

Homily
Pentecost – A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
May 16-17, 2026

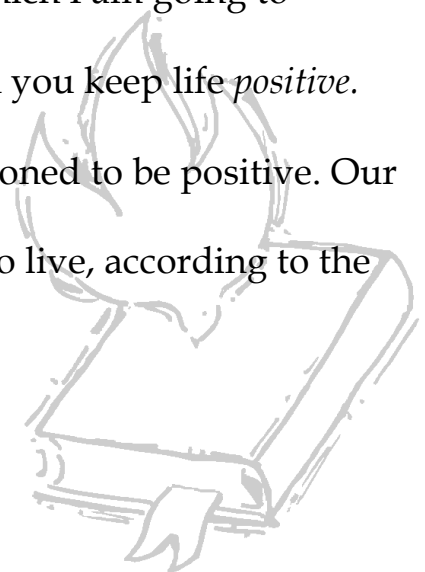
Acts 2: 1-11
Ps 104: 1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34
1 Cor 12: 3-7, 12-13
Jn 20: 19-23



Like I did last week, I am recording over here because if people are going to invest as much as they have in creating this beautiful display for us

here at the parish, I want to make sure that we broadcast this when we put it on our YouTube channel. We have posted over a thousand videos and we have got almost 600 subscribers.

During this homily, I want you to know that for those who really are invested in their personal mission statement, which I am going to describe in a second, this is what happens when you keep life *positive*. To be honest with you, our society is *not* conditioned to be positive. Our society does not live the way we are supposed to live, according to the gospel message.



Towards that end, I received a letter this week from a university student who took one of my classes years ago – I get few of these every so often. A lot of students say nice things behind my back, but this one actually referenced these positive thoughts in an email. Her name is Gianna. She wrote,

Dear Father Jankowski, as I prepare for my upcoming graduation from the University of St. Francis, I wanted to extend my sincere thanks to you. Even though I was your I was only a student for one class, Theology of Death and Dying. I really cannot overstate the impact that you made on my time as a student here. I learned so much about my own values and beliefs through your class. Thank you so much for being such an understanding and generous professor and being a part of what makes USF so special.

Sincerely, Giana.

At times we might *think* these kinds of positive thoughts but many times we do not *express* them, especially to the people in front of us. I think of this sentiment often during funeral services when many people say, “Why do not we talk nicely about a person until *after* they are dead?” In the book, Tuesdays with Morrie, this sociology professor dying of ALS decided that he wanted to part of what he called “A Living Wake,” so he invited his family and friends to his home so his loved ones could share these moments of joy with him while he was alive. Morrie also wanted to say to his family and friends how much he loved them as well.

Unfortunately, we are in a society where many focus on the *negative* things of life; this is how our society is conditioned to be. So for instance, whenever we offer an evaluation about a person or event, have you ever noticed that the great majority of the things we discuss are often about the negative and the things that go wrong? I once worked with a priest named Fr. Don Ahles during my time when I was a youth minister (1988-1991). Fr. Don would always balance evaluations by saying, “Before we are going to talk about the things that go wrong, the

opportunities for improvement, so to speak, let us talk about the ‘well-dones’ first. Let us talk about the things that went well.”

If you really think about it, what is been going on around at our parishes these last few years have been really, really *good*. By taking this path, we do not focus on the bad things of life even when society conditioned us to live this way.

To explain how society works and is conditioned to live, I am going to give you an personal example of what I try to do that is good and this is not a knock on anybody, so just bear with me. I noticed in the last three years, I have received donations over the amount of \$200,000 that I have given back to the parishes I serve. This is in my makeup; this is how I have been raised and this is how I have been taught to live. Giving what I have away is part of my personal mission statement.

When I do this, when I give what I have been given away, there has been two basic responses for what I do and neither response is “thank you.” The first response (and I am fine with this) come from people who are concerned about my own well-being, saying, “Father, you should *not* be giving all your money back to the parishes you serve; you should

keep something for your future.” I get that part but I do not agree with it – if I am to take Mt 19: 27 seriously (“sell all you have and follow me”) then I need to show God I am serious in following that example (by telling you this, I break Matthew 5 which tells me to give alms in secret; I tell you what I do so you know I am sincere in caring for you).

The other comment is that, for some reason, people do not believe me and still think of me as some kind of crook. As a result, these people call the diocese on me, saying that I am some type of liability to the diocese and I am stealing all the money. For some reason, a few malhechores in the diocese actually believe these people and “monitor” me for some reason, not realizing the secret for me getting what I do – I love people and people love me; as a result they give to me and I give it away.

