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“Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:23).

Today’s first reading from the Prophet Zechariah presents a vision of holiness following the exile in Babylon. A restored Israel will draw the attention of the nations for its outstanding virtue. Everyone will “take hold of every Jew by the sleeve” to learn about their intimacy with God.

Pope Francis has said that evangelization is not about convincing others with theological arguments, but it is a matter of attraction. People are drawn to goodness and joy. They want to know the secret of those who are capable of great love.

On this feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, we are given an example of someone who had this capacity to live a heroic life in an almost childlike way. Known as the “Little Flower,” Therese so trusted God that despite her short life (1873-1897) and enclosure in a Carmelite monastery in France, the universal church recognized her “little way” as a path to full sainthood. Paradoxically, because of her desire to offer herself in service, Therese was also designated the patroness of the missions. Holiness produces great hearts overflowing with love. This is the secret of all evangelization.

Pope Francis is devoted to St. Therese. It is no wonder he identified another great heart in the person of Sister Norma Pimental, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus serving at the border in Texas when thousands of refugees fleeing poverty and violence in Central America were seeking asylum in the United States. In a nationally televised 20/20 program with Pope Francis, he honored and thanked her for her work with immigrants.

Sister Norma's efforts to help thousands of families at the border by welcoming them with love and human dignity attracted international praise and heightened attention to the tragic situation of hundreds of children separated from their parents and held in overcrowded detention facilities as a policy decision intended to deter other asylum seekers. Images of children kept in cages drew outrage and hundreds of volunteers to the border, attracted by the sisters' efforts to care for immigrants waiting for processing in the US or in Mexico.

Today's Gospel from Luke shows another aspect of Jesus' way of offering his life to transform a broken world. As he and his disciples proceed to Jerusalem, where Jesus knows he will be rejected and crucified, James and John, known as the "sons of thunder" for their aggressiveness, want to call down fire on a Samaritan town that will not welcome them. Jesus rebukes them. Anger and violence are not the way of changing hearts. Only love can transform opponents.

Sr. Norma spoke of her efforts to work with border control agents, most of whom are parents themselves, to alleviate the suffering of immigrant families as they tried to apply the policies ordered by the current administration. She saw no benefit in alienating anyone facing the crisis with her, but great blessing in witnessing to the common purpose of restoring human dignity to a complex and tragic situation.

As we celebrate the life of St. Therese of Lisieux, we also rejoice that there are many among us who understand that love is the basis for genuine humanity and holiness. We strive to make this the face of welcome we offer to others, especially the most vulnerable, both as individuals and as a nation.

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