

## **Silver Jubilee Homily – 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday Cycle “B” – June 20, 2015 (AMDG)**

This is the weekend when I am going to make a relatively rare exception to my general rule that says the homily needs to talk about the Scriptures of the weekend. You may be thinking “well the only other thing that Pastors generally talk about is money.” Rest easy – I’m not going there either. Rather, I’d like to offer a reflection upon the occasion of my 25<sup>th</sup> “wedding anniversary” – well sort of wedding anniversary. However it is true that 25 years ago on the morning of June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1990 at the Cathedral in St. Paul, you might say that I pledged myself to a life-long relationship (a marriage if you will) to the Church. I even have the ring to prove it. In my wildest dreams I could never have imagined that 25 years later this local Church would be dealing with news headlines about the resignation of 2 of our 3 Bishops, a sexual abuse scandal and its after affects that have rocketed this Archdiocese into national and world news headlines, and as a result, the bankruptcy of the diocese and selling off of property including the Chancery and Archbishop’s residence to rightfully pay damages to victim survivors. Not in my wildest dreams could I have seen this coming. And I feel compelled to apologize to you, God’s people, for such a sinful abuse of your trust by leadership on so many levels. I am deeply sorry for that. Yet, as in today’s Gospel, as the violent storm raged around them the apostles turned to Jesus who encouraged them to faith, as he brought peace and restored order. The lesson is there for us too, just as for the disciples, about who to look to for help and guidance in these troubled times. “For better worse”, as the marriage vows say. And there have indeed been many good times for me in my 25 year relationship with Christ’s bride the Church. For that I am deeply grateful to God - and to all of you.

The past 25 years of ministry for me have been, (it almost sounds sacrilegious), a lot of fun and an awesome privilege. Talk about variety! Five assignments – none of which I actually applied for – all around the Archdiocese. You know how it works in the business world – if you have a problem employee you just keep passing them on. I hope that wasn’t the case

with me. First stop after ordination – St. Olaf in downtown Minneapolis – living in the heart of the city 2 blocks from the IDS tower. And I had, during my 4 years there, 2 fantastic mentor pastors to learn from – Msgr. Frank Fleming who retired while I was there after being the pastor for 24 years, and Fr. John Forliti who had a vastly different style but was equally effective. I learned there is no single right way to be a shepherd because every pastor's gifts are so varied.

Next stop, my first pastorate in Faribault MN - guarding the southern borders of the Archdiocese. It was kind of rural (population 18,000) with 3 ethnic parishes (German, French & Irish). During these 4 ½ years I learned how to merge 2 parishes when they (the Archdiocese) pulled out 1 of the 3 priests in town and added his parish to me. There was with lots of stress, little direction from the Archdiocese (they were experimenting with us), but lots of help from the Holy Spirit. Thank you Lord!

Then Archbishop Flynn asked me to be the Spiritual Director at the St. Paul Seminary. Another way of saying this is that I was “institutionalized” for the next 7 ½ years. As you might guess, it was a whole different type of ministry –very challenging and very rewarding as, like a real dad on this Father's Day weekend, I sort of felt like a proud papa. I could watch the men “grow up” and “graduate” to serve the Church in this and other dioceses. However, God was kind to me in that to help keep my sanity I went to parishes every weekend – all around the Archdiocese where they needed help while awaiting a new Pastor. Pure sacramental work, little responsibility. (People would come up to me and complain, say, about the custodian. I could say, “That's a really good point. Be sure to tell your new pastor about that. – See you next weekend.”)

Again a phone call from Archbishop Flynn. Would I go to St. John's in Little Canada (notice that I'm moving progressively north)? This time my biggest parish so far, with a school, and a cemetery, and \$4M left on the debt that built the school. Through the generosity of the

people we fairly quickly had the debt down to \$2M and dropping. One lesson that I learned in this assignment is that when your brother is a member of the parish, it limits some of the stories that you can tell in your preaching. But it was great fun to have Ron and his wife only 6 blocks away and to yak with him after Mass each weekend.

But after 7 years this time it was a tap on the shoulder from Archbishop Nienstedt at the May Rosary procession in 2013. He would like me to come to St. Bridget's in Lindstrom. (Another move north – pretty soon I'll be either in Duluth or Canada.). And after 2 years here, if you total the numbers at each assignment it equals 25 exciting, varied and blessed (and fun) years of priesthood. I love it here and sincerely hope that I can stay a little longer than past assignments. Who knows, the full 12 years might be kind of nice, if you don't get sick of me. But honestly, I trust that the Holy Spirit is in charge of my assignments, and has been all along. SO.... what have I learned (what have you all taught me so far) in these 25 years of ministry?

#1) I love what I do (most days). God is so good and so generous and so loving, (and so forgiving), that it is just a privilege to do my best to serve him.

#2) It's NOT about any given priest. Priests come & go – parishioners make the parish "work". (I think of a garden hose & nozzle analogy. God provides the water; we are the hose & nozzle. The hose's job is not to draw attention to itself, but to unobtrusively carry focus and direct the water to areas where it's needed. So with the priest. It's about the water, not the hose. It's about God, not us.)

#3) Most times it's best to go slow on making changes. Respect the parish's history; try to understand why they do what they do. Communicate a lot, and LISTEN....before major changes are made.

#4) People are forgiving and most want to love the Church, their faith and even their Pastor – so my job is to try not to get in the way and mess that all up.

#5) Pray and Trust (like today's the Gospel/ boat story) He IS listening (it may seem at times like he's sleeping, but he IS listening, and he CARES - although He may not work things out the same way that I would.

#6) Be joyful – act like its **Good News** that we are preaching and living.

#7) The Church could use more priests (vocations) – especially good priests, like T.J. – these troubled times in our Archdiocese will pass.

#8) I must never fail to hold in reverence that you allow me into your lives - and many of your lives are way more difficult with way more suffering than mine. I am convinced that celibacy is a relative breeze compared to the challenges of raising a family.

Thanks for being patient with me.

#9) At times when life gets complicated and stressful, I need to refocus on the basics: God's word (the Bible), the sacraments (esp. Eucharist), Jesus, Mary & lots of prayer.

#10) For all those who, in the past 25 years I have hurt (knowingly or not), offended, ignored, given bad advice or not responded to your needs, I am sorry and I ask your forgiveness. I promise to keep trying to do better

So, thanks for allowing me this walk down memory lane. I think and pray that I still have some more fruitful and fun years ahead. I love what I do and God willing hope to keep doing it in the foreseeable future as we help each other to grow in holiness and live God's will in our lives. I hereby publicly and joyful recommit myself with God's help to continue to love and serve you, my bride the Church .....until death do us part. Thanks for being my continued inspiration, support, and companions on the journey!