregarded (Lord knows that has happened to me so many times, both in the diocese and the parish level) but that is part of the deal; that is how you live like Christ. If the leaders of the Church can nail God to a cross two thousand years ago, they can do the same to any of us at any time. I remind myself of all those saints and martyrs who have gone before us made the ultimate sacrifice to allow the faith to grow, greater sacrifices that I ever could accomplish that set the example by which you and I should live by which you should live.

In response to this message, we continue to deliver the pies and the cheesecakes and all those things that are probably not necessarily good

for the health but certainly send a message that God has commissioned us to serve, praying that the few that embrace what we are doing follow the same path. As God washed our feet, we must wash each other's. We see this theme played out over these three Triduum days – God models the example and we must follow it by doing the same, by metaphorically (or literally) taking our wash basins, taking our towels, getting on our knees and washing and serving and loving the people that we meet. This is our prayer.