

## *Walking Together*

### *Homily for July 26<sup>th</sup> 2023 Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne*

When we think about Saints Joachim and Anne, we know that there is no direct reference to them in Scripture. What we do know is that by the second century they were being honoured as the parents of Mary and grandparents of Jesus. Then under the papacy of Leo XIII (Feb 1878-July 20<sup>th</sup> 1903) this feast day was declared a universal celebration.

We appreciate that it was in our province that a year ago today Pope Francis celebrated Mass at Commonwealth Stadium. Some of you here this evening remembers that hot day last July when 30,000 people gathered - present with the Holy Father on his Penitential Pilgrimage called "Walking Together". On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, having just returned to Rome after his week in Canada Pope Francis said at his Wednesday audience these words:

*Today I would like to share some reflections with you on the Apostolic journey I made to Canada in recent days. It was unlike the other journeys. Canada has embarked on the process of writing a new page in the journey that the Church has been making together with the Indigenous peoples for some time. And indeed, the motto of the journey, "Walking together" explains this somewhat. A path of reconciliation and healing, which presupposes historical knowledge, listening to the survivors, awareness and, above all, conversion, a change of mentality. This in-depth study shows that, on the one hand, some men and women of the Church were among the most decisive and courageous supporters of the dignity of the Indigenous peoples, coming to their defence and contributing to raising awareness of their languages and cultures; but, on the other hand, there was unfortunately no shortage of Christians, that is, priests, men and women religious and laypeople, who participated in programmes that today we understand are unacceptable and also contrary to the Gospel. And this is why I went to ask for forgiveness, on behalf of the Church.*

*It was therefore a penitential pilgrimage. There were many joyful moments, but the overall meaning and tone was reflection, repentance, and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>*

I appreciate the Holy Father's perspective in these remarks where he can call forth and recognize the Christians who truly honoured the culture of the First Peoples while also naming the generational suffering stemming from the pedagogical methods and forms of assimilation so contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and why reflection, repentance and reconciliation are so important.

So, as we gather on this day, where once more we mark the Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, I want us to consider how we can share in the ongoing work of reflection, repentance and reconciliation as we walk together with the First Peoples of Southern Alberta.

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<sup>1</sup> [General Audience of 3 August 2022 - Catechesis: The Apostolic Journey in Canada | Francis \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francis/general_audience_francis/_compendio/2022/08/03/20220803_01_1.html)

To do this, I would like to think with you about the Land Acknowledgment St Peter's has adopted. This is a statement that took four months to draft and finalize and was ratified by our Parish Council earlier this year. The first sentence reads:

***We are grateful to God, the Creator, for the gracious gift of these lands for all peoples.***

This emphasis on gratitude is so important because we acknowledge these prairie fields, towering mountains, coniferous forests, cities, and towns are a gracious gift from God the creator of heaven and earth. When considering Joachim and Anne we are invited to see them reflected implicitly in the reading from Sirach:

***These were godly people,  
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;  
<sup>11</sup> their wealth will remain with their descendants,  
and their inheritance with their children's children.<sup>2</sup>***

Notice mention is made of their wealth and righteous deeds and how their inheritance would be extended to their children's children. Now think about this in relation to our saints for this evening. Their child's child was Jesus. What we see repeatedly in the life and teaching of Jesus is an appreciation for the land as he expressed it in parables, and by his walking together with so many people through the Holy Land. Their wealth was not monetary but their awareness that all is gift. No doubt Jesus learned to have this gratitude because of his mother, father, and grandparent's example where they would have modeled thankfulness.

Gratitude for the land then leads to a deepening appreciation of our interdependence and connectedness, the idea next expressed in our Land Acknowledgement.

***In a spirit of gratitude, we acknowledge that this Treaty 7 Territory, where as a community we worship, live, work and play, is the traditional home of the Siksika, Piikani Kainai, Bearspaw, Chiniki and Goodstoney First Nations and the Tsuut'ina Nation. This area is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.***

Here there is a recognition of those people who have inhabited these lands for thousands of years and we want to affirm the importance of what it means to live together communally sharing lives of worship, work, and play. This is to be for the betterment of all peoples, especially those for whom this is their ancient ancestral home. Listen now to the communal dimension of the Sirach reading:

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#) (Sir 44:10–11). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

*Their descendants stand by the covenants;  
their children also, for their sake.  
13 Their offspring will continue forever,  
and their glory will never be blotted out.  
14 Their bodies are buried in peace,  
but their name lives on generation after generation.  
15 The assembly declares their wisdom,  
and the congregation proclaims their praise.<sup>3</sup>*

Here is stated the importance of honouring and remembering of names. This is something that was violated during the period of forced assimilation, but we are now called to affirm and elevate the First Peoples of these lands by the naming of their Nations.

Names are so important from a biblical perspective that we remember the names of Anna Joachim all two millennia after their deaths. The first work the man is given to do in Genesis was to give names to the created world. When names are remembered, honour, dignity and identity are affirmed because we then see the other person, or other peoples.

This brings us to the last part of the Land Acknowledgement:

*As members of St. Peter's Parish, we will in humility strive to learn, reflect, and act in ways that will promote our shared journey of truth, reconciliation, healing and hope.*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is at its heart an invitation to this shared journey, our walking together. But this calls for the kind of humility represented by Saints Anne, Joachim, our Blessed Mother and Saviour. Those who understand this invitation to humbly learn and reflect on the importance of this penitential journey will recognize the gift we are being offered. A gift Jesus expressed in today's Gospel:

*But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it<sup>4</sup>*

We can be blessed that in our day Jesus is inviting us to share with Him and the peoples of these lands what it means to walk together as we learn to live out these words:

*We are grateful to God, the Creator, for the gracious gift of these lands for all peoples. In a spirit of gratitude, we acknowledge that this Treaty 7 Territory, where as a community we worship, live, work and play, is the traditional home of the Siksika, Piikani Kainai, Bearspaw, Chiniki and Goodstoney First Nations and the Tsuut'ina Nation. This area is also home to the*

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (Sir 44:12–15). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (Mt 13:16–17). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

*Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3. As members of St. Peter's Parish, we will in humility strive to learn, reflect, and act in ways that will promote our shared journey of truth, reconciliation, healing and hope.*