

St. Therese - C
Song of Songs 8:6-7;
Galatians 2:19-20;
Matthew 18:1-4
Little Flower - 10/2/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, our patron saint. A patron saint plays two roles in the life of a parish. The first is as a protector and intercessor. In other words, St. Therese watches over us and prays to God for us. Certainly, our parish has been superabundantly blessed since its beginning through the intercession of St. Therese. The second is that a patron saint is someone to be imitated. Today's readings suggest three qualities of St. Therese for us to imitate.

Today's first reading proclaims that authentic love is strong as death and "*its flames are a blazing fire.*" From her writings and from everything written about her, it is clear that St. Therese had a passionate love for God. However, she also had a passionate love for the souls of all people. In this context, passionate means she loved God and others with her whole being. To imitate St. Therese means, in the words of Jesus, to love God "*with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" [Mt. 22:37] and to love others as Jesus himself has loved us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to become like little children. This is precisely how St. Therese saw herself—as a little child. In the Gospel, to become like little children is to see God as our loving Father and to acknowledge our dependence upon God. However, because our relationship with God and our relationships with others are inseparable, it is also important that we recognize that we are interdependent with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me...*" Like all great saints, by dying to self, St. Therese was transformed into the likeness of the Risen Christ. One of the great paradoxes of Christianity is that the more we become Christ-like, the more we become ourselves. The best evidence of this is St. Paul himself. He was the one who wrote, "*I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me...*," yet he was the strongest personality in the New Testament next to Jesus himself.

My brothers and sisters, although St. Therese was a cloistered Carmelite nun, she had a missionary heart. In fact, Pope Pius XI named her patroness of the missions in 1927. Therefore, it seems to me that one of the best things we can do as a parish to imitate St. Therese is to develop a missionary heart, a missionary spirit.

During the first 40 to 50 years of our parish history, our parish was growing by leaps and bounds, and, therefore, we really did not have a lot of incentive to become missionary. In those days, all we had to do was wait for people to join the parish, wait for children to enroll in school. As a parish, today we are less than half the size we were in 1962 when our beautiful new church was built. As a school, today we are approximately one-third the size we were in 1962.

Although this might seem like a bad thing, perhaps it is a good thing. It reminds us that the essential mission and ministry of the Church is to evangelize. A few years ago, I heard a speaker make the point that if a church wants to grow or even to maintain itself, it needs to remember that every time someone moves out of a home, someone moves in. Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church, it is the essential mission of every parish; it is the essential mission of every Catholic. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, we might all reflect on what we might do to grow the Church and to grow the parish. That would be a very good thing.