

**Msgr. Laurence R. Bronkiewicz**

**Homily – 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 24/25, 2023 – A Readings**

**Saint Mary Church – Greenwich**

Life experiences can strengthen our faith in God. A good number of years ago I was flying home from Chicago. I got to O'Hare early and eventually boarded Delta flight 6182. My seat assignment was 7B, but a family with a number of children wanted to sit together – so I offered to sit in seat 6B, which was an aisle seat. 6A was the window seat, and that was occupied by a little boy.

When I sat down, the little boy was busy taking inventory of the contents of his big blue backpack. He then turned to me and in a matter-of-fact fashion said, "You probably don't know this, but this is my first trip by myself." He was all smiles. I put my book down and said, "You mean your parents are not with you?" "No, they're not" he said. He then explained that his Mom had brought him to the airport for the flight and made sure he got on the plane.

It turns out that my seat companion, Alexander, was 8 years old, and would start 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in the Fall. He and his Mom and Dad and little sister live on a farm in Indiana. I should also tell you that Alexander's final destination was not New York. It was Milan, Italy, where his maternal grandparents live. His Mom is Italian, and she was sending him to spend the summer with her family. Alexander spoke fluent Italian.

He is also addicted to Nintendo but told me that he couldn't take out his portable Nintendo player until the plane was in the air because it might interfere with the instruments on the plane. Then he asked me how old I was. I told him, and he said I was probably older than his grandfather. So, I went back to a book I had brought with me but not for long.

"I think it's time to put your book down," he said. "Why is that?" I asked. "Because it's time to read the emergency instructions. If my Mom were here, that's what we'd be doing. So, let's get it over with – we can do it together." He handed me the laminated card, and we went over the instructions. Even before the flight attendant started to give the customary instructions, Alexander told me that if the oxygen masks dropped down, I should put mine on first and not worry about him because I was old and needed it first.

Eventually, we taxied out to one of the runways at O'Hare, and as we lined up for takeoff, Alexander leaned over to me and asked me to put my book down again. He looked at me and said, "Now it's time to say a little prayer. If Mom were here, that's what we'd be doing." So, we prayed together – he led the prayer - we prayed for his Mom and Dad and his little sister, for all the people who work on the farm and for the crops. Then I said "Amen." A mistake because the prayer wasn't over yet. We continued to pray for the pilots and the crew and all the passengers and for good weather.

My little companion in seat 6A explained to me that prayer is very important. We pray to God, he explained, because God takes such good care of us. He's just like my Mom and Dad, he said, again in a very matter of fact way. No matter where we are or what we're doing, God is always there with us.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells his apostles not to be afraid of anything because to God we are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows. Sparrows incidentally were the cheapest item you could buy in the marketplace of Jesus' day. If God's providential care covers sparrows, we have nothing to fear. Of course, what our Lord is teaching his apostles, my young friend, Alexander, had already learned from his parents and believed – that God loves us and cares for us and watches over us. All of us, all the time. I was sitting next to a little boy who, because of that faith, wasn't afraid to fly to Italy all by himself or to talk to the old man sitting in seat 6B.

Well, the plane finally landed at JFK, and we taxied toward the terminal, but there was no parking, so we sat on the runway for quite a while. Many of the passengers, like Alexander, had connecting flights, and a number of them were pretty upset that they might not make their connections. But not Alexander – he remained amazingly calm. However, because of his age they got him off the plane first so he could make his flight to Italy.

A few other passengers and I were worried for him. Then it occurred to me that Alexander would not have wanted us to worry. Because our God loves us and takes care of us and watches over us. So, I said a little prayer for a little boy I will never meet again but who was and still is a real example of the faith and trust in God that Jesus is trying to instill in all of us in today's Gospel.

I called Alexander's mother this morning – I had asked him for her phone number. She told me he made the connection!