

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - C  
I Samuel 26:2,7-9,12-13-, 22-23;  
I Corinthians 15:45-49;  
Luke 6:27-38  
Little Flower - 2/23/25

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading describes the final encounter of King Saul and King David. When God chose David over Saul, Saul decided to kill David. In this reading, David has the opportunity to kill Saul but refuses to do so, demonstrating "his innocence and noble character."

Today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians argues that by rising from the dead, Jesus became a life-giving spirit. As Christians, we are called to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ by dying to selfishness and sin and rising to new life in Christ, in other words, becoming the-best-version-of-ourselves. To the extent that we do, we too become life giving.

Today's Gospel offers several ways to demonstrate our "innocence and noble character" and to be life giving. I want to mention just three. The first is the golden rule: "*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*" For me, this is an almost infallible guide to doing the right thing. Treat other people as you want to be treated. If you do this, you will do the right things. The so-called silver rule is a corollary. Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you. This, too, is almost infallible.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*Be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful.*" This verse is one of three parallel verses. The comparable Old Testament verse is "*Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy*" [Lev. 19:1]. Many years ago, Josef Goldbrunner, a Jesuit priest and psychiatrist, wrote a little book titled *Holiness is Wholeness*. Holiness is certainly not psychological wholeness. If it were, many saints, including St. Therese, probably would not be saints. Rather, those who are holy live in right relationships with God, others, the world, and themselves. One of the biggest challenges we face today in trying to live in right relationships is balancing our relationships.

The parallel verse in Matthew's Gospel is "*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" This is what Matthew Kelly is talking about when he talks about becoming the-best-version-of-ourselves. Although we will never be perfect, we must constantly strive to become a better version of ourselves. We must strive to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ. Actually, one Bible translation reads, "*In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" [NAB, 1970]. Although this is probably a mistranslation of the Greek, it accurately describes the reality of our situation. We are never going to be perfect as God is perfect, but we can always strive to become better than we are.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*" When we think of mercy, we tend to think first of forgiveness. Certainly, when we think of God's mercy, we think of his forgiveness of our sins. However, mercy is much richer than forgiveness. Mercy in the fullest sense of the word is compassion. Therefore, "*be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate*" seems an appropriate translation. To be compassionate is to be sensitive and responsive to the real needs of others, both those spoken and those that remain unspoken.

From our perspective, it is easier to be merciful or compassionate than to be perfect. However, in the Old Testament, mercy is attributed to God and only rarely to human beings, while perfection is a goal to be sought by everyone. As Pope Francis has often said, mercy is the quality most proper to God. Therefore, we are most like God when we are merciful or compassionate.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, Jesus said, "*Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.*" Today this is the most challenging of Jesus' sayings. Today there is so much judgment and condemnation. Today there is so little forgiveness. However, Jesus is telling us that if we do not want to be judged or condemned, that if we want to be forgiven, we must not judge or condemn but rather forgive.