February 17th, 2019: Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

My friend, Fr. David Darcy, has been living in the rectory with us since October, recovering from open-heart surgery, but since January he has been well enough to get around on his own. Father David brought with him a special guest, his boxer Piper, and it has been interesting watching how the dog and my two cats have interacted.

When Piper first got here and my two cats heard the jingle of his collar, they kind of freaked out. Harry and Sally actually hid either in the closet or under the bed. Over the next few days of his presence in the rectory, they slowly got used to him being there. In time, they would go into the room where Piper was staying. And, when Piper came into my room, they would simply look at him and kind of ignore him. Now, they have got to the point where they actually go over to see and smell him. The more interesting thing has been watching how Piper reacts; he is terrified of the cats! When they are all in the same room, he refuses to look directly at them. And, whenever they come near him, he either goes to the other side of the room or tries to get behind Father David for protection. It is really one of the funniest things to watch. The cats are curious about the dog, but, at this point, are clearly indifferent to his presence while the dog wants nothing to do with the cats.

How the cats and the dog are dealing with a changing environment really kind of speaks to how we, as humans, many times come to address the changes in our own lives. All three animals at first acted out of fear. They were not really sure how to handle the encounter of something they were not prepared for. Animals are no different than us in this respect; generally, change creates anxiety, uncertainty, and some level of fear. It can also create a sense of loss, both of what was, and of the sense of control we had over our lives. We are forced to confront a new reality and to look at our particular situation in a new way. It forces us to ask questions, like: What does this mean? Where do I go from here? What is going to happen moving forward? Where is this ultimately going to lead me? And many more such questions will naturally arise.

How we come to deal with change is really different for each and every one of us. I must admit that change is something pretty constant in my life. It reminds me of the saying that “the only thing that stays the same is change.” As I have written before, I have lived in eighteen different places in my life. As a priest, I have been part of ten different parishes—each of them with their own unique set of challenges and responsibilities. And my daily life is constantly in flux based on the needs of the people I am called to serve, and what I need to address pastorally at any given moment. It is not unusual for me to set up a schedule for a particular day and then to change it based on something that takes greater priority, such as a funeral, a person dying, a person in crisis, or an unexpected parish emergency. Our outlook on life is really based on how we come to terms with change. It is not a question of whether or not we will have to confront change in our life, but how we will choose to react to it.

It is not about our initial reactions. I simply look to the cats and how they initially dealt with Piper coming into their space. It was fear and flight—they hid! But over time they adjusted and came to terms with their new situation; it simply became part of their lives. Piper, on the other hand, has remained frightened and refuses to accept that the change is not a big deal. Fear is holding the dog in a place of anxiety and concern. The dog is bigger and stronger than the cats combined, and yet he is the one who is caught in a world that keeps him caged in fear.

Even though change is a constant part of my life, I will admit I do not always appreciate it for what it really is. As with all change in our lives—good or bad—God makes use of it to create an opportunity for us. Now, to be clear, God does not bring about all the changes in our lives, but He does make use of all our changes.

Each moment of change is a liminal moment. It is a point where we have to decide how we are going to react. We are, in a sense, at a threshold and how we react will define what that change will bring into our lives. Are we going to react with fear and not move forward? Or… are we going to have courage, which does not mean we are not afraid, but rather, that we choose to act in spite of our fear? Ultimately, if we can recognize that God is with us—that our God will never abandon or forsake us—He will give us the strength,
the grace, and whatever else we need to take on the next challenge in life. Change is inevitable, but God is, and will always be, with us. We must realize that whatever changes life may bring, we truly have nothing to fear, for God will get us through it. And, through that moment God will reveal to us something about ourselves. Therefore, embrace the change, take courage, and trust in the Lord!

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian