

My Brothers and Sisters,

After the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, I am always happy to return to Ordinary Time when the readings suggest multiple themes. As Paul wrote to Timothy, *"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching..."* [2 Tim. 3:16].

In today's first reading, God chose Elisha to succeed Elijah as prophet. Elisha then followed Elijah as his attendant. Elisha became Elijah's disciple. For us to live well, we have to be lifelong learners. I would argue that we primarily learn from the example or witness of others.

God puts people into our lives who can be role models, witnesses, and examples to us. Parents, with God, are co-creators of their children. Children learn from their parents and often their grandparents what it means to be a boy or girl, man or woman, and what it means to be a couple. As I have often quoted, children learn what they live and live what they learn. Life often comes full circle. We often learn how to grow older gracefully (or not so gracefully) as we watch our parents grow older.

Teachers and coaches play a formative role in the life of young people. For example, when I go to Scecina Class Reunion dinners, it always amazes me that after so many years, the alumni still address their former coaches as "Coach," a sign of deep respect. Certainly I was influenced profoundly by the priests, sisters, and lay teachers here at Little Flower. Likewise, I can think of teachers from high school, college, and theology who profoundly influenced my life. In almost all cases, it was the person of the teacher more than what he or she taught me that influenced me. I certainly have learned how to be an older priest from some of the older priests with whom I lived.

Many people have mentors in their jobs or careers and relationships. One of my college professors gave me the best advice before I went to Rome. He encouraged me to choose as friends people who were more intelligent and better than I was. We can certainly learn what it means to live a good Catholic and Christian life from the example and witness of the best Catholics and Christians we know.

As Christians, it goes without saying that Jesus should be our primary role model. Being both fully divine and fully human, he perfectly embodies what it means to be human, what it means to be the best-version-of-ourselves. Jesus calls us to make our own and live the attitudes and values he lived. However, to make him our primary role model, we have to develop a personal relationship with him. In today's Gospel, Jesus' words to the men who wanted to follow him or whom he called to follow him suggest the urgency of following him.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul reflects on the true meaning of freedom. Too often we think of freedom as freedom from laws, rules, and other constraints. Freedom, in other words, is freedom to do whatever we want to do. However, for Paul, true freedom is the freedom to serve one another through love. In other words, Paul's definition of freedom is freedom for rather than freedom from. In fact, he reminds us that the whole law is fulfilled in the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. What this suggests is that all the other commandments of God are expressions or specifications of this one commandment. For Christian adults, love for others becomes the guiding principle of their lives.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, when Jesus was not welcomed by the Samaritan village, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy them. Jesus, however, rebuked James and John. Sadly, in our divided country and church, we tend to have an us vs. them mentality. If we listen to talk shows or follow social media, people are figuratively calling down fire on others. This is not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of love.