

Our Parish

Fr. JC's Pastoral Letter

My dear Little Flower,

September gathers us again: to school, work, parish life, ministries, responsibilities, and the ordinary rhythm of our days. It is fitting that our parish theme this month is Faith and Love in Action.

At the foundation of everything we do stands one great Catholic conviction: the dignity of the human person. Before a person is useful, successful, agreeable, educated, wealthy, healthy, young, old, conservative, liberal, familiar, or strange, that person bears the image of God. Human dignity is not awarded by society and cannot be revoked by society. It comes from God. The person I love. The person I find difficult. The stranger. The lonely. The wounded. Even the one who has hurt me.

That is where this Sunday's Scriptures become demanding. Sirach warns us that anger can become something we "hug tightly." Resentment begins as a wound and can slowly become an identity. Shakespeare understood this tragic logic well: vengeance promises justice, yet so often multiplies the very poison it seeks to cure.

The Gospel proposes another way. Peter asks Jesus, "How often must I forgive?" Jesus' answer is essentially: stop counting. Forgiveness does not mean that evil is unimportant. Mercy is not moral amnesia. Truth, accountability, justice, repentance, and protection of the vulnerable all matter because human dignity matters.

Christianity refuses to allow another person's worst act to become that person's final definition. Psalm 103 reveals why: "The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion." God does not treat us as the total of our failures. Saint Paul gives us the foundation of Christian community: "None of us lives for oneself." This is not simply a lesson in being nice. It is the demand of Christianity.

A parish is not a religious service station. It is not a collection of programs offered to spiritual consumers. It is a communion. When one child is baptized, we receive a new brother or sister. When one family grieves, the whole Body is touched. When a teenager wonders whether the Church has a place for him or her, that question belongs to all of us. When an elderly parishioner becomes lonely, her loneliness becomes our concern. When a newcomer enters Little Flower, Christ himself entrusts someone to our welcome.

This is why Catholic social teaching speaks of dignity, but also participation. Because every person has dignity, every person must have a place to belong, contribute, serve, receive, and share responsibility for the common good. At Little Flower, this means becoming ever more consciously a family of faith. Otherwise, faith remains a beautiful language without incarnation.

So, I ask each of us this September to carry one question into prayer: Does another person become more aware of his or her God-given dignity because of the way I live my faith? Does my speech preserve dignity? Does my disagreement preserve dignity? Does my service build communion? Does my presence help another person know: You belong here. You matter. God has not forgotten you.

The Eucharist will not allow us to separate communion with Christ from communion with one another. We approach one altar. We receive one Lord. We become one Body.

Your parish priest, Fr JC Merino



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