

32nd Sunday per Annum - B
I Kings 17:10-16;
Hebrews 9:24-28;
Mark 12:38-44
Little Flower - 11/10/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

As many of you know, every year in the early fall, the Archdiocese asks priests their preferences concerning their assignment for the following July. Some choose to seek a new assignment, some prefer to remain where they are, some are not looking for a new assignment but are open to a new assignment, and some are eligible for retirement but wish to continue in their current assignment.

However, when a priest turns 75, he is no longer eligible to continue as pastor but may be appointed administrator. As you know, I turned 75 on August 6. On October 17, I received a letter from Archbishop Thompson appointing me administrator until July 2, 2025.

In my request for next year, I asked to remain at Little Flower for the first year of our 100th anniversary celebration. Fr. Tim Wyciskalla, Episcopal Vicar for Clergy, Religious, and Parish Life Coordinators, then requested a meeting with me. We had lunch on Monday, September 16. He told me that in all probability the Archbishop was going to ask me to retire. On Thursday evening, October 17, he confirmed that indeed that was the Archbishop's request.

Today Fr. Rick Ginther, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes, is making a similar announcement. The big difference is that he had already announced that he was retiring next July. The reason the Archbishop is requesting my retirement is because he plans to appoint a pastor who will be pastor of both Little Flower and Our Lady of Lourdes.

I want to be clear. Our two parishes are not being combined. They will continue to be separate parishes. However, the Archbishop strongly feels that it is best for both parishes that the pastor be assigned for both parishes at the same time. This will be helpful for both parishes and the new pastor so that neither parish feels it is being absorbed into the other as could happen if the new pastor became pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes in 2025 and Little Flower in 2026.

This actually makes a lot of sense to me. First of all, because of the shortage of priests and the size and proximity of both parishes, such an arrangement is inevitable. This is happening at many parishes, and it provides not only for the reality of the number of priests we have, but also cooperation, coordination, and some community synthesis between the parishes. Second, I had already decided that I was going to retire in 2026. Third, I have come to realize, and I am sure many of you have noticed, that I am not able to do well everything that a pastor needs to do. In simplest language, I am very tired and have little energy, which I think is the result of my cancer treatment.

When this becomes effective in July 2025, the new pastor will live at Our Lady of Lourdes initially. The Archbishop has graciously decided that I may continue to live in the rectory for at least a year until I have a plan for retirement and a place to live. I am extremely grateful for this.

As part of the process for appointing a new pastor, the Archdiocese sends two priests from the Personnel Board to meet with the parish leadership including the Parish Council, the

parish staff, and me to discern the needs of the parish. This will happen in the next few weeks. Fr. Steve Giannini and Fr. Aaron Jenkins will be the two priests.

What role, if any, I will have in the parish next year will completely depend on the new pastor, and I am fine with that. Although I have no idea who the new pastor will be, I will want the transition to be as smooth as possible. I will want to completely support the new pastor in his role as pastor of Little Flower and Lourdes, and I hope you will also.

Many years ago, two older pastors shared their wisdom with me. One told me that whenever there is a change in pastors, there is at least a temporary decline in Mass attendance. The second told me that whenever there is a change in pastors, there is at least a temporary decline in financial contributions. I hope and pray that neither of these will happen at Little Flower. In my first Sunday homily here almost 22 years ago, I said, "I believe this parish is your parish." In the almost 22 years I have been here, we have done wonderful things together. My hope and my prayer is that you will continue to see this parish as your parish and continue to support it as generously as you have throughout my time here.

For many of us, change can be very difficult especially because it brings a lot of uncertainty. I am one of those for whom change is very difficult. Right now it is important that we continue to live in the present, i.e., day by day. As we move into the future with all its uncertainty, faith will be very important. We will need to entrust ourselves and our future as parishioners and as a parish to God. As Jesus said, "*Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself*" [Mt. 6:34].

My brothers and sisters, as we prepare for this change, please pray for Little Flower parish and school, for me, for yourselves, and for vocations to the priesthood. However, I am not going anywhere yet. I will continue to be administrator until July 2.