

Homily

The Solemnity of Easter– A

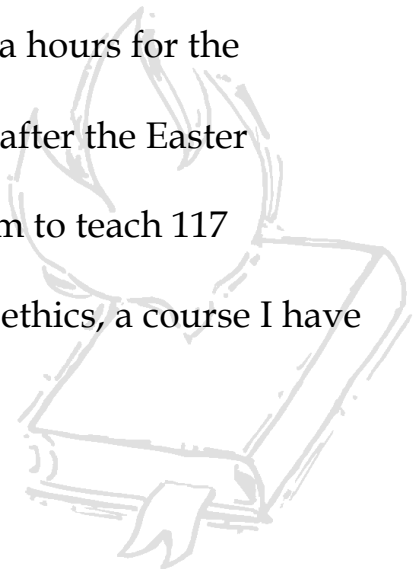
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 04-05, 2026

Acts 10: 34, 37-43
Ps 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23
Col 3: 1-4
Jn 20: 1-9

As I stated this week, Regan and her mother cost me \$187 for this homily (I expect a check to be written at the end of this Mass for \$187 in cold hard cash, which you do not have to do).

This homily wrote itself last Thursday when I was really, really tired. Over at St. Anne's, a parishioner named William Brown was hospitalized and I had promised to visit him. Earlier this month, William's brother David had passed away; David was William's roommate, car ride and personal friend. As Dave needed hospitalization, the family asked me to visit him in Kankakee at the local hospital, which I did.

During this last week, I also was pulling in extra hours for the University of St. Francis because on Sunday night after the Easter liturgies at 12:30 a.m. I am flying to Hanoi, Vietnam to teach 117 Vietnamese students in-class sessions on business ethics, a course I have been teaching them online these last two months.



With all these things going on in in my life, I have been running a bit. So, when I got this call from Good Shepherd Manor to offer an Easter type service at 1:00 p.m. last Thursday, with everything else going on, part of me said I did not want to go because I was really, really tired. Nevertheless, I drove over to Good Shepherd Manor anyway with a handful of palms, creating a last-minute Holy Week service for the residents. I am trying to figure out how I am going to do an Easter service on Holy Thursday. So, I decided to bring all these palms that we had on Palm Sunday. At that service, I gave every resident who prayed with me a blessed palm because with the residents at Good Shepherd Manor, the one thing they *can* do at a service is wave their palms as we sang Church hymns.

At this makeshift service, I called Albuquerque, NM in the chapel and put Brother Charles Pratt and Brother Alphonsus Brown on the phone, two religious brothers who served these wonderful residents for over fifty years. At this service, the two brothers helped us sing, “The King of Glory” together as well as the “Peter Cottontail” song. Brother

Charles refused to get his guitar to sing with us, like he does on YouTube.

After having a nice service over at Good Shepherd Manor with the family members of the residents present, I was asked to go visit one of the residents who could not join us at the service because he was in hospice care; the man's name was Dave. Some weeks back, Dave had fallen, he injured himself and was not doing well. One of the leaders at the manor asked me to visit Dave at the end of our service to make him feel better.

For Dave, the visit meant everything but for me at the time, the visit was just one more item added on to everything else I have to do that day, which is why ministry can be so miserable and so wonderful for this particular priest, miserable because so much of what I do is inconvenient and so wonderful because those moments remind me why I am a priest.

During that hospice visit, I learned one more time the importance of Easter and everything else I do. Regan, we can teach her about all the

commandments and the sacraments, we can teach her about the Old Testament, New Testament but as I try to teach the university students, as I sometimes try to teach myself, if you do not have love, if you do not have a loving heart, then we are empty; we are like noisy gongs or clanging cymbals. We are empty without the love of God.

Why did I have to learn this from a resident of the Manor instead of realizing this on my own? I often learn in these cases that someone like a resident from Good Shepherd Manor has a whole lot more faith than I often do because this tired priest forgets about the smile that comes from a sacrament conferred and how one resident from Good Shepherd Manor can possess constantly that I often forget.

During this visit at the Manor, one resident of this community, specifically one individual, received a special grace from our Lord... specifically *me*. As I walked into Dave's room, the first thing that I encountered with Dave was a *smile*; Dave was smiling. In Spanish, the word for smile is the same word for sunrise - *sonrisa*. I have said it more than one time - *sonrisa* is one of my favorite words in Spanish.

Here is a resident who was suffering and was in hospice care. Here was a person that was ailing towards the end of his life. With all this suffering, the one thing he could do for me was smile, was to offer me this *sonrisa*. As he started talking to me, that smile revealed how happy he was concerning all the wonderful things about faith and his life. In fact, Dave and I were talking about all the cool events that were about to take place at Good Shepherd Manor during the Easter Season.

