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My dear Little Flower,

Recently, I returned from the Philippines - my *motherland*, but it's been over 13 years since I was last there. It was eye-opening to realize how much New Jersey has truly become home now for me, the Catholic Church in America has embraced me to be family. While in New Jersey, I have built roots - home, community, purpose. Still, being among friends and family in the Philippines reminded me of a deep bond and belonging that neither distance nor time could erase. Fr. Vincent D'Agostino, pastor and friend from Our Lady of Mercy in Park Ridge, joined me on this journey. He also found joy in reconnecting with the beauty and faith of the Philippines. We saw how connections remain, strong roots endure, and hope sustains across oceans and years.

For Wisdom's promise to the Hebrews' long journey, the Scripture speaks to that tension in the journey through life: longing for a place, trusting in God's promise, living between memory and mission. And, today, Jesus calls us to readiness - faithful stewardship of where we are now, even while looking toward what is yet to come.

Friends, we are a "little flock" entrusted with God's Kingdom. We may be small, but in faithfulness and love, we bear witness to something mighty. We are living in the holy tension between a past that shaped us, and a present mission God calls us into now, holding both as sacred. Our watchfulness is not driven by fear, but by love - a love that, like Abraham's faith, moves us to step forward even when the destination is unknown. In this journey, we cultivate treasures that last, relationships and friendships grounded in prayer and service, a community built on trust, and hearts that are open to the stranger.

Reflect: Where do you carry "home" in your heart? Where do you feel called to build new roots?

Act: Draw near someone in your life - perhaps from different places or cultures - and share in prayer, story, or service.

Trust: Let us continue to invest our love toward God's unfolding story through Little Flower Parish.

Your parish priest,

Fr. JC Merino

