

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Praise & Worship  
May 19, 2019  
Romans 8:18-30 The Future Glory  
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In Romans 8 verses 1 through 17, the focus has been on really knowing and appropriating the fact that we have power now to walk in the Spirit, not in our fleshly disorders, because the Spirit dwells in us, we who are God's heirs and adopted children and who cry out, "Abba, Father." That focus has largely been on our present walk as we look to what Christ, in the past, has already poured out on our behalf. But, there is now a shift as Saint Paul goes on to explain that although we may still suffer with Christ in this present life, we can patiently wait, with hope, for a future that encompasses our full adoption and inheritance in Christ, and this includes the redemption of our bodies in glorified recreation. So in verses 18 through 22 we read:

*<sup>18</sup>I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup>for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;*

Christian martyrs down through the ages banked on the faith filled fact that their short-term sufferings on this earth were not worth comparing with the glory to be revealed in them during their next life with Christ. Similarly, this experience of suffering swallowed up in happiness, occurs almost every time a woman gives birth, as my daughter, Mary, discovered when last Fall, after a long and arduous labor, she gave birth to her first child, a daughter, who they named Theresa, after her dear departed mother, my wife.

Saint Paul states that all creation participates in this longing or groaning, as in labor, for God's children to be fully revealed and for creation itself be set free from the bondage to decay. Indeed, all creation does participate. For instance, cosmologists tell us that our planet and our solar system were seeded long ago with heavier elements necessary for life, which are forged inside the pressurized cauldron of certain large stars when after millions of years of laborious contractions, suddenly explode into super-nova events. From a star's point of view it is death and futility, but not from God's point of view. Similarly, we may at times think that our lives are over or that our efforts are futile but when we consecrate ourselves and those we love to the one who knows all and works all for our good then God is glorified and we are transformed both now and in eternity.

In the creation story, the Book of Genesis reveals how man and woman were designated to carefully name and have dominion over the rest of creation and to work in and care for the garden they were placed in as royal vicars or stewards of God's creation. Although mankind, the pinnacle of God's creation, forfeited this exalted role through grievous, mistrustful disobedience, God had a more glorious plan of restoration so that those made in God's image and likeness would one day become his adopted children and heirs of his glorious dominion of grace, including the rest of creation. For we know that it is God's nature to have providential care for all his creatures and Sacred Scripture reveals that He will create a new heavens and a new earth wherein the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and the river of life shall be teeming with fish and be surrounded by the tree of life with its fruit for food and its leaves for healing. Indeed, all creation will share in this glorious plan wherein recreated humanity will not be just stewards of God's creation but fully mature, royal sons and daughters of the most-high God. Paul then writes;

*<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes<sup>d</sup> for what is seen? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

In these verses Saint Paul states that those who have received the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait in hope for our full adoption, the redemption or resurrection of our bodies, a hope that is not seen. For a hope that one presently sees or experiences is not true hope for Godly hope entails a promise by God for a future reward even beyond the grave so that our mortal, decaying bodies may obtain the resurrection of the dead.

Saint Paul speaks of "first fruits" and as scholar and author Scott Hahn explains in his commentary on Romans, the "first fruits of the Spirit" alludes to the Jewish liturgical tradition of Pentecost wherein, "the first stalks of grain gathered from the spring harvest, and taken to the temple, were offered to the Lord in thanksgiving for a successful beginning and in petition for God's blessing on the rest of the harvest season." Dr. Hahn states that the Spirit here is a like a down payment or "first installment of our inheritance" (see Eph. 1:14).

Heaven is not supposed to be "totally" different from what we can now experience on earth. For often we receive a foretaste of heavenly glory in our praise and worship together in this very room, in our private moments of adoration, in our experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit or in the joyous use of the spiritual gifts God has given us for the building up of his kingdom. However, for those in Christ, it is a natural desire to want more of Christ, to groan for a more full experience of

heavenly glory, to want to be more like Christ with freedom from sinful inclinations, and to find ones home in Christ alone. Do you not groan for more?

Saint Paul also speaks of adoption and at the time he was writing, adoption was an established practice in Roman high-society, especially in emperor designations. For instance, Julius Caesar was the great-uncle of Octavian, later known as Caesar Augustus, but Julius Caesar's will designated Octavian as his legal son and heir. And although legally Julius Caesar's son, Octavian did not fully inherit all that was Caesar's until after Caesar was assassinated and he defeated Caesar's assassins and other pretenders: "Caesar is dead; long live the new Caesar." Yet we well know that striving for earthly glory and power is futile and we can't take it with us. But Saint Paul says that our adoption is different, for even after our mortal life is over we who hope in Christ have a heavenly inheritance and a resurrected body to look forward to wherein death is swallowed up in victory. Let us continue reading;

*<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

In this passage Saint Paul notes "our weakness" for we all have weaknesses that may be physical, emotional, intellectual, developmental, and so on. We are not God, we are not self-sufficient, and frequently we do not pray as we ought to pray. But Paul declares that not only creation and we ourselves groan, but the Holy Spirit himself joins our chorus of groans with sighs too deep for words. And God, who knows well our hearts and minds, and who knows the character he wants formed in us, is able, through the Spirit to translate our prayerful groaning in accordance with God's will. Isn't it wonderful that we not only have an intercessor that knows our hearts and minds but intimately knows God's as well. May His kingdom come and His will be done.

