

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
Isaiah 66:18-21;  
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13;  
Luke 13:22-30  
Little Flower - 8/25/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

As I mentioned last Sunday, most of us are aware that the numbers of practicing Catholics are declining. You also know that we are looking at changing our Mass schedule. However, the decline in church attendance is also true in most other non-Catholic Christian churches as well. I find it interesting that both Catholics and non-Catholic Christians seem to agree that if our churches are to survive and thrive, we all have to become true disciples of Jesus through encounter with him, through growth in faith, and through discipleship building. Jesus calls all of us to passionately share the Good News of Jesus with others.

In today's first reading, God proposed a radical plan to bring all people to him. To understand today's reading, we have to understand that when Isaiah wrote these words, the Israelites had just returned home to Israel after 70 years of exile in Babylon. In this reading, God said that he was going to send the recently returned exiles back out to the nations to proclaim God's glory, i.e., God's mercy and goodness to Israel, and to invite all peoples to come to the Lord.

The question we might ask is why did God choose to send back out to the nations those who had just returned. I would suggest it was because they would be the best evangelizers because they had personally experienced God's love and mercy in their return from exile.

Times have changed. As a parish, we can no longer expect Catholics to show up and join or non-Catholics to show up and want to join the church. Maybe the current decline is God's way of telling us that he really does expect all of us to become evangelizers. Again, this is why Catholics and non-Catholic Christians agree that for our churches to survive and thrive we have to encounter Jesus, grow in faith and in our relationship with Jesus, and become active evangelizers. Since both the first reading and the Gospel remind us that God calls all people to salvation, we also have to be willing to reach out to all people.

Last week we heard representatives from our RCIA team speak to us about this year's RCIA. Please take seriously the invitation to invite someone to RCIA, either someone who might be interested in learning about the Catholic Church or becoming Catholic, someone who simply wants to learn more about the Catholic Church, or someone who no longer actively practices the faith. Even if you are not comfortable inviting someone, at least make an effort to submit someone's name. RCIA begins on September 3, two weeks from this Tuesday.

During the announcements today, *Invite* Commission members will briefly introduce the upcoming Bible study on the Wisdom literature. Most Catholics are not very familiar with the Wisdom literature in the Bible. The Wisdom literature offers all kinds of practical insights into real life. "Wisdom: God's Vision for Life" will begin on Monday, September 9. At the same time, Sharing Christ, the third component of the ChristLife program, will also begin on Monday, September 9. This program is for those who have participated in the first two components, Discovering Christ and Following Christ.

My brothers and sisters, Little Flower is offering several opportunities for you to discover, follow, and share Christ. I hope many of you will choose one of them as a way to prepare yourselves for your Christ-given mission to share the Good News of Jesus with others, to help them grow in faith, and to mentor them as they become evangelizers.