

25th Friday in Ordinary Time, Cycle II
September 24, 2010
Fr. Joe Bambenek
St. Anne's Extended Healthcare Chapel, Winona, MN

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Psalm 144

Luke 9:18-22

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for everything under the heavens.”

These words from today's first reading highlight what a privilege it is to be here this morning, to celebrate Mass with you, the residents of St. Anne's. It is also a bit daunting to be here and preach a homily on this reading. Those of you who have lived long lives during which you have seen and experienced so much have a much better appreciation of this reading than those of us who are younger. You can look in your own lives and see the many different periods of time in your life. Each one of you can undoubtedly think back to when there were times in your life to love, times to mourn; times to build up, times to tear down; times to laugh, times to cry; times to seek and times to lose. And hopefully, with the perspective of age, you can also see how God's loving hand has guided many of those periods of time of your life, even those times which may have been painful and involved suffering as you went through them.

Now, living here at St. Anne's, you are in the time in your life when a lot has changed. Of the time periods on the Ecclesiastes list, this period in your lives might most resemble 'a time to lose.' For many, it is a time when some of the freedom that was once enjoyed is no longer possible. A time when physical limitations prevent being able to engage in some long-cherished activities. A time when life-long friends are no longer on Earth with whom to talk and share life. A time of physical pain and loneliness. It is a time to let go of what one has accumulated in life; a time of giving back to God the many blessings that He had given in life. On the surface, this might be considered a bad time. Some might even suggest that it is a wasted time in your lives. Yet this is a time which God has appointed in your lives! It is not a wasted time! Although certainly different, and often difficult, this can be a very rich time, a time of great value. It can be a time of new friendships. A time of increased freedom from daily responsibilities, since you no longer need to cook, clean, or go to work. It can be a time of greater and deeper prayer. A time in which the sufferings and surrender of Jesus can be more profoundly understood. It can be a time to offer up sufferings and unite them to those of Jesus for the sake of beloved family and friends. It can be a time for influencing the next generation through actions and words. And a time of preparing for eternity, for the timelessness that God has placed in our hearts, as we hear at the end of the reading.

In a very different way, I come here today at a rich time in my own life. It is a time of great joy for me, as I celebrate the great gift of having been ordained a priest several months ago. It is a time of thankfulness and gratitude, as I thank God for the great privilege it is to be a priest. A time to thank the many people who have played a role in my acceptance of God's call. I forgot to mention during the blessing of my new vestments at the start of the Mass that they were ordination gifts. So today is also a time to thank the many people who have been so generous to me during these past months, including Jerry & Pat Papenfuss, who gave me the beautiful chasuble I am wearing and who are also generous to you through service on the St. Anne's Foundation Board.

As part of my post-ordination celebrations, I chose to come here to St. Anne's because of the times earlier in my life when several people who greatly influenced me lived here. Most

especially my two grandmothers: Sophie Bambenek and Marg Papenfuss. The time in my life which I spent with them highlights the important influence that grandparents can have on their grandchildren through their words and through their example. The very name of this place, St. Anne's, named after the grandmother of Jesus, reminds us of the important role of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren.

Grandma Bambenek lived at St. Anne's for less than a year back in 1990, so the opportunities to be influenced by her in this building were quite limited. But more generally, through her words of encouragement to me and prayers for me, Grandma Bambenek had as big of an influence as anyone on my ultimate decision to follow God's call to the priesthood, even though it was more than a decade after her death when I entered the seminary and almost two decades before I was ordained a priest. Her influence is a reminder that sometimes the seeds we sow take a long time to germinate; even long after we are gone.

On the other hand, some of my most important memories of Grandma Papenfuss happened here at St. Anne's, during the nearly 7 years when she was a resident. When I would come visit her in the morning, I would go to Mass with Grandma Papenfuss. One of the most enduring images I have of Grandma is of her kneeling in the pew during Mass, at a time when she could barely walk, even after having broken her hip. Marg was not one to talk a lot about her faith, but she preached by how she lived her life. In particular, she preached the gospel through the love and the joy she would show to others, even when she was suffering. And she set an example for me of how to see the best in people.

My most recent visit to St. Anne's was just last year, during the time when my second cousin Fran Cisewski spent his last weeks on Earth in the same room in which Grandma Papenfuss once lived. Fran was a man to be emulated in his generosity, including his financial generosity to St. Anne's; to be emulated in how he lived out his wedding vows to remain faithful in sickness & in health; and to be emulated in his ability to connect with others.

There may be times when your time at St. Anne's might seem like wasted time. In fact, if you focus only on yourself, that may very well be the case. Yet this time in your life can be a very rich time if you make the choice to unite your sufferings with those of Jesus and to influence the next generation and the lives of those around you. For my ordination prayer cards, I chose to print the Bible verse Hebrews 3:13, which reads: "encourage each other daily while it is still today." I mention that because rather than thinking of this as a time of limitation or loss; instead, your time at St. Anne's can be a time of encouragement [in your lives]. It can be a time to encourage fellow residents: in spite of your own suffering, to show love and kindness to those who may be suffering even more limitation and loss. And it can be a time of encouraging the next generations. The example you set of how you live your life, how you live out your faith during this season of your life of limited physical capabilities can have a strong and lasting influence on the next generations. Memories of how you lived during your time at St. Anne's with love and joy would be an awesome legacy to leave, and who knows what fruit it might bear even decades after you have moved into eternity. Let this time in your life, be a time in which you fulfill the purposes that God still has left for you on Earth, including the great purpose of encouragement.

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