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FR JC'S PASTORAL LETTER

My dear Little Flower,

The greatest blessing and gift that we have all received from God is Love. Today, during the Feast of the Holy Family, we highlight the importance of the mission of love in our spiritual journey - and how the family could be the place where love is received and shared. Our church - our parish - is a family. And remember that “we love because God first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Authentic and real love leads all of us to a life full of blessings. It is therefore engraved in the very fiber of our being to seek it, have it, in every step and journey of our lives. Recently, there has been a lot of confusion among the faithful on whether the Church is now “changing” their doctrine on the Sacred Sacrament of Marriage (Matrimony). The Church’s teaching on marriage remains unchanged; however, the Pope’s statement on same-sex couples underscores “the importance of blessings as a support for people on their spiritual journeys, recognizing that everyone can benefit from God’s healing and mercy” (Cardinal Tobin’s Statement).

Pope Francis' recent statement highlights the distinction between a sacramental blessing during religious ceremonies and a pastoral blessing, which can be given to people who seek God's grace. We need God’s grace, and therefore, we can walk together and seek God’s blessings. Archbishop Socrates Villegas of the Philippines speaks about a difference between a blessing of sanctification, and a blessing for mercy. The point being that all blessings flow from the same source, and all blessings desire to return to its source - who is God.

It is important to recognize that we all need pastoral blessings; and that it can be a powerful way to offer support to people who are struggling with their faith or who are feeling isolated from the Church.

Pope Francis says: “The request for a blessing, thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered” (no. 31, Fiducia Supplicans).

In this New Year, let us continue to be God’s faithful and sacrificial love for one another. And so, continue to receive each other as Jesus received, healed and journey with sinners like you and me. We are family; mercy, love and healing isustain us in our journey.

**Your parish priest,
Fr JC Merino**