

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Pentecost Sunday; Sacrament of Confirmation

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Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

June 9, 2019

A Word of Welcome

First, let me say a warm word of welcome to all of you gathered here at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen from various parishes all around the Archdiocese of Baltimore to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. Welcome! And I hope you will see this wonderful Cathedral church not just as a large and imposing structure but as your spiritual home. I am delighted to have the honor of confirming you on this great and beautiful feast of Pentecost.

All of us here in the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen are a little bit like the people whom we met in today's first reading from the Act of the Apostles. As you recall, it described how the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' closest followers who had come together in prayer in a house somewhere in Jerusalem. Outside that house, in the city of Jerusalem, there were visitors from different places, and they were speaking many different languages: people from all around the Middle East and even as far away as Rome. . . . I don't know if there are any Medes or Elamites here in the Cathedral today, but you have come from parishes near and far. You speak various languages and you represent the wonderful diversity of cultures that makes up our family of faith here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The big difference, however, between you and those visitors of old to Jerusalem is this: Unlike them, you are not outside the house. No, you are very much inside the house, inside the household of the Church, that is to say, you are not only inside of this Cathedral Church, you are already members of the Church itself; you belong to the Catholic Church.

Now, it's my understanding that various circumstances brought you here today.

Some of you need to be confirmed before you are married in the Church. Others may have been unable to be confirmed in your parishes. Still others of you may have decided that you've just put this thing off too long, that it's high time to be confirmed, that is, to receive the fullness of the Spirit. Some of you are younger; others are well into your adult lives. And a few of you are even as old as I am! God bless you all for being here, together with your sponsors, spouses, parents, family, and friends. And even though we are different from one another in so many respects, we are completely united in what it is that has brought us here this afternoon.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

And what brings us here this afternoon is the same thing that brought the Apostles and the Virgin Mary to that house in Jerusalem which we read about in the first reading. Like them, we came here to pray, to listen to God's Word and to invoke the coming of the full force of the Holy Spirit into our lives. Oh, we might not see tongues of fire or feel the Cathedral shake, but just the same, the fullness of the Holy Spirit will come upon those of you who being confirmed, just as surely as Spirit came upon those first followers of Jesus so long ago.

Let me tell you why and how this will happen. First of all, all of you have been baptized already. When you were baptized, the Holy Spirit began to work in you, removing from your soul original sin, and if you were baptized when you were older, any sins you may have committed up to that point in your life. But the Holy Spirit did more than take away sin. When the water was poured over your head and the Holy Trinity was invoked, the Holy Spirit brought about in your soul a new birth, a new and spiritual life. You were "born again" by water and the Holy Spirit.

What did this new birth, this new life, consist in? With the obstacle of sin removed, you were united to our Savior, Jesus Christ. In fact, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus began to live in you, and you became members of a new family, a new household, the Church. This is how you and I were "born again" on the day of our Baptism.

Well, if all that is true, then what are we doing here today? The fact is that your Baptism is the foundation of your life in Christ but it is not the only word or the last word . . . more is needed. If we are going to be serious Christians and life-long

practicing Catholics, whose lives are centered on the true and living presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, then we need to have the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the depths of our hearts.

We can see this if take another look at what happened to Jesus' first followers. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostles were frightened that they would be persecuted, even killed, and try as they might, they often misunderstood what Jesus taught them. After they received the fullness of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they became bold and courageous witnesses to the Risen Lord. They were ready, willing, and able to lay down their lives for their faith. As we saw, they boldly proclaimed the Risen Lord as the Savior of the world, and in the power of the Spirit, those who heard them, understood this great truth.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, I will call down the fullness of the Holy Spirit upon those of you who are being confirmed. I will extend my hands over you and anoint you with sacred chrism or holy oil. By means of these prayers and outward signs, the Spirit will come upon you just as surely as he came down upon the Apostles in the Upper Room. The Spirit will come upon you to renew and strengthen his seven gifts, gifts that were first given you in your Baptism, namely: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and indeed, the gift of wonder and awe or fear of the Lord. And why is it important that these gifts be given to you fully & brought to life in you? It's important because these are powerful gifts that help us understand and accept Jesus' teaching; they enable us to model our lives on Jesus' example; to worship the Lord reverently; and to bear witness to Jesus by what we say and do. What's more, receiving the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit makes of us fully-initiated members of the Church, full members of the Church, the Body of Christ. That is to say: men and women who are strong and mature in the faith; men and women who participate in Sunday Mass and the Sacraments and who live your faith and your vocations with integrity and generosity, whether at home, at work or school, and in every relationship; men and women who have a heart for the poor and vulnerable, men and women who live in hope of eternal life and joy in heaven.

Conclusion

You know, it's a really mysterious thing. When Jesus was with his apostles physically, when he walked with them, taught them, ate with them, and prayed with them, they were close to him but there was a certain distance, a gap that couldn't be closed. We might feel that gap in our lives, especially when Jesus seems far removed from us, a distant figure of history with no relevance to the problems of daily life. But after the Risen Lord ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit upon them, the Apostles were closer to Jesus than they were when he walked the earth. The Risen Lord lived in them in a new and powerful way. Jesus spoke through them and acted through them. The light and love of Jesus shone through them onto a darkened world.

The point of being confirmed is that in the power of the Spirit, the "gap" between you and Jesus can be closed, such that the Risen Lord will live in you more completely, and if you allow him to do so, the Spirit will enable you, not only to speak and act like Christ, but also speak and act for Christ, to carry his Gospel into the world, wherever you go. May the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, fill your hearts as you are confirmed, so that you may say, all the days of your life, "It is now not I who live but Christ Jesus who lives in me!" May God bless you and keep you always in his love!