

St. Therese - C  
Song of Songs 8:6-7;  
Galatians 2:19-20;  
Matthew 18:1-4  
Little Flower - 10/2/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, our patron saint. A patron saint plays two important roles in the life of a parish. Patron saints are first intercessors. When we pray to St. Therese, we ask her to join her prayers to our prayers. Certainly, our parish has been superabundantly blessed since its beginning through the intercession of St. Therese. As most of you know, we were the first, or one of the first, parishes in the world dedicated to her. Second, a patron saint is someone to be imitated. Today's readings suggest three qualities of St. Therese for us to imitate.

Today's first reading proclaims that authentic love is strong as death and "*its flames are a blazing fire.*" From her writings and from everything written about her, it is clear that St. Therese had a passionate love for God and a passionate love for all God's children. However, the Song of Songs is a dialogue between a lover and his beloved. Therefore, this passage also reminds us that God's love for us is also a passionate love. As Paul wrote, nothing can "*separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus*" [Rom. 8:39]. To imitate St. Therese is to have confidence in God's superabundant love for us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls us to become like little children. St. Therese always saw herself as a little child. In the Gospel, to become like little children is to see God as our loving Father and to acknowledge our dependence upon God. However, because our relationship with God and our relationships with others are inseparable, it is also important that we recognize that we are interdependent with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, to imitate St. Therese is to live as sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of one another.

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me...*" Like all great saints, by dying to self, St. Therese was transformed into the likeness of the Risen Christ, into the best-version-of-herself. One of the great paradoxes of Christianity is that the more we become Christ-like, the more we become ourselves. The best evidence of this is St. Paul himself. He wrote, "*I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me....*" At the same time, Paul was the strongest personality in the New Testament next to Jesus himself.

My brothers and sisters, as we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, I want to thank you for your stewardship of time, talent, and treasure. You are Little Flower parish. At the same time, our parish is facing some real challenges. Although the numbers of people who attend Sunday Mass are increasing slowly, attendance stands at approximately 2/3 of what it was pre-pandemic. Unfortunately, habits of not coming to church developed during the pandemic are hard to break. If the parish is going to continue to thrive, we need more people to attend Mass consistently. Therefore, as I have said before, we really need your help in encouraging and inviting others to attend Sunday Mass, especially those whom you know formerly attended Mass. Celebrating Sunday Eucharist together is the most important thing we do as a parish. We want everyone to feel welcomed and needed, and you can help us do that.

If we are going to continue to thrive as a parish, more parishioners need to take ownership in the parish. Parishioners in rural parishes often feel more ownership for their parishes than parishioners in city parishes. Parishioners in rural parishes often understand that if they do not step up when there is a need, the need will not be met. Parishioners in city parishes assume that if they do not step up, somebody else will. Right now several of our ministries are struggling because of a lack of volunteers. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese today, please look for ways to volunteer your time and talent to our ministries and encourage others to return to Sunday Eucharist.