During our talk, Dave shared with me his cooking secrets for making an Easter ham (I hope you have your pads and pencils ready because this is their secret for cooking a good ham). Dave told me that to cook the perfect Easter ham, you set your oven on to 375° and stick the ham in for 18 hours (como se dice “carbon” in Espanol?). I am not sure putting anything in the oven at 375 for 18 hours is a good idea but Dave told me to share this secret, which I just did for you!

During this conversation at Good Shepherd Manor, Dave and I shared this wonderful conversation, his smile and how happy he was that a priest came to visit him during Holy Week. Then Dave asked me

if I was going to attend Regan's wedding on May 30th – Regan's mother, the nurse, told him about the wedding. I told Dave that, considering that I was the priest at the wedding, that I think I would be there. I then asked Dave if Regan's mother would attend the wedding.

"Oh, yes," Dave replied.

I then asked, "Do you think Regan's husband was invited to the wedding?" "Oh, yes," David said.

Again, I asked, "Do you think the priest is going to be invited to the wedding?"

Dave replied, "*You* are the priest. You got to be at the wedding."

Throughout this conversation with Dave (which was making me happier by the minute), Dave then asks Regan's mother Julie that she had to bring something special me because our meeting would not have been complete had I not been given special "gift" from Julie.

So Julie gave me Dave's special gift – a Reese's peanut butter chocolate egg. Julie presented this chocolate egg to me like she often did for Dave. In fact, Julie gave me a few eggs to hand out to my staff – one

for Debby Absher (the business manager), one for Sonia Fonseca (the secretary), one for Artemio Ojeda (the maintenance man) and one for Padre Pedro (the priest).

As Julie was handing me the chocolates, I thought to myself... here was a guy who was suffering. Here was a guy who was dying and was in hospice care and yet... here was a guy who spoke a language that sometimes I forget and is the language that is universal – *here was a guy who spoke the language of love in the form of a sonrisa*. I teach this lesson with the Vietnamese students in the business ethics class I teach yet during Holy Week, I needed a resident from Good Shepherd Manor to teach it to me.

We learn on Easter Sunday about this universal language that goes across the board, that Jesus taught us on the cross after we abandoned him, that he was willing to die for us because he loved us that much. The language is love. The language is a smile. When you offer that smile, you offer that love and all of a sudden, even if we do not

understand each other by the things that we say by our lips, we can hear and understand each other from what is said from the heart.

I know the family of Regan's fiancé – the Aguilar family has been helping this parish and me personally for the last few years. What the Aguilar family has done for this community behind the scenes has been absolutely spectacular. Like they do for us, I believe that if you treat people well, then good things can happen. I also know that if you treat people well, then a lot of people are going to take advantage of you; a lot of people are going to hurt you.

That said, if you speak with a language of love, I honestly believe that the sunrise will come and good things will happen. Because of all these families I encounter, *especially all of you!*, because of that institution down the street by the Berkots dedicated to Brother Alphonsus and Brother Charles and the bad musical and cooking videos Brother Charles uploads for YouTube, it dawns on me that the good brothers, the residents of the manor and so many of you are teaching me a whole lot more than I am teaching you.

I told Regan that all relationships must start and end with love if the relationship has any meaning. All Christian relationships start with love for God. I told her that for a successful marriage, God must bless and be part of her life with her fiancé. That love must exist in her family. If this happens, then members of her family learn from her, she learns from them and all of you teach me about God's love that inspires me to do the same for you.

For me to stand up here and preach about this subject on Easter weekend tells me how far I need to go in the kingdom of heaven; this love depends on me sharing it with you and you sharing it with me. In a similar way, there are so many people here that are here to support each of you in this community, to love you in this community, always in God's name. I keep saying this constantly at our Masses, that all these individuals who quietly come before the Masses to pray the rosary for the sick, the dead, the people who are suffering, make all the difference in the world.

While all this craziness took place on Holy Thursday, as I finished the Holy Thursday Mass and then heard an hour's worth of confessions afterwards, there was a woman who comes to our daily Mass named Ruth Thornton who came to me on Thursday night at the end of the confessions. Seeing how tired I was, Ruth said to me, "Father, you look tired. It looks like you need a blessing." So, she stood up and she blessed the very tired priest at the end of a long day.

At that moment, it dawned on me that when I am getting ministered by you, when you are teaching me, then I will go out and spend \$187 to buy chocolate eggs for all the kids in our community and everyone who is here today. Chocolate eggs are "dumb" to pass out; the gesture is kind of small and insignificant. That said, today's chocolate eggs I share are provided courtesy of Good Shepherd Manor and I resident who taught me about a sonrisa and an Easter homily that came from a kind of faith that I need to learn and have.

Even during Holy Week, I need to learn about that smile, that sunrise, just as much as all of you do. One chocolate at a time. It was my

honor and privilege to drain the Dollar General of every chocolate that they had this last week to pass out these chocolates. God bless the Dollar General. God bless the Aguilar family. God bless the residents of Good Shepherd Manor. And God bless you. Let us embrace that faith, that light, that smile, that sunrise and share it with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.