

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - B  
Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15;  
Ephesians 4:17, 20-24;  
John 6:24-35  
Little Flower - 8/1/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus begins his Eucharistic Discourse.

Little Flower, together with most Catholic parishes and other Christian churches, is struggling to recover from the pandemic. Almost every week our numbers at Sunday Eucharist are increasing. Currently we are at approximately 2/3 of pre-pandemic attendance. Thank you for having returned home to Little Flower. In the coming weeks, we will attempt outreaches to encourage those who are able to return to Sunday Mass.

One of our challenges is that many people are finding it hard to return to Mass simply because they got out of the habit of attending Mass. Others are finding it hard to attend every Sunday because again they are out of the habit of attending every Sunday. Other have found it easier to watch the streamed Mass either live or at their convenience. Still others do not feel safe returning.

However, churches have an even bigger challenge than encouraging their parishioners to return to Mass. Even pre-Covid, attendance at Mass here and in many, if not most, parishes hovered around 1/3 of registered members. Today many Christians and Catholics believe they can be good Catholics or good Christians without attending church because they believe in Jesus, pray, and try to live good lives. Many of them and others would answer they are spiritual but not religious.

If we look at the New Testament, however, the Christianity of Jesus is a Christianity of church or community. In the Gospels, Jesus first built a community of disciples and then established a church built on the foundation of the apostles. His teaching was constantly bringing people together. Acts of the Apostles is primarily the story of the foundations of the first Christian communities around the Roman Empire. Most of Paul's Letters were written not to individuals but to church communities.

What does it mean to be church? *An American Catholic Catechism* attempted to define the Church: "The Church is the community of those called to acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, who ratify that faith sacramentally, and who commit themselves to membership and mission for the sake of the Kingdom of God in history." The Church is, first of all, a community, a flesh and blood community, called by God. This community, established by Christ, is called to faith, sacraments, and service.

In other words, we are called to live and share faith within a faith community. In fact, the New Testament frequently urges us to support one another in faith. When we are actively part of a parish or faith community, we have the benefit of having others to support us both in our faith struggles and our everyday life struggles. Likewise, being actively part of a faith community adds a layer of accountability to our choices. Finally, it is easier to live a faith-filled and faithful Christian life just being together with individuals who share our faith and our values.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*" Although John 6 is often referred to as Jesus' Eucharistic Discourse, it might better be termed Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse because only part of the discourse focuses on the Eucharist. In this passage, Jesus proclaims that he himself is the bread of life. As he said, those who come to him will never hunger, and those who believe in him will never thirst. Where do we find Jesus? Jesus promised always to be present in the community of the Church: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" [Mt. 18:20].