My mother’s mother, my Grandma Thomsen, was known for uttering pithy proverbs from time to time that left us nodding in agreement and sometimes chuckling along with her.

The theme for tonight’s homily is borrowed from her collection of proverbs. It goes like this: “Wonders never cease.”

Grandma trotted out this proverb whenever something highly unlike occurred, such as the time that my uncle ate all of his vegetables without being prodded, and the time that my grandpa said that they could get new living room carpet, instead of a new farm implement.

I’m quite certain that Grandma would have trotted out her proverb, “Wonders never cease,” several more times had she lived long enough to witness some other events in the life of our family that follow.

II

There was, for example, that first Christmas at my sister’s house after her oldest daughter, Susie started college.

To be brutally honest—Susie was a real pain in the butt during her teenage years. She readily admits it now, and is quite contrite. But back in the day. Not so much.

Susie was known to lay in bed putting off her morning barn chores until her dad threatened to sell her horse or her show cattle if she didn’t feed them. Susie was also a notoriously bad housekeeper. I remember trying to dial down the drama one Christmas break when she was in high school by volunteering to help clean her room. Susie’s room was knee deep with clutter, but she didn’t see the point.

Fast forward, 12-months later, when I visited next, and found Susie to be a polite conversationalist, and a mindful practitioner of the manners that we had taught her years before. Even more impressive was the fact that Susie had her room ship-shape, and volunteered to clear the table after each meal.
Once Susie was out of earshot, I turned to my sister and said, “Wow, the body snatchers have brought our Susie back.” (Grandma would have said, ‘Wonders never cease.”)

Mar cracked a smile, looked my brother-in-law, Dennis, and said, “Yeah, if we had known how good college was going to be for Susie, we would have sent her a long time ago.”

III

This year, our family not only continues to celebrate the rapid maturation process we saw in Susie that first semester of college, but we are also celebrating the fact that our mother made a much-needed change in her life this year.

Last month Mom signed a contract and moved into a retirement community in Central Iowa. Although some seniors make the move to a retirement community gladly, my mother is not one of those kind of seniors. She has long said, “Over my dead body am I moving”—which is all the more reason that her decision was so remarkable.

Professionals who work in the long-term care sector call the people who are eager to move into retirement communities, “go-goes.” Go-goes are seniors who experience liberation by moving into a retirement community. They sell their family homes soon after retirement, and move in as soon as they can—delighting in the opportunity to give up yard work, and home maintenance. Then they gas up their cars, renew their Passports, and start checking-off vacation destinations on their “bucket lists.”

No one would have ever taken my mother for a go-go, when it came to making a move. She wouldn’t have even qualified as what the pros call a “slow-go.”

**Slow-goes** are seniors who find the change daunting, but eventually they make the move because of a health crisis and diminishing abilities to handle routine activities of daily living.

A third category identified by senior service professionals is known as the “no-goes.” The no-goes are the seniors who say, like Judy Nehring, “Over my dead body am I moving into a retirement community.”

When I told my mother about the way that long-term care friends describe the differences in how seniors approach retirement opportunities, she immediately said, “That’s me! That’s me! I’m a no-go!”

Given my mother’s resistance to making the move that she just made, you may wonder what happened to change her mind.

I’d like to tell you that her mind was changed as a result of my arranging for her to tour Mayflower three years ago at Christmas. But it didn’t. I’d like to tell you that she changed
her mind because we went back again to take a look two years ago. But that didn’t turn
the key either.

I’d also like to say that Mom’s mind was changed after I ran the numbers for her and
proved that we could afford for her to move to Mayflower, or that it was because my
pastoral care skills were so awesome, but I don’t think that’s the case either.

The truth is that my mother, like my oldest niece, is an experiential learner, and she didn’t’
change her mind about retirement living until she experienced two falls and laid on the
floor for nearly two hours at a time, and because she had a midnight dash through the
ER a couple of weeks later.

Fortunately Mom didn’t suffer any broken bones from the falls or require hospitalization
the night she went to the ER. But the inability to help herself up from the floor and the
need to ask someone to drive her to the ER caused her to see the light and make the
move to Mayflower.

If Grandma had lived to see Mom move into Mayflower, she would have said, Wonders
never cease.

IV

Recently, I’ve seen a surprise change in my sister, too. This past July she suffered the
worst horse accident of her life. She’s a capable rider, and a safety-first kind of person,
but still accidents happen.

Early one morning in late July Mar and her family were loading cattle onto a couple of
semi-trucks and sending them off to a feedlot. Just as the crew was starting the roundup,
Mar’s horse slipped on the wet grass and fell to the ground launching her from the saddle.

Mar landed hard on her right shoulder and shattered her humerus, which required surgery
a couple of days later, and the installation of 5 rods and 11 screws. Mar’s surgeon told
her last week that she’s making a great progress on her recovery.

She was not nearly as “impressed” with her results as was the surgeon. She’s still in a lot
of pain. She gets tired easily. And she isn’t supposed to pick up anything heavier than her
cellphone for the next month.

So Mar’s getting quite a course in patience, which does not come naturally to her.

Still, there has been a hidden blessing in the midst of this drama, in that Mar has a
newfound sense of empathy and patience for our mother, who has struggled for years
with fibromyalgia and more recently with Parkinson’s disease.
I share these three vignettes about my family tonight, not to tell stories on those who aren’t here to defend themselves, but to remind you that wonders never cease. Adolescence doesn’t last forever; that stubborn parents can come to their senses; and that sometimes we have to reach our own limits before the Holy Spirit can get a chance with us.

The same is true with respect to Christmas. Jesus was born in a barn over 2000 years ago, but the story didn’t end there. It was just the beginning. Whenever we encounter growth in a child, God’s wondrous love is revealed all over again, and we can be assured that wonders never cease.

Whenever we accept God’s call to a new venue, we have the opportunity to rediscover that home is not a house, but rather a people who love and care for us. Wonders never cease.

And, whenever we face our own limitations, we can protest like crazy, or we can remember the truth that we are not in charge. God is. And this is why wonders never cease. Amen.