

31st Sunday per Annum - A
Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10;
I Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13;
Matthew 23:1-12
Little Flower - 11/5/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday Pope Francis celebrated the closing Mass for the first session of the Synod on Synodality. Because of this synod, I have a different perspective on today's readings. All three readings today are about Christian leadership.

The reading from the Prophet Malachi is a warning to the temple priests. Through Malachi, God accuses them of not being faithful to the covenant and teaching and acting in ways that do not give glory to God, that favor themselves, and that show partiality to some but not to others. He reminds them we all have the same father, the one God who created all of us. He then asks why they break faith with one another, violating the covenant of our fathers.

One of the key synod words was *communion*. Within the family of the Church, we are called to live in communion with God and with one another. If God is father of us all, all of us are brothers and sisters of one another in Christ. Therefore, we are called to live as brothers and sisters, loving and respecting one another. Whatever our roles in the Church, we are all called to work for the common good, i.e., using our unique gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ. In the family of the Church, leadership should always be service to God and one another.

When I came to Little Flower 20 years ago, one of the points I made was that Little Flower is your parish, not mine. Therefore, because I believed and still believe this,, I changed very little. Nevertheless, it would have been better if I had said that Little Flower is our parish. The bottom line is that Little Flower is our parish, and we all need to continue to work together to build up our community in faith, love, and hope.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the people to follow the teachings of their leaders and teachers but not their example because they did not practice what they preached. We call the family the domestic church. Parents are the leaders of their children. Because parenting is a 24/7 job, I think it is extremely difficult for parents to always live up to the ideals they want to teach their children. However, it is extremely important that they keep trying because "children learn what they live and live what they learn."

Jesus accuses the scribes and the Pharisees of imposing heavy burdens on people without doing anything to help them move the burdens. In his homily at the opening Mass for the Synod, Pope Francis said that the Church must be a welcoming Church "which does not impose burdens." As we all know, most people are already over burdened. Instead, we should proclaim the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: "*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest*" [Mt. 11:28].

Finally, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul talks about his own servant leadership among the Thessalonians. First, he stated that he was gentle among them as a nursing mother cares for her children. At the Synod, the Pope said, "... the faith is transmitted in dialect, and usually in the feminine dialect. This is not only because the Church is Mother ... it is precisely women who best reflect her..." Second, because of Paul's affection for them, he was determined to share with them not only the Gospel of God but his very self as well. In other words, we cannot be servant leaders unless we love the people whom we serve.

My brothers and sisters, in their book *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges remind us that everyone who seeks to influence others is a leader. As Christians, we are all called to seek to influence others within our families and within all the communities of which we are part. Today's readings challenge us to be servant leaders like Jesus.