

24th Sunday per Annum - C
Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14;
I Timothy 1:12-17;
Luke 15:1-10
Little Flower - 9/15/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday all parishioners of Little Flower, Holy Spirit, Our Lady of Lourdes, and St. Bernadette were invited to attend a meeting at Holy Spirit to hear the proposal that our cohort is making to the Archdiocese as part of the *Connected in the Spirit* strategic planning process. As I mentioned in my homily last Sunday, with the *Connected in the Spirit* strategic planning process, the Archdiocese is trying to realistically plan for the future of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in light of fewer priests, limited resources, fewer active Catholics, and changing demographics. Probably 120-150 people attended, and the meeting went very well.

In today's bulletin you will find an insert that contains our proposal. I believe that our proposal is very creative. If the Archdiocese accepts the proposal, I think all four parishes can continue to thrive. The proposal is based on the requirement that our four parishes go from four priests to three priests.

In our proposal, the pastor of Little Flower will also become the pastor of St. Bernadette. Little Flower will go from four to three weekend Masses. We will continue to have a 5 p.m. Saturday Mass, one Mass on Sunday morning, and the 6 p.m. Sunday evening Mass. St. Bernadette already only has one weekend Mass. We probably will have one or two fewer weekday Masses. Currently St. Bernadette has two weekday Masses.

Likewise, if our proposal is accepted, the Archbishop will appoint a Parish Life Coordinator as the chief administrator of Our Lady of Lourdes. This person may be a permanent deacon, a religious, or a lay person. If the person is not a deacon, our hope is that the Archbishop will appoint a deacon. The priests from Holy Spirit will be the sacramental ministers at Our Lady of Lourdes. Holy Spirit, therefore, will go from six weekend Masses to five weekend Masses.

The four parishes will collaborate to strengthen ministries and services that need strengthening and to develop new ministries.

Finally, I want to emphasize that this is only a proposal. It may very well change radically based on feedback from the Archdiocesan Planning Commission. By no means is it a done deal.

Today's readings are all about sin and forgiveness. In today's reading from Exodus, after all that God had done to deliver the people from slavery in Egypt, the people made a molten calf and were worshipping it. God's anger blazed against them, and he was going to destroy them. However, when Moses implored the Lord, he relented and forgave them.

In today's reading from First Timothy, Paul reminded Timothy that he himself had been the greatest sinner of all because he was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and arrogant. However, because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and his grace had been abundant, Paul was treated mercifully and even appointed to ministry.

The three parables from Luke Chapter 15, of which we read the first two since the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Prodigal Father was read on the 4th Sunday of Lent, are all about God's forgiveness.

In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd leaves the 99 other sheep and searches for the lost sheep until he finds it. When he finds it, he rejoices and invites his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. Jesus concludes, *"I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."*

Likewise, in the parable of lost coin, we are told that the woman lit the lamp and swept the house, carefully searching until she found the coin. Like the shepherd, she invites her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. Again, Jesus concludes, *"In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

My brothers and sisters, the message of the parables is clear. God loves us so much that he takes the initiative in forgiving us. As Jesus said in John's Gospel, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life"* [3:16]. Pope Francis tells us that God's love and forgiveness should be our primary proclamation. However, we cannot proclaim God's love and forgiveness, we cannot witness God's love and forgiveness, if we do not practice love and forgiveness in our own lives.