

Homily
7th Sunday OT - B

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 18-19, 2012

Is 43: 18-19, 21-22, 24-25

Ps 41: 2-3, 4-5, 13-14

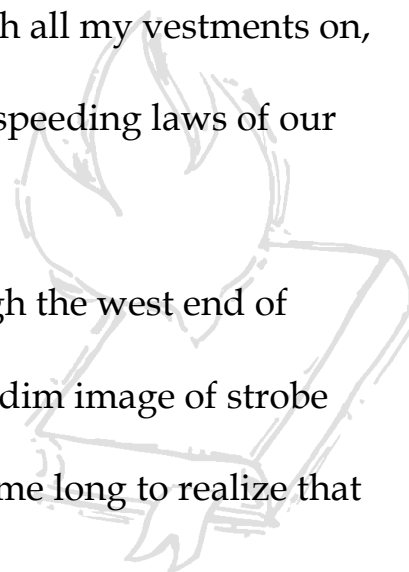
2 Cor 1: 18-22

Mk 2: 1-12

For the first ten years of my priestly ministry, I spent a great deal of time commuting from whatever parish I was serving to the city of Plano, Illinois, where I helped serve the needs of the Spanish community at St. Mary's Parish. This trip would often take 45 minutes to an hour, depending where the bishop had assigned me that particular year.

One particular weekend in my travels, I recall how I was running *way* late on my way to Plano. I had just completed a Mass at 9:45 a.m. from Joliet and I knew that I would need to book in order to be on time for the 10:30 Mass at St. Mary's. So, as my mentality would have it, right after my 8:30 Mass in Joliet, I jumped into my car with all my vestments on, and went on my jolly way *maybe* stretching the speeding laws of our country a tad.

As I was pacing myself on a brisk clip through the west end of Plainfield, I entered the disco era, as I noticed a dim image of strobe lights approaching my direction. It didn't take me long to realize that



the friendly neighborhood policeman had appreciated my speeding as well and wanted to pull me over to congratulate me. As I brought the car to a stop on the side of the road, I saw the ominous shadow darkening the windows of my car as it approached.

The officer took one look at me in my vestments and smiled.

“Father,” he said, more in a tone of scolding than respect, “you realize that a) you were speeding; b) you are not wearing your seat belt; and c) your driver’s license has expired. This is what we call a ‘trifecta’ in the police business.” I was quite embarrassed by the whole situation and apologized profusely. I explained that I was late for Mass but there was no excuse for my behavior.

I appreciated that the officer took pity on me. “Father,” he said again with a light scold, “do you promise to a) slow down; b) put on your seatbelt; and c) get your license renewed next week?” I said “yes, officer and thank you, officer,” and he let me an my way. I can’t say I’ve always been perfect on the road since, but at least I earned a greater respect for the rules of driving.

(I had a similar problem a couple years ago when I went to meet the bishop on a topic that was very difficult. As I left the building, somewhat upset by the meeting, I didn't realize I had run a stop sign in the parking lot. Immediately, a policeman pulled me over and asked me the same question he asks everyone who gets ticketed there: "Was it a bad meeting with the bishop?" He, too, took pity on me and told me that he liked to pull priests over at that stop sign. I guess more than a few priests have encountered the same experience.)

Whether it is policemen, fireman, serviceman or anyone who offers their talents towards the protection of our land and country, it seems to me that these men and women represent the guardians of safety, guardians who protect us from the evils of the world and safeguard the rules that our country has chosen to follow. Personally, I am most grateful that we have these guardians who protect our life and liberties because they keep us on the straight and narrow paths and keep us from harm.

It is this idea of being a good guardian that dominated my reflection on today's gospel reading, since in the world of faith we need guardians as well to protect us and aid us in life. Some of the great homilists of the past wrote that the example of great faith in the paralytic story did not come from the paralytic himself but from the four men who carried this ailing man to our Lord and lowered him down from the roof of the house. St. Ambrose called these men "the guardians of the soul," four individuals who cared enough about one sick person that they went through great measures to present this paralytic to Jesus so that he could be healed. St. Ambrose writes,

Anyone who is sick should seek the help in prayer of others, that they may be restored to health; that through their intercession, the enfeebled frame of our body, the wavering footsteps of our deeds, may be restored to health by the remedy of the heavenly word. Let there therefore be certain guardians (helpers - *monitores*) of the soul, to raise the soul of man, even lying indifferent in the weakness of the outer body, so that by their assistance it may be easy for a man to raise himself and lower himself again, to be placed in the sight of Jesus; worthy to appear in the Lord's sight.

