

24th Sunday per Annum - A
Sirach 27:30-28:7;
Romans 14:7-9;
Matthew 18:21-35
Little Flower - 9/17/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Catechetical Sunday. “As part of a 1935 initiative to recognize and celebrate the gift that catechists give to their parish communities by volunteering their time for the education of children, the Church began what we know today as Catechetical Sunday.” Today, then, we want to recognize and celebrate all those who give their time and talents to share our Catholic faith at Little Flower. This includes those who help with Children’s Liturgy, our Sunday Religious Education program, our Vacation Bible School program, our Baptismal Preparation Program, our First Communion and First Reconciliation preparation program, our Confirmation preparation program, our marriage preparation program, and our various adult Bible studies and other studies. Of course, this also includes the administration, faculty, and staff of Little Flower School and our coaches who formally or informally share faith with our young people. Finally, and above all, this includes parents. I am sure I have missed some other individuals and groups. Please congratulate them.

This year’s theme comes from St. Matthew’s Gospel: “*Come to me all you who labor and are burdened,*” [Mt. 11:28]. The remainder of the Gospel verse is equally important: “*and I will give you rest.*” An essential element of the proclamation of the Gospel is an invitation to all to come to Jesus and to find rest in him no matter what the burdens of their lives.

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul offers us a message of hope. He reminds us that as Christians we are called to live for the Lord and to die for the Lord. In other words, we are called to put Christ at the center of our lives, to make our relationship with Christ our first priority. He then draws the conclusion that because Christ died and rose, if we make our relationship with Christ our first priority, we are Christ’s possession, which means we live in Christ’s love both in life and in death.

However, the first verse of this passage has also been translated “*The life and death of each of us has its influence on others*” [JB, 1966]. For better or for worse, we influence the life of everyone whose life intersects with ours even from afar. For example, I am inspired when I witness older couples who are still very much in love with each other or younger people who are very engaged with their faith. On the other hand, many years ago, a high school student who was a cashier at a grocery store told me that a woman whom she recognized from church was consistently rude to her and other workers, especially younger workers.

Likewise, the death of each of us influences others. For example, when a husband or wife dies, it is as though part of the other dies with him or her since they have become part of each other. The death of a parent is one of the most difficult losses we face. Parents never get over the death of a child. Suicide is also a tragedy both for the person who commits suicide and for all those left behind. If you have ever had a family member, friend, or even acquaintance who has committed suicide, you know how true this is.

When we think of hugs, we think of affection or love. However, the first verse of the first reading paints a different picture: “*Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight.*” In other words, according to Sirach, the sinner is unwilling to let go of wrath and anger. However, many good people also have a difficult time letting go of anger. Most of the rest of the sayings in the first reading are also about forgiveness and letting go. Scripture tells us that God both forgives and forgets. Since God really cannot forget anything, forgetting for God means letting go, not holding anything against us. This is what forgiveness needs to mean for us.

My brothers and sisters, the parable in today’s Gospel is a powerful reminder of Jesus oft-stated warning that if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. Forgiveness includes letting go.