

24th Sunday per Annum - C
Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14;
I Timothy 1:12-17;
Luke 15:1-10
Little Flower - 9/15/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today is Catechetical Sunday. The theme of this year's Catechetical Sunday is "Stay with Us." According to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "the root word, 'catechesis,' is from a Greek word meaning 'to echo, or resound.' Catechesis is the act of resounding or bringing the Church's teachings to the world. A catechist is one who teaches in the name of the Church." Today we recognize all those who teach in the name of the Church, including parents. We are also invited to reflect on our own responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

I was struck by the theme for this year: "Stay with Us." My first thought was that at a time when Catholics often leave the Church to join other churches or simply stop practicing their faith, this theme was inviting us to re-evangelize them and to invite them by word and deed to remain part of our faith community and to be active within our faith community. We are all called to invite and re-invite people to continue to be part of our faith community.

As I thought about it some more, I remembered that these words appear in the Bible. Most of us are familiar with the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday evening. After Jesus explained everything in the Scriptures pertaining to him, when they reached Emmaus, the disciples "*urged him, 'Stay with us.... So he went in to stay with them'*" [Lk. 24:29]. This passage suggests that we all have a natural desire for the Word of God, a natural desire to experience God more profoundly, a natural desire to know God more deeply. As Christians, we are all called to help people to eat and drink more profoundly of the Word of God.

The first evangelizers and catechists are parents. However, because it takes a village to raise a child, they need the help of the community through Catholic schools or Sunday religious education. Our Sunday religious education program for K-8 students who do not attend Catholic schools begins next Sunday, September 22, after the 8:30 a.m. Mass. Currently Little Flower School is slightly over 50% non-Catholic. Therefore, our school provides our parish with our greatest opportunities for evangelization. Later this year we will have RCIC, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children. Currently our adult offerings include RCIA, ChristLife, and the Wisdom Bible Study.

Last week at RCIA, a member of the team asked a question I had never been asked formally. How do we share the Good News of Jesus with those who have explicitly rejected faith or who are simply uninterested in faith? It seems to me that there are several things we can do. Often the best way to proclaim the Good News of Jesus is through the witness of our lives. As we all know, actions speak louder than words.

Second, if we want to share the Good News of Jesus with others, we first have to listen to them. For example, we might want to ask them about their faith journey or life journey. Was the person raised Catholic or Christian? If the person stopped believing, why did he or she stop believing? We need to validate the person and his or her life or faith journey.

Finally, we have to translate the Good News into language they can understand. Jesus was Jewish and spoke Aramaic. When the apostles went out into the Roman and Greek world, they had to speak using concepts and ideas the Greeks and Romans understood. In contemporary terms, if we are talking to people whose knowledge and understanding are primarily based on personal experience, we need to share the Good News of Jesus in experiential terms.

My brothers and sisters, the Good News of Jesus is the message of all three readings today. God pursues us in love, never giving up on us, never abandoning us.