

St. Therese - A
Micah 6:6-8;
Colossians 3:12-17;
Matthew 18:1-4
Little Flower - 10/1/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Although her actual feast day is October 1, today as a parish, we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese. As you may know, we were one of the first parishes in the world dedicated to St. Therese after her canonization in 1925. When I was in school, we were told that we were the first.

Patron saints play two important roles in the life of a parish and its parishioners. The first is as a protector and intercessor. In other words, we believe St. Therese watches over us and prays to God for us both as a parish and as individuals. If we look at both the earlier and the more recent history of the parish, God continues to bless us superabundantly through the intercession of St. Therese.

The second is that a patron saint is someone to be imitated. Many or most of you may be aware of the emphasis Little Flower School places on St. Therese's Little Way. All three of today's readings list qualities that St. Therese lived or tried to live during her life, qualities of her life that we should try to imitate in our lives.

Today's reading from the prophet Micah captures St. Therese's life: *"What is good has been explained to you: this is what God asks of you, only this: to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God."* Scripture scholars tell us that this verse captures the main message of each of the three previous Old Testament prophets. The prophet Amos calls us to act justly; the prophet Hosea calls us to love tenderly; and the prophet Isaiah calls us to walk humbly with our God.

St. Therese found the meaning of *"walk humbly with your God"* in today's Gospel: *"Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."* Just as young children intuitively recognize their total dependence upon their parents, St. Therese recognized her total dependence upon God. Likewise, she tried to maintain the innocence of a child. In everything she did, she aspired not to greatness but to holiness.

As many times as I have read this Gospel, I learned something new this week. When Jesus said, *"Unless you turn and become like children"* he was talking about the need for ongoing conversion. In the Gospels, the word *turn* suggests conversion and change. Even Therese, the Little Flower of Jesus, had to constantly be turning away from selfishness and sin.

Paul's letter to the Colossians suggests how we might walk humbly with our God. First, he calls us to be thankful. The primary ways we give thanks to God are by celebrating Eucharist and by sharing our gifts with others. Finally, St. Paul challenges us to do everything, whether in word or in deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus. If we strive to do everything in the name of Jesus, we will become holy like St. Therese.

St. Therese loved tenderly. Her love both for God and for others was never a depersonalized spiritual, intellectual, or abstract love, but a very human, very personal love. St. Paul's letter to the Colossians captures some of the qualities of tender love we are called to live in our lives: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.

St. Therese acted justly. She treated everyone with profound respect. She was able to do this because she always tried to see Christ in everyone. She tried to look beyond the surface, beyond their physical appearance and even beyond their behavior or their personality, to their soul where she believed Jesus lived and loved them. Like St. Therese, we are called to have a profound respect for others. On a human level, we have to cherish their otherness, their uniqueness, however different they may be from us.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, on this Respect Life Sunday, let us also pray, through the intercession of St. Therese, that the Holy Spirit will open the minds and hearts of all so that all will develop a profound respect for all life from the moment of conception to natural death.