

50th Anniversary of Dedication of Church
[31st Sunday per Annum - B]
Deuteronomy 6:2-6;
Hebrews 7:23-28;
Mark 12:28b-34
Little Flower - 11/4/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

On July 8, 1962, Archbishop Paul C. Schulte dedicated Little Flower's beautiful new church. Fifty years and four months later, we celebrate today the 50th anniversary of the dedication of this church. However, more than the dedication, people remember the raising of the steeple on May 15, 1962, Fr. John's 80th birthday. After it was raised, Fr. John immediately saw that it was not positioned correctly, and it had to be taken down and re-positioned.

When we celebrate the anniversary of the dedication of a parish church, we are really celebrating the parish. The word *church* does not, first of all, refer to a building but to a people, a people called and chosen by God to proclaim everywhere the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ. What do we celebrate today?

Today we celebrate all those who have gone before us as parishioners of Little Flower, all those who sacrificed so much to build this church, both this community and this building. Little Flower parishioners made great sacrifices to build this church to fulfill Fr. John's dream for the parish. Fr. John dreamt of a free-standing church, a building completely devoted to the worship of God, and a church modeled after the cathedrals and basilicas he had seen in Europe. Fund raising began in 1954, and it took eight long years to raise the necessary funds. One of the reasons it took so long was because the school was becoming overcrowded, and Fr. John had to add the north wing in 1957.

Today, then, is a day to be thankful for all those who sacrificed to build this parish and church, the pioneers of our parish. However, today also calls us to recommit ourselves to continue to build up this parish as the family of God in this neighborhood, to continue to be the anchor for the neighborhood.

In many ways Little Flower today is the same parish it was fifty years ago, and in many other ways it is a very different parish. For example, a retired realtor recently said that for so many years, Little Flower was the parish and neighborhood into which people wanted to move. In 1962, we had over 5,100 parishioners. Today we are a much smaller parish, but a parish that has remained very stable. Young families continue to move in, but as they have children they frequently move out. However, today many people who live outside our boundaries choose to become or remain members of Little Flower.

At the same time, the qualities that distinguish Little Flower have remained largely the same. We are still primarily a middle-class/working-class parish. We are still a parish that welcomes new people; we are still a parish that accepts all kinds of people. The beauty of our Liturgies testifies to the priority we still give to worshipping God.

When a parish is growing, parishioners are often tempted to sit back and wait for people to join. When a parish stops growing, it is imperative that the parish seeks new members. This is not a bad thing. As a parish, we need to be looking for ways to bring home non-practicing Catholics and former Catholics. As a parish, we need to be inviting new people to join us. Recently, there has been much talk about the New Evangelization. The New Evangelization is not primarily teaching people about God or Christ; it is not primarily about teaching the truths of our faith. Rather, it is about helping people encounter the person of Jesus Christ in their lives and then helping them change their lives to become Christ-centered and other-centered.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus' two great commandments of love in today's Gospel and the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel capture the essence of the New Evangelization and the mission of our parish. We are to love God first and our neighbor as ourselves. We are to help lead others to love God first and their neighbor as themselves.