To be honest, I do not think the leaders of our diocese will ever understand this part of the gospel message nor do I care – I do what I do for God, not for them. By doing things the way I do, I am able to get all these things done with no money whatsoever.

The first week I serve these parishes in August 2019, my first *day* at the parishes, a member of the diocesan business office came down to

visit and deliberately *lied* to me. The person said that the diocese was inspecting all the windows of all the rectories and they decided to visit the parishes I served *first*. I knew this was a lie – this was not my first rodeo with the diocese. At my last parish, we were able to accomplish the impossible with practically no money and the leaders of the diocese could not figure out how this was done.

As a result, this person visited every room in every house under our care and “inspected” all the windows of every one of my rectories. As I said, their “excuse” was they were going to check all the windows of all the rectories around the diocese, but, in reality, mine was the only rectories they visited according to my sources. Then, and you have to give them credit, that same person returned exactly one year later to re-inspect the windows of the rectory after we were able to all the buildings. You know how many rectories they visited inspect the windows?

Another example... at my last parish, my parishioners were clamoring for an adoration chapel. With no money and no prospects for achieving that dream, I couple I knew gifted the parish with a \$40,000.

Gift to build this chapel. With the money, I asked local help, friends of the benefactors to help me build a chapel. I travelled to Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), Grand Rapids (Alabama) and Mobile (Alabama) to purchase old church items from church warehouses. I travelled to Italy to buy a tabernacle that doubled as a monstrance. We took an old classroom and converted it into a chapel that naturally flowed from the church.



When the project was finished, leaders of the diocese visited the chapel, valued it at \$250,000 and audited the parish. They asked, “where did you get \$250,000? I responded, “we built

the chapel with a tool your office desperately needs to learn – Christian charity.”

Love is a concept that is foreign to many people in the world; most people do not start conversation talking about what is *good* in the world. If you have ever noticed it on television programs, political

advertisements or even the news, *we love trashing each other*. That is where you get your ratings - if it bleeds, it leads. Normally 60% of all deaths in the world are heart attacks or cancer but television news tells us the majority of deaths come from homicides, terrorism and suicides. Mundane deaths do not excite us; violent deaths do. We focus on the negative, the violent and the evil because the negative is what garners ratings; the negative is what makes people watch televisions or movies, to read papers and magazines. To be positive, to realize that what we got is *good* takes years to build... but it only takes one match to tear it all down.

So I am finishing the Business Ethics course for the University of Education and Business in Vietnam, we focus on what is good about the human person, the society, the community and even the government. Towards this end, we read the works of Aristotle and his view of the good within the human person. We have been talking about Immanuel Kant and the duty to do what is right for those around you (= ontology).

We have been talking about John Rawls and his “veil of ignorance” that we must place on every person to succeed in the world, to cover

any bias based on race, color, creed, religion or way of life to view a person as someone *good*, that each person is a human being that has value and has a story to tell.

I tell the students that if we focus on what is *good* in society and realize that as soon as you open your heart and welcome people in and allow people to tell you their story, *you* become a better person by learning about someone else, especially things about that person that are unique and valuable. I tell the students that this methodology is not just for the business – we must utilize it as a consistent ethic of life, of corporate responsibility, that you act the same way towards your family, your community and your world, then the world sees you as a person of integrity and value.

On the other end of the business world, a Nobel Prize winner from the 1970s named Milton Friedman says that business is all about profits and making money. What we teach in a Christian ethics course focuses on what philosophers call “the triple bottom line: people, planet and profits.” Of course in the world you need to make money for your business to persevere. That said, if you invest in your community, if you

care about people because the ethical thing to do is to care for others, then we understand how entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates investing in your community. Through an endeavor called “The Giving Pledge,” entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffet have pledged to return the earnings they have made from their respective businesses back to the local communities to make the world a better place to live.

So what I am doing with the university students is to teach them these different philosophies of business that is positive... and, even then... some of the students come back to focus on the negative because society has conditioned them to do so. After everything I have taught, many return to the basic mantra of making money: *Why do I have to take a course in ethics? Why is ethics so important in business?* Over and over again, I offer the same answer: if you want to be a good steward, if you want to be a good neighbor, if you want to be a person of integrity, you have to follow the golden rule: *do unto others*. “Love others as you would want them to love you. There is no greater love than this than to lay down your life for a friend. You are my friends if you do if I command you and you should love one another” (John 13).

