

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Isaiah 49:3, 5-6;  
I Corinthians 1:1-3;  
John 1:29-34  
Little Flower - 1/15/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

As we return to Ordinary Time, today's readings offer us insights into what it means to be Church as individuals and as a community.

The second reading contains the opening verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul addresses his letter to the "*church of God that is in Corinth.*" It is significant that he does not address his letter to the church of Corinth but to the church of God in Corinth. The Greek word for church is ἐκκλησία, which means called out of. In other words, God calls the church into being and invites us to be members of the church. God chooses us; we do not choose God. Our choice is to accept or reject God's invitation.

Although the church is embodied in individual communities, the phrase "*church of God that is in Corinth*" also implies that the church is larger than any individual community. This is also evident when Paul suggests that the Corinthians have been sanctified in Jesus and called to be holy as is all those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Finally, the greeting with which this passage concludes suggests the universality of the church, i.e., that the church is for all people. Paul greets them with the words *grace* and *peace*. *Grace* is a word of greeting used by Greeks, therefore Gentiles, while *peace* is a word of greeting used by Jews.

The three readings suggest several qualities of a Christian. At his baptism, God the Father validated Jesus as his Son. We believe that at our baptism we received the Spirit of God, making us sons and daughters of God. Christians strive to be holy. The words *holy* and *whole* both have the same root. Holy people live in a right relationship with God, others, the world, and themselves. Also, twice in the Book of Leviticus, God says, "*Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy*" [Lev. 19:2, 20:7]. The parallel passages to these in the Gospels are Matthew 5:48, "*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect,*" and Luke 6:36, "*Be merciful (or compassionate), just as (also) your Father is merciful (or compassionate).*" Christians, then, strive to be holy, i.e., to become the-best-version-of-themselves and to be merciful and compassionate. They also strive to live in right relationships with God, others, the world, and themselves.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist acknowledges that Jesus ranks ahead of him and that he came baptizing with water to make Jesus known to Israel. John the Baptist, then, exemplifies another virtue of Christians. Christians strive to be humble. First, Christians recognize that they are not self-made men or women. Christians, therefore, live lives of gratitude to God and to others who have helped them become the persons they are. Second, they strive to see themselves as God sees them and to discern who God is calling them to be and what God is calling them to do. John the Baptist knew that he was to announce the coming of the Lord, the coming of the Messiah. He had no illusions that he was the messiah.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, Christians strive to be lights to the world. Isaiah prophesied that the messiah will be a light to the nations. Christ may be the one true light of the world. However, he can only shine as brightly as we are willing to be lights to the world. As John the Baptist testified to Christ, we, too, are called to testify or witness to Christ by our words and our actions. As much as we are called to see Christ in others, we should want others to be able to see Christ in us.