

4th Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 13:14, 43-52;
Revelation 7:9, 14b-17;
John 10:27-30
Little Flower - 5/8/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Parish Staff and I want to wish all mothers and those assume the role of a mother a most blessed and happy Mother's Day. Monday is the 35th anniversary of my mother's death. When I think of my mother, I think of her deep faith and of her willingness to make any sacrifices necessary for my brother and me. Mother's Day is a day to cherish our mothers or our memories of our mothers.

At the same time, none of us had perfect mothers. There are no perfect mothers just as there are no perfect children. Families are complex; families are messy. At funerals I often quote an old Irish blessing: "May you never forget what is worth remembering, Or remember what is best forgotten."

Today is called Good Shepherd Sunday. It is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life. Priests carry on the ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by proclaiming the gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and serving the community. Religious have a unique vocation in the Church. If the church is called to witness to the world all that the world is called to be, religious communities are called to witness to the Church all that the Church is called to be. Today the Church invites us to pray specifically for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life.

What mothers, priests, deacons, and religious all have in common is the vocation to be servant leaders. In his book *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard argues that leadership is about influencing others. His first example of leadership is "A mother with a child at any time of day." Mothers have tremendous influence on every aspect of their children's lives. As I have often said, children learn what they live and live what they learn. Besides my parents, I was profoundly influenced by the Sisters who taught me and the priests who served at Little Flower. I was influenced by their words and by their example.

After Pentecost, the apostles, including Paul, initially proclaimed the gospel only to Jews, which included converts to Judaism. Today's first reading represents a transition point in the early history of the Church. Today's reading from Acts tells how Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. When the Jews rejected the teaching of Paul and Barnabas, they told them, "*It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it..., we now turn to the Gentiles.*"

Controversy over the admittance of Gentiles to the community led to the Council of Jerusalem, often considered the first ecumenical council. At that first council, the Christian community chose inclusion over exclusion. Multiple times throughout the history of the Church, the Church chose to be inclusive. Those decisions are validated by John's vision of God's kingdom in the second reading: "*I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.*"

For most of our history, going into the whole world and proclaiming the gospel to every creature has been understood geographically, i.e., going to the ends of the earth, to use the words of Paul and Barnabas. I would suggest we are now living in another transition time.

My brothers and sisters, both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict frequently referred to the new evangelization and re-evangelization. Both popes reminded us of our personal need to be re-evangelized and the need to re-evangelize our culture and society. Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke often about going out to the margins to invite and welcome all the marginalized into the family of God. In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, he called us to proclaim the gospel of God's mercy to all families, especially those who are alienated from the Church, those who have felt marginalized by the Church. When all is said and done, we are all called to "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*" [Mk. 16:15].