HOMILY FOR THE TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – A

The theme that runs through all our readings today is this: through all of life’s circumstances God is with us and for us, working to bring us to fullness of life. In our first reading, even while being persecuted by the leaders of his people, Jeremiah expressed his confidence that the abuse he was receiving would not keep him from sharing in the good things that God had intended for him. In our reading from Romans, Paul wrote that the greatest, most pervasive of sins are no match for God’s grace – a grace that will transform us into people who can share in the goodness of the divine life for all eternity. And in the Gospel Jesus assured us that we need not fear those who would do us harm in this life because we are under the providential care of our heavenly Father, who will bring us safely into his kingdom.

Again and again, the scriptures call us to place our trust in God’s providential care. But for most of us this is no easy thing. Especially when things become difficult and painful, it is hard for us to believe that in all things God is at work for our good and for our salvation. Yet this is the truth that lies at the heart of our Christian faith. And when we come to embrace it wholeheartedly we are no longer paralyzed by our fears. We are able to move through life giving thanks and praise for all things, because we know that God is in all things working on our behalf.

Of course, we all know that living into this truth and embracing it is no easy thing. And in this final homily here, I’d like to share with you some of my own struggles with this and what I have learned.

When I followed God’s leading over thirty years ago now and announced that I would be leaving the United Methodist Ministry to become a Roman Catholic, contrary to what people often think, this was no great act of courage. Though I had a wife and three children and many thought I was crazy for doing this, I felt so strongly that this was what God was calling me to do, that I was sure God would provide.

But as things went on, I began to wonder about this. For months, I struggled to find work that would make use of my background and experience. When I finally received an invitation to meet with a priest who was the head of a college theology department, my mood began to brighten – until he suggested that I forget about church work and consider selling insurance. At this point I found myself wondering why God wasn’t opening up an opportunity for me. And I began to fear for my family’s future.

Fortunately, through the kindness of Sr. Mary Ann Fatula, who was head of the theology department at Ohio Dominican, I was put in touch with the head of a high school theology department and I was hired. And I was overjoyed. It seemed that God hadn’t hung me out to dry after all – that is, until I discovered that I wasn’t cut out for teaching high school religion. I had such poor classroom management skills that my classes were totally out of control. After a couple months, I was so anxious that when I entered the school my insides started shaking so badly I could hardly stay standing. And it didn’t stop until I left the building. Again, I found myself wondering why God had brought me to Columbus only to go through such torture. It got so bad that I had to resign my position and was without work for a few months. And I was in the throes of a depression, again fearing for my family’s future.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a part-time teaching position opened at the Josephinum which soon turned into a full-time job. In the mean-time I had been offered a part-time position in the Diocesan Liturgy Office as the director of the implementation of the RCIA for the Diocese of Columbus. So, within a year of my becoming Catholic I was teaching at a Pontifical Seminary and directing one of the most important things going on in the diocese at that time. And it became clear to me that God was in this -- that our moving to Columbus was no accident -- because such things don’t really happen in the normal course of things. Again, I was very happy.

I became even happier when a priest suggested that I consider becoming a priest – something that I didn’t know was possible. But after some further vocational discernment, Bishop Griffin agreed to sponsor my petition. I was ecstatic.

But the process took way longer than the two years it usually took. And I became disheartened once again. It got even worse when after waiting five years the bishop came back from a visit to Rome
and told me that he thought I should forget about the priesthood because he had stopped in the
congregation that was dealing with the petition and had received no positive response. Again, I found
myself in a dark place, wondering why God had brought me there only to leave me disappointed. And I
became terribly dispirited.

Then two months later the rescript came, granting permission for my ordination. And as I
reflected on the time it had taken for this to transpire, I realized that we were in a much better position for
all this to happen family-wise than we would have been three years previously. Though it had troubled
me immensely while going through it, I finally came to see why God had brought me to that place of
waiting. God’s had been working on my behalf all along.

Truthfully, this pattern has continued throughout my life – making the leap of faith joyfully,
trusting that God was with me and for me – then finding myself in some dark and difficult place
questioning God’s providential care – only to discover later that God had been working through it all in
ways that helped me to grow as a person and contribute more to life.

My coming to serve here a second time followed this same pattern. I had requested to be assigned
to the parish in Delaware so I could serve in the same community where my wife had worked for the past
twenty plus years. And we believed that this was what was going to happen. Priests were even
congratulating me on my new assignment – to Delaware St. Mary’s. We were so happy about this
because we believed it was just the right thing for us. Then the bishop called me into his office and told
me that he was assigning me to St. Paul’s. And once again, the bottom dropped out – not because I had a
problem with St. Paul’s – but simply because we had our hearts set on something else.

But you all have been so good to us. In fact, if it wasn’t for the love you’ve shown us and Fr.
Charlie’s friendship and strong support, I don’t think I would have been able to do what God had been
pushing me to do for quite some time. If I had gone to Delaware at my request, I would have felt duty
bound to stick it out there for four more years – something that would have been very bad for my health
and the health of my family. Truthfully, I don’t think I would have survived it. The bishop was right in
sending me here after all! And once again I have come to see that God has been good to me in bringing
me to this place.

So often in my life, I have come to that point where I am being asked the same question Jesus
once asked his disciples while in a boat on a stormy sea – “Why are you afraid? Where is your faith?”
And I find myself more than ever wanting to give myself over to that faith, to trusting that in all things
God truly is with and for me. That all will be well. After all, I have a whole lifetime of experiences that
have taught me that regardless of how things seem to me at any given time, God is always present,
working for my good.

And this is my prayer for all of you – that you will continue to make that leap of faith, no matter
where you are and what hardships have befallen you. For the God who has brought us all into being loves
us with the greatest of all loves. God is with us – God abides with us in all things, working to bring about
some greater good, transforming us into those who can share in the fullness of life with him forever.

To help you remember this, I have written a little something for you – my parting gift to you. It is
on the back of your bulletin, and I would like to read it for you now.
A FLOWING FROM GOD

There is a creative flow, a flowing from God.

We can choose to push against it or to flow with it.

Sometimes we think, “This can’t possibly be taking me to where I want to go.”

So we push against it until weary, we can push no longer and are swept along to that unwanted place.

But to our surprise, we find that we have been brought to the best of all places.

Wisdom is learning to stop pushing against it and to go with the flow.

For in this surrendering we find that the ride is less exhausting and much more fun.

Either way, this creative flowing that gives birth to all things, will bring us to that place where there is only goodness and love.

Oh, there may be rough spots along the way where we might be bumped and jostled -- even bloodied and bruised.

But we will find upon arrival, that we were being fashioned to fit into something so wonderful that we will find ourselves forever delighted.

Fr. Rod Damico
June 25, 2017