

by Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A.

September 29, 2020

St. Anne’s Pavilion, Fiskdale MA

Scripture readings: Job 19:1,23-27; Psalm 23; Romans 8:14-23; John 14:1-6

Fr. Donald liked to call people “Kiddo.” I thought it was reserved for younger people, but I was at least 50 before he stopped calling me “Kiddo.”

It was a term of endearment, and we shouldn’t be surprised that he favored terms of endearment. Donald found life to be dear. His heart was easily moved by the beauty of relationships and, I would say, by the hope and promise offered by the Gospel. When he was operating at full throttle, his heart and soul were taken up by the prospect of a renewed Church.

He was at his best when he could work with others on a project that he was invested in, something that he saw connected to the renewal of the Church and the renewal of the Assumptionists. In a group of that kind, he was the idea man. For him, the well never ran dry as far as ideas were concerned. It made for long meetings, and he may not have been quite so good at follow-through, but the good mind, the fine intelligence that God had given him was so generative in looking for ways to develop the community in the widest sense of that word.

A few years back he told a classmate that these last years had been for him the best of his life. I have no reason to doubt that, and I think it was because he had found in the Assumptionist Center project, the residency program for graduate students and young professionals in Brighton, something that checked so many of the boxes for him: accompanying young people; religious and lay sharing life together; assisting in the preparation of future leaders in the Church. It was, for him, a concrete expression of the larger development work that had been given him to do.

Fr. Donald was such an integral part of our Provincial story in the last 50 years, and he touched the lives of many: the high school and university students in Weirton and Worcester, the parishioners here at St. Anne’s, those who worked alongside him in provincial leadership, young men in formation, members of the Assumption family, both religious and lay, and not least, the gang at the Assumptionist Center. Here we are now, during this time of pandemic, entrusting his soul to God. *The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord.*

Those are the words of Job, of course, the man of suffering. I think that most of us know that Fr. Donald had quite a lot of pain in his life. Like Job, his pain was physical and emotional and spiritual – he checked all the boxes there as well. Darkness filled a good number of his days and nights over the years. But he would be the first to say that God never let go of him, never went back on his promise to abide with him, no matter what. Faith in that promise sustained Donald, and made him the gentle and understanding and supportive friend and spiritual guide that he was. Job again, this time in the thick of his suffering:
"I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust. I will see for myself. My own eyes will behold him."
And St. Paul:
"I consider the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us."

These last months in the nursing home were, I would say, pretty dreadful. The isolation, the fear, the testing positive for Covid-19 – twice – the fall from his chair and the prolonged confinement to bed. I was not betting against Donald's robust constitution somehow coming out on the other side of that, but there is comfort in knowing that he has been freed of these terrible afflictions.

A very special word of thanks to Donald's friend and caregiver, John Gauthier, who was Donald's one link to the outside world in these last months and whose care for him over many years has been beautiful to see. To Fr. Roland, Donald's spiritual mentor, and Sister Clare, a devoted friend, who made it a point, when it was possible, to visit Donald regularly – a word of gratitude as well. Thanks, too, for all the prayers offered for him and those still to be offered for the salvation of his soul. And of course, to Donald for being a good brother and companion along the way …. thanks, Kiddo.

I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you also may be also. May God's unfailing mercy come to the aid of his servant Donald, and bring him safely home to himself.

God bless you all.