

St. Therese - C
Micah 6:6-8
Colossians 3:12-17;
Matthew 18:1-4
Little Flower - 10/6/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

As we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese today, all of us understand that we are living in challenging times. These are challenging times not just for us as individuals but for our Church and for our parish. Both the sexual abuse scandals and the divisions within the Church are affecting us at Little Flower. In addition, our parish is challenged by declining attendance and participation. Although our census remains approximately the same, the number of people attending Mass has declined to the point that we need to change our Mass schedule. I recently read that reducing the number of Masses in a parish is one of the most difficult things a parish can do because it reminds us that we are getting smaller rather than larger.

A parish's patron saint is a role model for the parish. St. Therese certainly lived and witnessed the values in today's three readings. However, in light of today's challenges, I would like to focus on these values applied to our parish. For most of us, our parish is the incarnation or embodiment of the Church. Because of all the challenges today, I would suggest that instead of being caught up in the scandals and divisions within the Church, we need to focus on the positives of our parish and on making our parish an even better-version-of-itself.

To do this, we need to focus on Micah 6:8: *"What is good has been explained to you: this is what God asks of you, only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God."*

If we want to be the best parish we can be, we have to act justly. This means we have to look outward rather than inward. If we are going to act justly, we need to focus on evangelization and community outreach within our local community. This has been a constant theme of Pope Francis. We have to reach out to those on the margins and the peripheries, to those in need physically or spiritually among us, and proclaim the Good News of Jesus to them and help meet some of their needs. We have to be a community of mission.

If we want to be the best parish we can be, we have to love tenderly. Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians explains what this means for a community. In a community, loving tenderly implies *"heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another."* We have to see ourselves as a family and strive to live as a real family, i.e., as brothers and sisters in Christ. We have to be a community of intimacy.

If we want to be the best parish we can be, we have to walk humbly with our God as St. Therese did. In today's Gospel, in response to the question who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus says, *"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven."* Little children are completely dependent on others. Among the primary qualities of little children, then, are their capacity for trust and their capacity for hope. As a community, we have to trust God and hope for the fulfillment of God's promises, allowing ourselves as individuals and as a community to be led by God.

My brothers and sisters, if we are going to be the best parish we can be, we need for every parishioner to take ownership of the parish. We are called to be good stewards of this parish. We are responsible for this parish and will be accountable to God for how we fulfill our responsibility. If we are going to continue to thrive, we all have to step up and be generous in sharing our time, our talents, and our treasure with Little Flower. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, let us commit ourselves to work to enable our parish, through the intercession of St. Therese, to become the-best-version-of-itself.