To illustrate this theme, I teach the students various ways that businesses live this way. I teach the students about the prayer of St. Francis, the idea of *Sitz im Leben* – look at a person's situation in life; every person has a different situation and every person has value. I teach them the two words in Spanish that model my own way of living: *Bienvenidos* (welcome) y *Hospitalidad* (hospitality). The person who welcomes you at the door is the one who makes a person decide if s/he wishes to invest in this parish community. If people treat you with love, if they treat you with welcome, more than likely people are going to come back. If you stare at them with daggers of the eyes, if you make them feel uncomfortable, they are not coming back.

I teach the students to build good personal relationships. I teach people that they have value. I teach the students to focus on the basics of life, to be positive and to treat people well.

At the end of our time in this course, during the last class with the students that the last chapter of the book instructs the students about the following lesson: if you want to make it in the world, establish what is called a *Personal Mission Statement*. A Personal Mission Statement is a

concise one to two sentence declaration of your core values, your purpose and the positive impact that you want to have in the world. It acts as a north star to guide your career, keep you accountable and helps you make aligned decisions.

So I challenge the students by asking them, “What are your core values? What makes you *you*? What makes you a person that people see? What is your makeup? In this activity, we go through this whole list of qualities that define what a good person does and who a good person is. I teach the students to be positive and we got to talk about the now. I teach the students that a Personal Mission Statement describes who you are right now, what kind of person are you and what kind of contribution are you making the world. I ask the students, “Are you the kind of person that is going to take that core principle and make the world a better place or are you the kind of person that It is all about me?”

In a sense, to succeed in faith you have to put on that same attitude or be-attitude in the Christian sense. The difference between selflessness and selfishness establishes what a Church is and what you are. A church

is not about me; it is about me sacrificing for you. “He who was in the form of God did not deem equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he lowered himself in the form of a slave, washing the disciples’ feet, dying on the cross for us, sending us the Holy Spirit that exists in every single one of us and gives us the opportunity to offer a unique contribution to the world” (paraphrase of Philippians 2).

Core principles underly the mission that remains stable and does not shift based on changing situations. We are who we are. No matter what happens in the world, we establish ourselves as the same kind of person.

The book we used focuses on basic missions in life:

Live a life that will bring me true happiness and success.
Be an effective leader and role model.
Always hold true to integrity and values
Improve the lives of other people and your life achievements.

When you all introduced me to these parishes in 2005, I said that this is where I wished to end my public ministry before retirement. When I came back here in 2019, I was asked to do certain things and I have tried to do it to the best of my ability. As I was talking to the students about my joys and struggles with parish life, I also was trying to figure out

what is my own Personal Mission Statement – why am I crazy enough to do what I am doing? So I came up with the following Personal Mission Statement for me after doing the same reflection I asked the students to do. This is what I wrote...

Fr. Pete's personal mission statement. Honoring and following the teachings of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost Sunday. My personal mission is to allow God to guide me to follow humbly the golden rule and place the needs of those who are vulnerable ahead of my own needs.

Essentially, what I am saying is you are more important than I am. That is what Christ taught us and that is what my family taught me. This is the core principle that establishes who I am. Whether you agree with my statement or not, whether you are happy with it or not, the statement reflects who I am and that is the way I am going to be. That is why I do what I do.

When I think about Pentecost Sunday, that we have gone through these whole eight weeks of Easter and we have read all these stories about how Christ gave us the Holy Spirit to share with others, as we have celebrated with those who received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), we often do not see many of

these families return to church. A couple weeks ago, the churches were full of all the individuals with the confirmation retreat and with the confirmation Mass... and now the church is much emptier. Even though this is sad, the lack of faith does not stop me from living my core personal values and my mission statement to take care of you. Nothing of what I do is possible unless our Personal Mission Statement is to take care of what God has given us.

This is God's home. This is your home. The way you take care for these churches and communities, the way you take care of each other, the way I take care of you is our way of saying how much we care about God. If we do that, then all these wonderful things happen.

As Bones Hess often tells me, the way we live makes the impossible become possible. Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for living out your Personal Mission Statement at this parish. I am what I am (that is a quote from the Popeye cartoon, BTW). I do not eat my spinach, but I will do what I can to live the life and share it with you as I hope you do for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.