

06/10/18 10 B

-- When I first looked at the readings for today as I prepared to preach, I was taken aback. The gospel, in particular, didn't look like very good material to reflect on my anniversary of ordination to the priesthood.

-- Fortunately, the second reading came to my rescue, so I choose to concentrate on St. Paul's reflections. This letter is one of his more personal ones. He speaks about his own ministry, and also the need to place our confidence in the Lord and not ourselves.

-- And he tells us not to be discouraged or, as another translation puts it, "Do not lose heart." That's an important message for me and, I believe, for all of us.

-- There could be many reasons for me to be discouraged as I complete 40 years as a priest of our diocese. For one thing, when I was ordained, there were about 220 active priests serving our diocese. Now, there are about 100. And there seems to be just as much work to do.

-- Mass attendance, which was already dropping at that time, has dropped even more. And even more discouraging, the percentage of young Catholics being married in the Church is about half of what it was then. That would appear to put a cloud over the Church's future.

-- Many of you feel the effects of these trends and may be tempted to lose heart. I'm sure some of you have adult children who do not practice the Catholic faith. You may worry about your grandchildren's faith.

-- Those of you with young children may be concerned about their safety in school, and when they are outside of school as well. You worry about the dangers of the drug culture, of bullying and other dangers.

-- And you may be concerned about whether they will continue to hold on to their faith as they grow older and more independent.

-- As we all grow older, we also are concerned over our fading ability to do the things we could do when we were younger. Our physical and

psychic energy is not what it used to be. That even may affect what we can do in our parish. Younger people may not take over these ministries.

-- Yes, all of these concerns are out there. But, as St. Paul reminds us, the grace of God is still there in abundance. That grace carries us through difficult times and helps us face the challenges of our faith.

-- If it were not for the grace of God, I could not have persevered in my vocation for these 40 years. Fortunately, God has not let me down. God has allowed me to be his minister despite my obvious weaknesses. God's patience has so often made up for my lack of patience.

-- And God's grace is there for all of us. He gives it to his Church by the people who, every year, continue to grace our community when they receive the Easter sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist).

-- God's grace is shown in the young people who are working for an end to school violence and for greater justice in our world. It comes to light when Catholics speak up for human life: in the womb, for migrants and refugees, in our prisons and many other places.

-- And God's grace has been shown to us in our Holy Father, who has called us to be a Church for the poor and the powerless. He has called us to a humble spirit and even to the importance of a sense of humor.

-- I hope to use this anniversary to reflect more deeply on God's grace in my life, and I would hope you would take that opportunity as well.

-- This anniversary reminds me that my own earthly tent will not last forever, that I'm much closer to its demise than to the day of my birth.

-- I hope and pray that, in my remaining years of life, however many they may be, I will maintain hope in the Lord and will persevere in the task of doing his will

-- I would think there is no better prayer that any of us could make than that.