

- Yesterday the Church celebrated the feast day of one of Her most popular saints: St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Many of us know her as the Little Flower.
- While this cloistered Carmelite lived only a short 24 years on this earth, and all of it in relative obscurity, she is perhaps one of the most well-known saints of all time – and certainly one of the most important saints of modern times – and for good reason.
- In her spiritual autobiography called *Story of a Soul*, St. Thérèse wrote extensively on the virtue of charity and her vocation to be love in the heart of the Church.
- One of the things that the Little Flower teaches us is that the Church has a heart burning with love. This love in the heart of the Church is what moves all of her members to act.
- St. Thérèse opined that, “if love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood.”
- And so we, who make up the Church, must keep the virtue of charity burning within us! Charity – authentic love – must be the animating force that impels us as we seek to live out our lives as Christians.
- As St. Paul writes to St. Timothy in our 2nd reading, we must “stir into flame the gift of God,” which is not a “spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love and self-control.”
- As true Christians, impelled by the love of God and neighbor, we must never be ashamed of proclaiming the beautiful truths of our Faith, or ever scared of “bearing our share of hardship for the gospel.”
- As many of you know, the month of October is Respect Life month. This is a time for us to speak up for all Pro-Life causes, and to speak clearly against the “Culture of Death.”
- And this year, we have so much to celebrate with the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*. But as I mentioned last Sunday, we still have so much work to do to outlaw abortion here in North Carolina – which has seen an uptick in abortion business from out-of-state folks.
- Oftentimes when I go with people to pray at our local abortion mills, there are vulgar and hate-filled volunteers at these places who harass us as we pray.
- In those moments when we come face to face with such people, it’s very easy to develop an “us vs. them” mentality. Personally, I often feel great temptations toward anger. Yet anger is exactly what we need to avoid!
- For we cannot tend to the wounds of others if we are angry or hate them. We cannot speak the truth in love if we are angry or hateful ourselves.
- So, as we continue working for an end to abortion and fighting the other elements of the Culture of Death like contraception, euthanasia, and the evil aspects of the LGBTQ agenda, we must try to avoid the polemics that lead us to demonize our opponents.
- As we encounter the evil propaganda of the Culture of Death or have experiences with people like the hateful volunteers at abortion mills, it’s easy to think that we have nothing in common with those with whom we disagree on the issues of life.
- Yet we do have something in common; something very fundamental: we are all sinners. As your pastor, this is something I pray you never lose sight of. All of us are sinners; all of us are in need of God’s mercy.
- Therefore, we must have compassion on our enemies. If we are members of the Church, then we are the doctors and nurses in the spiritual field hospital that is the Church. Thus, we must try to meet people in their woundedness.

- My experience as a priest has shown me that those who sin by participating in any way in the Culture of Death are often the most wounded people in our society.
- If you contravene the natural ordering of the marital act through sins like same sex relations or contraception, or even more egregiously, if you participate in the sin of abortion, you are sinning in a way that goes against very fundamental aspects of our human nature.
- At our core, we are ordered toward procreation and life. This is how God created us – and we are fearfully and wonderfully made! And when we sin against procreation or life, when we sin against the natural order of things, we become less human!
- Yet, as awful as the wounds from these sins are, my experience as a priest has also taught me that these wounds can be healed by God’s grace – most especially the grace we receive through the Sacraments. So we must do all we can to help people receive grace.
- When people fall into these terrible sins, the Church must be the place they turn to for help. She should never be an obstacle to a sinner’s healing. So we must meet people in their woundedness with honesty and compassion – for both are necessary for healing.
- Meeting people in their woundedness does not mean excusing their sin. Our model for dealing with our fellow sinners is Jesus and His interaction with the adulterous woman.
- Jesus was compassionate and even saved her from her persecutors, but He didn’t fail to tell her to repent. He said to her, “Woman, has no one condemned you? . . . Neither do I condemn you. But go and from now on sin no more.” (John 8:10-11)
- This must be the role of the Church in society – and not just the priests and bishops, but all of us! We must all reach out compassionately to those enmeshed in sin, gently tending to their wounds with the healing balm of charity and the bandages of truth.
- At the same time, we must also be that prophetic voice in the world that fearlessly and courageously speaks the truth about the inherent dignity of man and the grave evils of the Culture of Death – all without demonizing those caught up in the Culture of Death.
- In short we must hate the sin with a ferocious tenacity, while loving the sinner with all the tenderness we can muster.
- Sound difficult? It is, but if our hearts are burning with charity and our minds and wills are intent on doing the will of God, then all things are possible. Indeed, we are all unprofitable servants, and loving others is only what we are obliged to do.
- Through the intercession of St. Thérèse and especially of Our Lady, may each of our hearts be turned into burning furnaces of charity so that we may attend generously to our fellow sinners caught up in the evil snares of the Culture of Death.