

25th Sunday per Annum - B
Wisdom 2:12, 17-20;
James 3:16-4:3;
Mark 9:30-37
Little Flower - 9/20/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

This week Pope Francis will visit the United States for the first time in his life. The Vatican is characterizing his visit as a pastoral visit. He will arrive Tuesday afternoon and remain until Sunday evening. During his stay, he will visit three cities: Washington, New York, and Philadelphia. You may remember that the core reason for his visit is to participate in the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

However, he has a full itinerary for the entire length of his visit. Besides Masses, prayer services, including one at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and visits to a school in East Harlem and a prison, he will meet with President Obama, canonize Father Junipero Serra, speak to a joint meeting of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, address the United Nations General Assembly, and meet with the bishops of the United States.

In today's reading from the book of Wisdom, the wicked chose to oppress the just one because he challenged them for not living in accord with God's will. In today's Gospel, Jesus continued to prophesy his passion, death, and resurrection.

Inspired by God, the Old Testament prophets challenged the beliefs, values, and actions of God's people. Jesus was crucified for doing the same. His teaching and example challenged the beliefs, values, and actions of the people of his day. Just as people of the past did not like to be challenged, neither do we.

From the time he arrives until the time he leaves, Pope Francis will be challenging our beliefs, values, and actions. Today, then, I want to challenge all of us, myself included, to allow ourselves to be challenged. In his meeting with the bishops of the United States, he will be speaking to the Church in the United States. In his address to Congress, he will be speaking to the leaders and the people of our country. In his address to the United Nations, he will be speaking to the leaders and the peoples of the world.

I really want to encourage you to watch, listen to, or read his talks with an open mind and an open heart. Please do not allow his words to be interpreted or misinterpreted for you by the media. I am not suggesting that you will or even should necessarily agree with everything he says. My guess is that everyone who listens to or reads his talks will find them discomfiting in one way or another. However, instead of rejecting out of hand what you may not agree with, at least prayerfully consider what he says.

My brothers and sisters, in the second part of today's Gospel, the disciples were arguing among themselves about who among them was the greatest. In response, Jesus said, "*If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.*" Since the time of Pope St. Gregory the Great, who was Pope from 590-604, one of the titles of the Popes has been "servant of the servants of God." Pope Francis has modeled that title by humility, simplicity of lifestyle, and emphasis on God's love and mercy. Like Jesus and Pope Francis, all of us are called to be servant leaders, modeling humility, simplicity of lifestyle and emphasis on God's love and mercy. Finally, please pray for him during his visit that he will be safe and remain in good health.