

*Homily for November 8, 2019*  
*Friday 31st Week of Ordinary Time*

We come today to the end of our readings from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. Romans is to Paul what Messiah is to Handel. Paul's theological masterpiece to Handel's musical masterpiece. Paul concludes his letter by expressing his confidence in the Roman Christians.

*I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.*

Here is a statement about the respect and admiration he has for the Roman Christians. He affirms his confidence in them and then describes that confidence in terms of the attribute of goodness. They are full of goodness. What does he mean by this? At the very beginning of Romans Paul describes his Mission this way:

*we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles*

This is chapter 1 verse 4. His Mission is to bring about the obedience of faith, he says, among the Gentiles that is non-Jewish people.

Now listen to this verse, taken from today's passage at chapter 15:18

*For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed,*

This is a key idea in the Letter to the Romans, the obedience of the Gentiles, stated at the letter's opening and near its conclusion. So when Paul says that he says that these Gentile Christians in Rome are full of goodness he discerns in them this remarkable potential to grow into the full stature of Christ Jesus as the live obediently to him and for him. It is told that once, when Michelangelo began to carve a huge and shapeless block of marble, he said that his aim was to release the angel imprisoned in the stone.<sup>1</sup>

This is the idea Paul has in mind here. As the Apostle to the Gentiles he not only sees there great potential but also affirms they are filled with knowledge able to instruct one another.

As I reflected on this verse I realized this is a bold statement about the central role the laity have played in the Church from her first generation. Paul understood the importance of his priestly ministry, which he described this way:

*to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God.*

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, W. (2002). [\*The Letter to the Romans\*](#) (3rd ed. fully rev. & updated, p. 237). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

However this was so his priesthood could serve the lay faithful to mature in Christ. Paul was so committed to this mission that he writes:

*from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.*

This represents the length and breadth of the Roman Empire from near Rome all the way to Jerusalem, so desirous was he to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles.

As I reflected on these verses from Romans I reaffirmed in my thinking that you the people of St. Peter's are also full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. You are the very heart of this parish and those of us called to ordained ministry are to encourage and enable you to fulfill your ministry that is so multifaceted and vibrant here.

Know that as Paul loved those to whom he wrote in Rome, so too I love you and want to grow in being dedicated to my calling so you can be dedicated to yours.