

Homily
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 26, 2020

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28)

This reassurance of Saint Paul to the small Christian community in Rome, and heard in our Second Reading, has been a source of consolation – and confusion – to Christians ever since.

Saint Paul declares that God uses all things for His good purposes. But note, Saint Paul *is not saying* all things that happen in life are good in themselves! He is not saying our troubles and sufferings and temptations are good *in themselves*.

He *is saying* that God can *use them*, in fact uses every circumstance of our lives – the happy and the sad, the peaceful and the painful – to accomplish His predestined will for us.

And what is God’s predestined will for us? Saint Paul tells us in the very next verse: *“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rm 8:29).*

God wants to conform us to the image of His crucified, resurrected and glorified Son. He wants us to look like Christ. That’s what this life is all about. That is God’s vision for us as Christ’s *“brothers and sisters.”*

What this implies is trust in God and surrender to His greater purpose. God knows what He is about, even if in the details of our lives we do not. But some day we will see that bigger picture and understand.

In the Old Testament the patriarch Joseph has somewhat of a similar realization. Betrayed and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, Joseph becomes advisor to the Pharaoh and rises in position and power. Later, during a time of drought, Joseph's brothers are brought to him as they seek refuge in Egypt from famine. Addressing his brothers Joseph explains, *"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as He is doing today."* (Gen 50:20).

Saint Paul expresses a similar sentiment: the tragedies of life do not fall outside the scope of divine providence. In God's plan they can be used for unforeseen blessings, in this life but with their ultimate purpose the next. For, *"those whom [God] predestined He also called; and those whom He called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified."* Amen.