

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
Isaiah 66:18-21;  
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13;  
Luke 13:22-30  
Little Flower - 8/25/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Old Testament reading expresses what Pope Francis expressed in the two talks from which I quoted last week. Isaiah struggled with those who had returned from the Babylonian Exile and wanted to maintain a narrow vision of who belonged to God's people. He prophesied that God would send messengers to the ends of the earth who would call the nations to come to the Promised Land to see the Lord's glory.<sup>1</sup> I would suggest this is what Pope Francis means when he says the Church has to go out to the peripheries, to those who live on the margins because of sin, pain, injustice, or ignorance.

What does this mean for us at Little Flower? We are called to be an inclusive parish, a parish that is not judgmental, a parish that welcomes all people. One of our ministries with which we struggle is Greeters at Sunday Liturgy. The ones we have do a great job, but we need more people who will welcome and greet people, especially visitors. If you might be interested in becoming a greeter, please let me know.

Last Sunday we heard RCIA team members ask us to invite people to RCIA or to give us contact information so that we can invite them. Many of us Catholics have a hard time doing this. I want to tell you a story told to me several years ago by one of my grade school classmates. She was the youngest child. Her mother was Catholic, but her father was not Catholic. However, he always supported them going to church and to Catholic schools. Some years after her mother died, her father called her one day to tell her he was becoming Catholic. She was surprised and asked what made him decide to become Catholic at that time. He explained that no one had ever asked him, so as he was getting older, he thought he better do it on his own. The children had never asked him because they wanted to respect his choices.

The New Evangelization also calls us to deepen our own faith. As you have been hearing recently, Little Flower is beginning *Christ Renews His Parish*. The men's weekend will be September 20-22, and the women's weekend will be October 4-6. Dan and Joanne Mages will be in the Gathering Area after Mass to answer your questions or to register you. I really want to encourage your participation. Everyone I have known who had made a *Christ Renews His Parish* weekend has come away with a deeper faith and with a greater commitment to parish ministry.

Today's Gospel should cause us some discomfort. Today's Gospel reminds us that all of us will have to give an account to God for our lives. In the parable, people will say to the master of the house, "*We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.*" The master of the house will then say to the people, "*I do not know where (you) are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!*" This parable has particular relevance to those of us who are Christian or Catholic, who say we know Jesus and are disciples of Jesus. This Gospel also has particular relevance today. In the past, most Catholics accepted the teachings of the Church even if they did not always follow them. Today most people believe that they are free to decide for themselves what is right or wrong. We can use Sunday Mass as a very simple example. Today many Catholics believe that they can be good Catholics without attending Sunday Mass every Sunday, believing, in effect, that it really does not matter to God whether attend every Sunday or not. This reading challenges us to ask ourselves what if it does matter to God.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Hebrews reminds us that God disciplines those whom he loves as a parent disciplines a child and that discipline is necessary and good. I think most parents would agree. As I mentioned a few moments ago, we live in a different world today, a world where we are bombarded by conflicting messages of what is good, beautiful, and true, a world where we have a great deal more freedom to choose how we are going to live, I would suggest that the real challenge of parents today is not disciplining their children but teaching their children self-discipline.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary A. Ehle, PhD and Margaret Nutting Ralph, PhD, *Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word*, United States Edition, 2013 Year C, (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2012), p. 242.