

5th Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:26-31;
I John 3:18-24;
John 15:1-8
Little Flower - 5/2/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Archbishop Thompson has asked that I share with you today that he has reappointed me pastor of Little Flower effective July 7, 2021, until August 6, 2024, when I will turn 75. After that time, upon review and my desire to continue, I could be appointed administrator of the parish for periods of one year. The official announcement of this appointment is scheduled to be published in next week's edition of *The Criterion*. However, although my appointment runs until I am 75, because I am over 70, I am free to retire during this time.

The early church has a lot to teach us about what it means to be church today.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches.*" This passage describes Jesus' relationship with the Church. Last week I mentioned that the Gospel passage concerning the Good Shepherd reveals the Church to be a community of intimacy, a community of service, and a community of mission. The image of the vine and the branches gives us insight into what it means to say that the Church is a community of intimacy. When we say the Church is a community of intimacy, we are not talking about emotional intimacy. The Holy Spirit living within each of us is the soul or life principle of the Church. Our union with God and our unity with each other—our intimacy with God and others—come from the Holy Spirit living within us.

Last Monday was the funeral of Fr. Herman Lutz. Fr. Lutz was working full time at the Tribunal when I first started in 1980. He often used the word *messy* to describe families, parishes, and the Church. Fortunately, Little Flower is not very messy. For the most part, we are welcoming, respectful, and accepting of each other. Unfortunately, I would say that the larger Church is messy right now. Today there are significant divisions within the Catholic Church at least in the United States, divisions that mirror the divisions within the larger society. Divisions in parishes or in the Church hinder the mission of the Church. At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed, "*I pray ... also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me*" [John 17:20-21]. Divisions in the church or in parishes prevent us from witnessing the unity for which Christ prayed.

At the same time, because the Church is made up of human beings and, therefore, human relationships, Christian communities will always have their struggles. As we heard in today's reading from Acts, when Saul arrived in Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, they did not trust him because he previously had persecuted Christians. Therefore, Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles. When the Hellenists tried to kill him, they took him to Caesarea and then sent him back to Tarsus, his hometown.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from I John reminds us of two important truths. First, John tells us to love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. As we all know, love is the most overused word in the English language. We prove the truth of our words by our actions. The second truth is very encouraging. St. John reminds us that God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. In other words, even when we feel guilty or ashamed, God's love is greater than our guilt or our shame. God's love for us is the one constant in our lives. No matter what we do, God never loves us any less. God's love, then, is the anchor of our lives. If God knows everything, he knows the secrets of our hearts and loves us with an infinite, everlasting love.