Quien esta enfermo debe buscar la ayuda en la oración de los demás, que puedan ser restaurados a la salud; que por su intercesión, el

marco enfermizo de nuestro cuerpo, los pasos oscilantes de nuestros hechos, puedan ser restaurados a la salud por remedio de la palabra celestial. Por lo tanto que existan ciertos guardianes (ayudantes – *monitores*) del alma, para elevar el alma del hombre, incluso estando indiferente en la debilidad del cuerpo exterior, para que por su ayuda sea fácil para el hombre levantarse y bajarse a si mismo nuevamente, para ser colocado en la mira de Jesús; digno de aparecer en la mira del Señor.

St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom both wrote that the faith of these four men provided the means for this paralytic to be healed, just as it is the faith of the people sitting in these pews who do the same for those who are in need of prayers today. Every day at Mass, we pray for those who are sick and who have died. We often pray for the poor souls in purgatory and we pray for those who are going through troubled times. This week alone, I have been approached by numerous people who asked me to pray for family members who are sick, dying, and who are going through problems. This is not just my responsibility but all of ours.

In my ministry, I encounter multitudes of the faithful who are homebound, in nursing homes or hospitals, parents with troubled

children and things of that nature. These people often tell me, “Father, all I can do is pray and I feel helpless in difficult situations.” In my faith journey, in light of the good news offered today, anyone who tells me that prayer “is all you can do” does not understand our gospel reading today. Prayer is *the most important thing* we can do for someone. You, like me, are the guardians of the soul. It is the responsibility of all of us to bring into prayer the needs, hopes, and concerns of the things around us. When we pray for others and care for them, we become guardians. When we don’t, we then become the paralyzed. The life of a Christian is an active one, one that requires all of us to do our part in offering the salvation of Christ to others.

Just this last week, I encountered three different situations where this image of guardian shined through. Last Wednesday, I celebrated a funeral Mass for a woman named Grace. Grace was married almost 50 years and raised four kids, eleven grandkids and five great-grandkids. Grace cooked lots of food for these three generations of family – chop suey, chili, kolachkis, and all kinds of Polish delicacies. She played cards

with the grandkids, knowing how they were taking advantage of her in the process. She also clutched a rosary in her hands on most nights and attended Mass on most days on behalf of the kids in her family that did not attend Church. In God's vision of the faith, Grace was a guardian of the soul.

This weekend, I ate lunch with a couple from our parish who have been married about ten years. The couple has three children and would have had a fourth about three years ago when the doctors told them that this fourth child would not be able to sustain itself outside of the womb. Against the doctor's recommendation, the mother carried this baby to term. The father called this miracle "the best 31 days of my life." As the kids and the parents held that child, the father had a change of heart in his own faith life. He began to realize how sacred life is and how life should never be taken for granted. It was at that moment that he, like his wife, became a guardian of the soul.

And this last month, a graduate from St. Patrick's School from the late 70s - early 80s who approached me last month in a great *metanoia*,

or life-changing faith experience. Let's call this woman "Jane." As Jane told me her story, she had attended St. Pat's School for the duration of her grade school and had taken all the necessary classes to receive the sacraments in her life. For whatever reason, Jane's parents decided NOT to allow her to receive the sacraments while attending school. For thirty years, Jane underwent all the feelings of loss in her life, from denial to anger to resentment to calm. As she tells me the story, Jane credited her own children who currently attend Catholic school in Aurora as her inspiration to come back to the Church. After a number of meetings and a good deal of prayer, I will have the honor of welcoming Jane back quietly into the Church, restoring a love that was lost through no fault of her own, all because Jane's own children turned out to be the guardian of her own soul.

At our intercession time, I will offer a moment of silence for those we need to pray for today - for Jane, for Grace, for the couples in our parish and for all those who seek guardians of the faith to give them direction. I urge you to become active in prayer and invest yourselves into the

lives of those who are sick and needy. I urge you today to write a letter to someone in need, someone you might know who is in need of a little bit of hope today. Let us lift up the needs of our beloved needy and infirmed so that we, too, become guardians and caretakers of the soul. This is the ultimate response to the Christian call and this is our prayer today.