

September 6, 2026—23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

During our parish mission, one of the priests pointed to the example of St. Philip Neri as a great evangelizer. I'm not sure if he knew that one of our stained-glass windows depicted three scenes from the life of St. Philip Neri. His life does have a lot to tell us about living and spreading our Catholic faith. He was born in Florence, Italy and lived for most of the 16th century. Instead of taking over the family business, which would have made him very successful, he felt he was called to move to the city of Rome, live a simple life and lead people to Jesus. Rome was in terrible spiritual shape, but St. Philip was a man of great warmth and love and intelligence. He attracted many young people and converted them through his holiness and humor. One day a young noble who was receiving spiritual direction from him asked if he could wear a hairshirt—a rough cloth worn next to the skin as a form of penance. St. Philip knew that he had a good heart but was very vain. He told him to go ahead and wear it, not next to the skin but on the outside of his clothes. The young man looked ridiculous but learned a lasting lesson on humility. His love for people and his joy was evident to all he met. After Sts. Peter and Paul, he is known as the “apostle to Rome”.

St. Paul simply explained the Old Testament law in the Second Reading: **“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”** St. Philip's kindness and joy were authentic. He was sincere in his love and desire to draw souls to Christ; it flowed from the love of his heart, and everyone could see it in his face and in his smile. You don't always have to have a smile on your face because the desire to love and care for others comes from a deeper source. Sometimes though, you must put on a smile even though you don't feel like it to make others joyful. Then it still comes from love.

Both the First Reading and the Gospel point out a time when our love and responsibility for others takes on a serious aspect and may not be easy. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel about the wicked ones who turned from God's commandments, saying that if **“you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked from his way, the wicked shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death.”**

In the Gospel Jesus spoke about this responsibility to help sinners. We call this **“fraternal correction”**. This is not nit-picking, but about a serious matter that will hurt a person's soul. With the advent of social media and podcasts, people are constantly criticizing and even belittling others for the smallest things. Also, we

must examine ourselves to make sure that a correction is made from charity, not pride or annoyance. Jesus explained it in three steps. First, talk to the person in person and in confidence. This avoids gossip and making the faults of others publicly known, even though they may be obvious to others. If the person won't listen, the second step is to bring one or two others to confirm the behavior and ask the person to repent. The third step is to bring the person to the Church.

This is only one of two times that Jesus uses the word, Church; the other was the day He made Peter the visible head of His Church: **"You are Peter (rock) and on this rock I will build my Church."** If the sinner doesn't respond to the third step of fraternal correction, the penalty is called by a serious name, Excommunication and belongs primarily to the successor of Peter. Normally, the farthest we can go is step two. We want all to be saved and we can sometimes help others to see the need for repentance.

In our continuing reflection on prayer, Jesus spoke about prayer in today's Gospel. He said, **"If two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my Heavenly Father."** By these words, Jesus is teaching us about the power of prayer. It is easy to take prayer for granted as if it were a last resort among many options or to pray half-heartedly.

As we reflected last week, we can't treat God like a soda machine; you put your money in, and the soda drops out; we put in our prayer and expect God to produce the results we want. St. James admonishes us **"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly to spend on your passions"** (James 4:3). The CCC (#2736) questions, **"are we asking God for 'what is good for us?' Our Father knows what we need before we ask Him, but He awaits our petition because the dignity of His children lies in their freedom. We must pray, then, with His Spirit of freedom, to be able truly to know what He wants."**

At the bottom of all our prayers of petition must be God's will be done. When we trust in Him and accept that He does have a fatherly love for us, then our prayers will be pure and good and He will hear them and grant them through Jesus.

Jesus said, **"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."** This is true for a prayer group or a family praying the Holy Rosary, but most of all, when we gather for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Don't forget that in the Holy Mass, not only are you and I united as one Body around the altar, but in a mystical way, the whole Church on earth is with us, as well as the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and the

saints. Jesus is in the midst of us offering our prayers and praise and sacrifices to the Heavenly Father. The Holy Mass is the greatest prayer, the source and summit of our spiritual lives.