

8th Sunday per Annum - C
Sirach 27:4-7;
I Corinthians 15:54-58;
Luke 6:39-45
Little Flower - 2/27/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you to all who participated in our ministry fair and pancake breakfast last Sunday and all who have completed their stewardship card. If you brought your stewardship card today, please drop it in the regular collection.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. I would hope that this Lent will help re-energize us as a parish. As you know, Jesus' program for Lent has three pillars: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

The first pillar is prayer. Masses on Ash Wednesday will be at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. The Eucharist, of course, is the greatest prayer of all. At every Eucharist, we thank God for all God's gifts to us, especially the gift of Jesus who makes all love possible. Also, at every Eucharist, because Jesus' sacrificial death on Calvary 2000 years ago is made present, we offer ourselves through, with, and in Christ to God the Father.

Therefore, I want to strongly encourage you to attend Mass on Ash Wednesday. I also would hope that we would recommit ourselves to weekly Sunday Mass attendance. At this point in the pandemic, fewer and fewer people have a legitimate reason not to attend. At the same time, I would encourage you to try to attend daily Mass during Lent either here at Little Flower or at one of our neighboring parishes. Likewise, I would encourage more of you to attend Friday Stations of the Cross. To aid in your personal prayer, the *Little Black Books* are available at all the doors of church today. You also have the option of signing up for Dynamic Catholic's *Best Lent Ever 2.0*. Finally, our parish Penance Service will be Wednesday, March 16, here at Little Flower.

Fasting is the second pillar of Lent. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. The other Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence. The requirements are explained in my Theresean letter this week. For most of us, fasting means giving up something we enjoy eating or doing. The purpose of this kind of fasting is to deny ourselves and to sensitize us to those who are more needy than we are. However, several times during Lent the readings will remind us that the fasting God prefers is fasting from sin. During Lent, we are called to put out of our lives whatever is selfish or sinful, whatever keeps us from loving God and others.

Today's first reading from Sirach and today's Gospel each suggest at least one area of sin from which we should fast. Sirach reminds us not to sin with our tongues. This is especially important in these times of division and social media. We should never forget the words of the Apostle James: "*...even though [ships] are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are steered by a very small rudder.... In the same way the tongue is a small member and yet has great pretensions. Consider how small a fire can set a huge forest ablaze. The tongue is also a fire*" [3:4-6a].

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenges us not to judge others, i.e., not to notice the splinter in their eye while missing the beam in our own eye. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently tells us to stop judging others. For most of us, judging others is one of our worst faults. Whatever other sins we need to work at avoiding, we need to really work not to judge others and to control what we say. In fact, our judging others often leads us to say what we should not say.

My brothers and sisters, almsgiving is the final pillar of Lent. During Lent, we are called to greater generosity toward others. Although we are called to be more generous with our money, we are also called to be more generous with our time and talent. We are called to have a more generous heart. If we pray more, fast more, especially from sin, and are more generous, our Lent will prepare us to enter more profoundly into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection.