

HOMILY
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 22-23, 2022

I was reading a story about the Ogan family that happened in 1946. On the first Sunday of Lent, the pastor told them that they would be taking up a special collection for a needy family in the parish on Easter Sunday. The Ogan family had seven children; and after Mass, they all decided to work together to raise money for the needy family. They decided to buy a large bag of potatoes and live off of that during Lent to save \$20 on food. They cut back on electricity to save money there. The kids all did yard work and baby-sitting, and they made potholders to sell in the neighborhood. They raised \$70 for the needy family and could not wait to turn it in on Easter. They thought that this was the most joyful Lent they had ever had raising this money. On Easter afternoon, after Mass, there was a knock at the door. Mom went to the door and, in a few minutes, came back into the room where they were gathered with the joy drained from her face. She had an envelope containing \$87. As it turns out, they were the poor family. They never thought of themselves as poor, and they were feeling sorry for the families that did not have the blessings that they enjoyed. A sadness fell over the family during the next week, and no one touched the envelope with the money. The children did not want to go to Mass the next weekend, but Mrs. Ogan insisted. That Sunday there was a missionary at church from Africa that told them they needed contributions to put a new roof on their church that would cost \$100. Mrs. Ogan looked at her children, and they all began to smile. She pulled the envelope with the money out of her purse and put it in the collection plate. Joy returned to the Ogan family that week. They knew that they were the rich family in the church. There is a difference between physical poverty and spiritual poverty; and once your basic physical needs are met, the spiritual becomes much more important.

I want to give you a little background information on the First Reading today. The Jewish people were forced out of Jerusalem during the Babylonian Exile; and when they were allowed to return to Jerusalem, they found it in ruins and the Temple had been destroyed. Where this reading begins, the second temple had just been built; and Jerusalem had been put back into order. Ezra and Nehemiah are telling the people now that things are in order physically, it is time to learn and understand the law of God. Their physical poverty had been solved, so now it was time to focus upon their spiritual poverty; and the people began to weep. They had just gotten comfortable and wanted to stay there. Nehemiah told them, don't be

sad, you must rejoice in the Lord who is your strength. You must rejoice in addressing your spiritual poverty, because this is what is going to bring joy into your life.

We do that at times in our lives. When we get physically comfortable, we want to stay there. We chose to settle for an ok life rather than reaching for a life of wholeness, fulfillment and joy. We sometimes get stuck at ok. During the past year, we have experienced physical poverty. With COVID, our very lives have been threatened. We have found a place where we feel physically safe, and we just want to stay there. We cannot do that. We need to be hopeful. When the Ogan family was made to feel like a poor family, they lost their joy. They were only able to be joyful again when they saw themselves as the rich family. If they saw themselves as the poor family to begin with, they would have spent their Lent hoping to be the needy family. This is the difference between glass half empty and glass half full. We have learned a lot about COVID in the past two years. There are signs that cases and hospitalizations are going down, and people are not getting as sick with the omicron variant. These are very positive signs. If you are a glass half empty kind of person, force yourself to be a glass half full person. It is a choice. Our parish is fine physically and financially, but now we must work on our spiritual poverty. We need to trust that God will be walking this journey with us and helping us. We need to rebuild our Parish Family spiritually. As we heard in the Second Reading, we function like the human body. We need all of the parts. The ears cannot see, and the eye cannot hear. We have people missing from our congregation, and we need them back. I know people are at different places in their comfort level, and I respect that, no judgment. If we become too content to stay in a place where we feel physically safe, we will become spiritually bankrupt. We need everyone. We need all of you. Our first goal should be coming back to Mass every week. We need to prayerfully decide how and when will you be able to come back and feel safe. Our next goal is to re-engage with the community. We are going to be slowly opening up for people who feel comfortable. We are becoming too comfortable in isolation, and I think we are seeing the result in all the divisions and self focus. All of that isolation is just not healthy. That is not the way God created us.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim