

### 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (January 22, 2023)

A change of pace today for you—I have three things to address briefly:

1. I think you are all aware of the recent murder that occurred in Elma, a horrible, evil event indeed. We are used to hearing of such things in New York City, Chicago, and other large cities...but now it happens even here in very rural north Iowa. The details are very sketchy at this point; no doubt that it will take much time for the legal process to play itself out. In the meantime, we need to pray:

--first and obviously, pray for the soul of the murder victim, and for his family and others who mourn his death;

--pray that the truth of what happened will be established and that justice will be achieved;

--pray for everyone else affected by this crime. When something like this hits a small town, everyone feels the impact, and some more intensely than others, and for a variety of reasons;

--finally, and maybe most difficult, pray for the perpetrator of this evil deed; pray for his conversion...because he is in desperate need of conversion. God certainly hates the evil done by that person, but God loves the person and Jesus died for his sake no less than he died for all of us. So please—do pray for all involved and all affected by this tragedy.

2. On a much happier note, I'm glad to report that the supervisor workshop I attended at Mundelein Seminary went very well. And you will be glad to know that I had no problems at all getting back to Elma Thursday evening—the roads were very well cleared after the Wednesday night snowfall. Thank you, road crews! The workshop was very helpful for our intern Tim Weber and I and the other pastors and interns in figuring out what the interns will be doing. Some of the things Tim will be involved with:

--various liturgical roles such as lector, conducting wake and committal services in connection with funerals, and offering occasional reflections (akin to homilies) after Communion at weekday and weekend Masses;

--visiting the homebound, those in hospitals or nursing homes, and taking Holy Communion to them;

--connecting with our young people, especially in our CCD programs. To that end, Tim will connect with our DREs (Chad, Debbie, and Meg) to learn about their responsibilities and to schedule those visits;

--visiting with our cluster staff and with some of the chancery staff in Dubuque to learn more about parish and archdiocesan administration. Of course, I'll be meeting regularly with Tim as well—both formally and informally.

There will be other learning and service opportunities as well. Some of you may be asked to provide feedback on Tim's work here (for example, about his preaching). The seminary and Archbishop Jackels are interested not only in my evaluations but in your thoughts as well—stay tuned for details.

Tim will be here sometime next weekend (Jan. 28/29); he has commitments at Mundelein early that weekend. He will get here just in time to see me go into surgery on January 31 (talk about

an internship!); I'll have more to say about that whole thing next weekend. Obviously I'll be focusing on recuperating those first few days after surgery while Tim gets settled in at the rectory; we'll get a few things underway as need be. Please pray for Tim and for all our seminarians, and please continue to pray for an increase in their number. I had a great experience of working with an intern at St. Ed's in Waterloo back in 2014; I really look forward to Tim being here, and I know he is as well.

3. Finally, a brief word about an important anniversary this weekend. Anniversaries are usually happy events like birthdays and wedding anniversaries. By the way: today, January 22, is the 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary for my brother Tom and his wife Jenny—so: Happy 40<sup>th</sup> to Mr. and Mrs. Kopacek! But there is a much more somber anniversary we observe this January 22—it's the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the worst, most wrong-headed decision ever issued by our Supreme Court. As you know, that decision created out of thin air a so-called 'right' to abortion. Thanks be to God, Roe was overruled last summer by the Dobbs case. But Dobbs did not make abortion illegal anywhere; it merely said that individual states can make their own decisions on this issue. Of course, the battle is by no means over. For example, many states very quickly passed laws allowing abortion to the very moment of birth. Again, thanks be to God, Iowa is not in that group of states at this point...but we dare not get complacent and think we have nothing more to worry about.

This past Thursday evening there was a respect-life vigil Mass in Washington DC, during which Bishop Michael Burbidge (Arlington VA) gave a stirring homily. He said that the most important work now is "not only of changing laws but of changing hearts...[stemming from] our knowledge of the truth and our courage to speak it." He also reminded us that "[w]e must learn to communicate our views with love". In other words, we must have the courage to teach the full truth of our faith and the demands of the Gospel of Life *like Jesus did*, and we must do so with a genuine love, *like Jesus did*, for those who oppose and even hate us.

In today's second reading St. Paul got after the Corinthians for being so divided amongst themselves; they forgot that their first and primary allegiance was not to Paul or Apollos or Cephas or anyone else. Rather, they belonged first to Jesus and to the gospel of truth and life and love that he came to bring us. The same is true for us. All the other ways that we define and classify ourselves—Republican or Democrat, John Deere or Allis Chalmers, even Cyclone or Hawkeye—all these fade into insignificance in the light of our oneness in Jesus Christ. We belong to him first and foremost and to the Church he gave us to preserve and hand on the truths he came to reveal, including the Gospel of Life. May we never give up the fight for that gospel; may we always trust and rely on the grace and mercy of God to sustain and strengthen us in that fight.