

## Homily for May 25, 2019

May 25<sup>th</sup> is an important day in my life. It was on this day in 2013, six years ago today, I was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest. For me, my ordination has helped me to appreciate and experience God's providential guidance in my life.

So this morning using my story as an example, I want talk with you about the providential working of God.

So what is providence? Listen to this definition from the Harper Bible Dictionary.

***Providence is the belief that God has a plan and purpose for his world where the Creator is actively involved in moving his creation to a goal. History is not a cyclical process of endless repetition; history is being moved toward the predetermined end.***<sup>1</sup>

Providence is therefore a way of looking at the unfolding of history and our personal lives where our heavenly Father working through his beloved Son as the Holy Spirit inspires and councils the Church, is moving his creation towards its goal. The ultimate goal is described as the new heaven and new earth that we will hear declared in our Sunday reading from Revelation 22.

And here is the point so important for us. God wants to work through you and me in unfolding his providential purposes. We see this on clear display in our reading from Acts in Paul choosing to have Timothy circumcised and in choosing to go to Macedonia.

Now if you are familiar with the unfolding of Acts, in chapter 15 the first council of the Church was convened in Jerusalem. The central question was: Do non Jewish converts to Christ have to be circumcised? St Paul was the voice most emphatically saying no. Circumcision was the sign of God's relationship with Israel. The covenantal sign of the New Israel – the Church is not circumcision, but the Eucharist. As I said, this was in chapter 15. Today we turn the page and at the beginning of chapter 16 we read:

***<sup>3</sup> Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised***<sup>2</sup>

Timothy came from mixed lineage. Rabbinic law stated that religious affiliation followed matrilineal lines, so that children born of a Jewish mother were automatically Jewish, regardless of the faith of the father.<sup>3</sup> Therefore even though circumcision for Timothy was not required according to the decision of the Jerusalem council, St Luke tells us:

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<sup>1</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [\*Harper's Bible dictionary\*](#) (1st ed., p. 832). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Ac 16:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament\*](#). (2010). (p. 234). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

***Paul had Timothy circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek<sup>4</sup>***

In others words Paul determined that it was expedient for the work of ministry among the Jewish people of that region so that they could cooperate with God/s providential purposes for the expansion of the Gospel. Notice later in the passage Paul and his companions are prevented from entering into Asia but are rather led by the Holy Spirit to Macedonia St. Luke tells us:

***When Paul had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.<sup>5</sup>***

Now here is the point I would like you to take away. To cooperate with the purposes of God's providential working requires a discernment where the Holy Spirit interacting with our conscience convicts us of a certain direction. In March 2012 I had a conviction that in order to be faithful to Jesus Christ, I had to become Catholic. Within 14 months something would happen that two years earlier, in May of 2011 I would have never anticipated, that I would become a Catholic Priest.

And here is what I am learning, about cooperating with providence. It can be painful to be obedient to discerning the will of Jesus in our lives. Think about how Timothy experienced that pain, circumcision as an adult at a time without anesthetic. Youch! But it is also glorious. For Paul going to Macedonia allowed him to establish the Church at Philippi, a congregation that gave him great support, especially in raising money for the impoverished Jerusalem Church.

Responding to Jesus call to become Catholic was very difficult in the early years. Some people thought I had gone loopy and for our family there was much pain and confusion surrounding Peggy's and my obedience to the Holy Spirit. Yet at the same time responding to the conviction inspired by the Holy Spirit has been glorious and I have been so aware of God's providence in making the most difficult and important decision, which was to enter the Church.

May we all discover that God is using us in his purposeful providential plan so clearly expressed at the heart of today's Collect:

***Through Baptism you have been pleased to confer on us a heavenly life, grant, we pray that those you render capable of immortality by justifying them may by your guidance attain the fullness of glory.***

I am so grateful that in God's providence in ordaining me he brought me to you so that together we can know God is guiding toward creation's goal which in the new heaven and earth will be to attain the fullness of glory.

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Ac 16:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Ac 16:10). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.