

St. Therese - A
Hosea 2:16bc, 17cd, 21-22;
Philippians 2:5-11;
Matthew 18:1-4
Little Flower - 10/1/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus, 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 as a parish and as individuals. If we look at both the earlier and the more recent history of the parish, God continues to bless us superabundantly through the intercession of St. Therese.

I would like to cite just a couple of recent examples—one school, one parish. Just a few years ago, Little Flower School only had 185 students. This year we have approximately 330 students. These are 330 young people whom we are not only educating but helping become the-best-version-of-themselves and with whom we are sharing our Catholic Christian faith by word and example. Little Flower parish continues to thrive. I would suggest that the initiatives of our *Invite* Commission are helping grow our parish spiritually. In January, they will host the ChristLife program of faith development. I certainly believe that St. Therese watches over me and prays to God for me. I am reminded of this at every Mass. Whenever I look up, I have the privilege of looking at the beautiful rose window of St. Therese.

The second function of a patron saint is as a role model to be imitated. All three readings today exemplify qualities of St. Therese's life. In today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, we are told to have the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself taking the form of a servant and humbled himself becoming obedient even to the point of death. Throughout her life, St. Therese strove to have the same attitude Christ Jesus had. She described her way as her "Little Way." She humbly served God and the sisters in her convent even after she developed tuberculosis. We all need to model ourselves on her and see ourselves as called to be humble servants of God and others.

The reading from Hosea compares God's relationship with Israel to that of a husband and wife, i.e., an intimate relationship. Throughout her life, what mattered most to St. Therese was her relationship with Jesus. Nothing pained her more than those times when she suffered dark nights of the soul, those times when she did not feel closeness to Christ. St. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have all stressed the importance of each of us having a personal relationship with Jesus. They have emphasized this much more strongly than it was emphasized when some of us were growing up. A personal relationship with Jesus should be a priority for each of us.

Finally, in today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to become like little children. St. Therese saw herself as a little child before God. Jesus does not call us to be childish but childlike. In other words, we are called to have a deep personal faith in God. To be childlike is to entrust our lives and our futures to God and to God's word of promise, Jesus Christ. To be childlike is to recognize our complete dependence on God. To be childlike is to recognize that all that we are and all that we have are gifts from God directly or indirectly through others.

My brothers and sisters, the Feast of St. Therese reminds us to be grateful for all God's gifts to our parish and to us through her intercession. I believe that what is good here at Little Flower is rooted in her intercession for us. Today's feast also challenges us both as a parish and as individuals to imitate her virtues. However, Little Flower is a community, a family. Therefore, today I want to thank all of you for all you do to make Little Flower the community and family we are.