

Dear Friends,

Having just returned from a wonderful pilgrimage to France, Spain and Portugal with fellow pilgrims from our parish faith community of Church of the Little Flower, I am deeply grateful to have been named pastor after spending the last year with all of you, learning, listening, praying, sharing the Eucharistic meal. While in Europe, you were in our hearts, especially when we celebrated Mass together and shared our Lord's Body and Blood with one another. As I traveled to, and prayed in, the magnificent churches and beautiful shrines we visited I could not help but be reminded of the awesome presence and activity of our faith throughout the world. To be part of something so transcendent and beyond my understanding was humbling while also very affirming of my mission and purpose as a disciple of Christ.

In the spirit of the Holy Trinity, a feast we just honored in our liturgical year, I pray that all of us at Little Flower will continue to feel a greater sense of renewal and deepening of faith. As your new pastor, I am excited to be on the journey with you and to embrace the tremendous gifts our Lord has given us with greater fervor and love for one another in Him, Our Redeemer.

A wise person once said, "A gift is truly a gift if it can be given away." Doesn't this hold true for our faith? Aren't we called to pass on our faith, share it, carry it to the next person? Perhaps this is what it really means to be missionary, as our Holy Father encourages us to be towards others in our lives.

Part of my new role as your shepherd, one that I am learning on the job to do better, concerns being a good financial steward. To this end, ***I am asking for your ongoing support as the Annual Appeal for our Archdiocese of Newark comes to a close in less than 2 weeks on June 30<sup>th</sup>***. If you've given already, please know how grateful I am of our unwavering support of our parish. At present we are getting closer to our parish goal of raising \$69, 000. but remain about \$6,000 behind. In the past, even during the Covid years, Little Flower stepped up to the plate. I know we can do so again. Cardinal Tobin and the Archdiocese are counting on us. Let's complete the task and reach our goal!

If we do, our parish will receive a 2% reduction in our monthly assessments which adds up to approximately \$12,000 per annum as well as a possible rebate check. So reaching our target, unquestionably, brings great dividends for Little Flower to continue to enjoy all the programs and activities that enhance our overall faith experience as brothers and sisters in Christ. If you haven't made an offering yet, please prayerfully consider doing so. Rest assured, that whatever you decide and whatever you can afford, I and all within Little Flower are grateful.

Let's close the gap together so we can continue our missionary work and support RCAN, and its mission to help the poor and vulnerable, assist our retired priests who served countless for decades, prepare our future priests in their educational lives, and to foster a solid foundation for all the other various ministries touched by the monetary fruits of the Annual Appeal.

Many thanks for your generosity in treasure and spirit. In recounting our Lord's words, the evangelist Matthew wrote: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Giving to the annual appeal offers an opportunity to dig a little deeper and help many in our midst.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. JC Merino

Pastor