It is said that one of the beauties of praying in tongues is that it allows the Holy Spirit to do the praying and praising through us. When I was prayed to receive the baptism in the Spirit the first gift I received was not tongues, which came later, but that night in my bed my hands wanted to clap together in praise of God. Also, my teeth seemed to want to chatter together whenever I felt God's presence and my mouth was closed. Although under my full control, to this day, on many occasions, my hands still clap and my teeth still chatter and seem to make prayerful expression to God in ways too deep for words. This may be a way of praying in the Spirit. Saint Paul himself

appeared to be talking about “praying in the Spirit” when he wrote in I Corinthians 14:18; “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all.” But let us read on in his letter to the Romans.

*<sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

Note that Saint Paul did not say that all things work together for the best to those who love God, but they do work out for the good to those who are called according to his loving purpose. For God’s goodness far surpasses all that we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20) for those who are lovers of God. And He can, with our faith-filled cooperation, and indeed does heal or work for good all wounds be they broken hearts, broken marriages, broken bodies or broken spirits. The greatest act of evil the world has ever known was the awful and excruciating execution of the Son of God on Calvary’s hill. But God, but God made it into the greatest good.

Of course, looking to God and working with Him, who works all things out for good, is a present work not just a future event. For instance, two weekends ago at the annual Mother of God School GlobalFest fundraiser, the MOG Community, as usual, had the responsibility of hosting an American food tent with hot dogs, hamburgers, soft drinks, alcoholic drinks and so on. It was my task this year to organize and oversee this function and as many of you know it rained and rained and rained. There was mud and puddles everywhere under our tent and I was beside myself trying to figure out how to handle things, but my sister in Christ, Lea Gargulinski, gave me a word of encouragement and I began seeing God, through my brothers and sisters work out things for good.

I saw us as a community working together, with some grilling, some assisting customers, some taking tickets and all with a smile. One brother, Doug Sharafinski, brought in flagstones for folks to step on in the food line. Another, James Rickett, brought in straw to lay on other pathways. My sister, Nancy McCambridge, got quite wet as she stood taking tickets a little bit too close to the outside. Most of the tent’s tables were water logged so I saw folks in the gym quickly put away chairs after the student performances and laid out the cafeteria tables that were on wheels with built in seats. What seemed disastrous turned out for the good as the body was built up in love and cooperation. I wanted sunshine, good order, and lots of money made for the School, but God has His own purposes and we do well when we allow Him to fulfill those purposes through us. As Saint Paul wrote “God is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

In the Romans 8 passage note the five verbs in God's divine providence used by Saint Paul – foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. And God's purposed destiny for us, according to Paul, is to be conformed to the image of His Son so he might be the firstborn among a very large family of God's children. As I see it, to a large degree, it is our calling here as a Community, to try, however feebly, to live as God's family here on this earth. And I saw this at the GlobalFest fundraiser two weekends ago.

I also saw it last weekend as well when we hosted and fed some 30 brothers and sisters who accompanied Georgian Banov in a conference to teach us how to practice hearing God's word and using it in evangelization. The two men I hosted, as well as others, expressed great gratitude for all the meals and hospitality they received from us. And God, through folks like my sister, Kinday Toto, our hospitality organizer, worked all things together for good.

One might ask how God lovingly works all things together for good, including our predestined calling, justification and glorification? How does God's foreknowledge before time began encompass eons of chance happenings, as well as human free will decisions? Well, we have a very, very big God, and in fact He is an infinite God. The universe, astronomers discovered, is not infinite, but God is and we can rely on his infinite love, goodness, wisdom, mercy and grace. I have seen God's infinite love work first hand. And I have seen how chance, free will decisions and divine providence meet together.

It was in late September of 2016 when Theresa, my wife of 41 years, passed away due to multiple organ failure in a hallway basement of a distant hospital, waiting for radiology to perform a CT scan. I was pretty disconcerted and desired some consolation from God, our Father, that He was still in control and that He had my wife, myself and our two daughters, Joann and Mary, in His loving hands.

And that happened on the night of October 2, 2016 after we had had a time of visitation or viewing for Theresa at DeVol Funeral Home in Gaithersburg. After the visitation period we were asked to take the flowers that were there to Saint John Neumann Catholic Church where there was to be a funeral Mass for her the following morning. So I took the flowers in my car with my sister, Barbara. Also, my wife's brother, Ralph, and his family followed us in his rental car with additional flowers, and it was dark.

I remember pausing a bit before turning right onto Route 355, so that my brother-in-law could catch up with us, as he did not know the way. When we reached the stop light at the intersection of Goshen Road and Odenhal Avenue I observed a small grey truck stopped directly in front of us and told my sister to look at the license plate. It read THERESA with an H, just like my wife spelled her name. My sister then declared, “Blimey, I waited six months after our mother died for some consolation sign from her and here you get a very direct sign as we are bringing flowers to Theresa’s funeral Mass.” I had never seen that vehicle before or since that night, but I discovered that the state of Maryland has some five million registered vehicles, but only one, only one has that license plate, and just by chance, and by free will decisions, and by divine providence it happened to appear on that road, on that dark night, right in front of me, a sinful man. I knew then that only an infinite God could orchestrate the coming together of all those circumstances and I felt consoled in the knowledge that He did indeed have my wife, myself, and our daughters in his loving hands for God’s providential, consoling and astounding love is beyond fathoming.

God is alive and he knows and cares for each of us with infinite love for God is infinite and He can only love infinitely. And if God loves infinitely in time, how much more does He love in eternity? Thank you.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

Are you looking forward to an eternity of glory with Christ and how has that helped you as you faced sufferings or trials?

How are you preparing for heaven now in your relationship with Christ as well as in relating to His brothers and sisters on earth?

Can you give an example of how the Holy Spirit has helped you in your hour of need?

Explain how you have seen God work good from what seemed to be bad?