

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Confirmation at St. Louis, Clarksville - Session I

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Nov. 18, 2018

Thank you, Monsignor Luca and Ms. Palting! The first order of business for this confirmation class is to sit down and relax.

I'm happy to be with you today and to share with you the Sacrament of Confirmation. As I read, underlined, and made notes on the letters you sent me, I saw that you have prepared well for this important day in your life and I thank you for taking your Confirmation preparation so seriously.

In fact, your letters were so good that I'd like to share some highlights from them. In other words, you wrote my homily for me!

And after sharing highlights from your letters, I'll add a final point of my own.

If that seems o.k. to you, we'll get started.

Highlights from the Letters of the Confirmation Candidates

All your letters followed an organized pattern that makes it easy to talk about them.

First you told me something about yourselves - about your family, your school, your studies, sports, music, dance, your future hopes. Second, you wrote on your favorite and less favorite parts of Confirmation preparation. Third, you got to the heart of the matter - what Confirmation is and why it matters, who the Holy Spirit is, and how the Spirit will influence your life, now and in the future. Fourth, you spoke of how you will live your faith as followers of Jesus dedicated to his mission in the world.

In telling me about yourselves, I sensed a lot of excitement, joy, and generosity, as

you prepared to be confirmed.

But one thing also stood out – you’re pretty busy.

Being a junior in high school is a very busy and pivotal year. That was true even when *I* was a junior in high school, back in 1968 (I think that was the year when they invented the wheel).

Yes, you’ve juggled lots of responsibilities, including getting ready for Confirmation – not easy.

But I’d also say that’s a pretty good practice run for what life is like as an adult Christian.

Life only gets busier. Faith can get lost in the mad scramble. We have to be intentional. Confirmation has a lot to do with being an intentional Catholic Christian.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit we choose to make the Faith a real part of our lives no matter how busy we are and no matter how difficult it can sometimes be.

I loved your thoughts on the most and least favorite parts of Confirmation preparation.

Some of you enjoyed the classes – one of you wrote, “My favorite part was the lecture because a ton of questions were answered.”

Not everyone agreed! But I could tell that all of you took your classes seriously because many of you said you learned a lot about faith in your time of preparation.

Our faith is rich and deep and beautiful. We should study it throughout our lives!

Several of you thanked Monsignor Luca and his team for giving you an opportunity to discuss the abuse crisis that is going on in the Church. Naturally, you find this scandal extremely difficult to understand.

“How such a thing could have happened in the Church?”

Some of you wrote that this scandal made you even more determined to be a good person and a good Catholic so you can help heal the Church: "I want to make a difference" one of you wrote. Another chose the name of a saint who helped reform the Church way back when.

I am humbled by your courage; it increases my determination to make things better.

A lot of you spoke about developing your relationship with God in prayer. One of you defined prayer beautifully: "a personalized conversation with God."

More than one of you told me that you had regained your faith or returned to it and some of your letters wisely recognized how difficult it is to be a good Catholic Christian throughout one's whole life, with all its ups and downs, and unforeseen challenges.

So you are right to see Confirmation as a Sacrament that is more than a ceremony but a source of grace and strength to avoid drifting away from your faith as life goes by.

More than a few of you made a pledge to attend Mass every week and to go to Confession once a month - that's foundational! Thank you!

Many of you also wrote to me about your service projects. You recognized that helping others in need is fundamental to following Christ, even when it stretches us and takes us beyond our comfort zone.

For example, one of you helped, through your school, to raise a lot of money to assist those suffering from leukemia and lymphoma.

And many of you spoke about the joy you experienced in reaching out to people whose lives are very different from your own.

I don't think it's possible really to be happy without serving others in their need!

Asked how you'd explain the Sacrament of Confirmation to others, most of you described the essentials of the Sacrament in such a thorough fashion that it did my old heart a lot of good.

You told me that this Sacrament completes your Baptism, makes you a fully initiated member of the Church, and deepens in you the gifts of the Holy Spirit that link you more firmly to Christ and enable you to live like Christ, as a fully active member of the Church.

Almost all of you also spoke about taking responsibility for your faith. One of you said that Confirmation is not “a coming of age ceremony,” but “a rebirth in Christ, a reaffirmation of a young adult’s baptism.”

Confirmation is about “making one’s faith one’s own” or again, Confirmation is about “embracing the Christian life” – giving oneself to the Lord!

I couldn’t have said it better! Some of you have a future in theology!

Your letters also talked about who the Holy Spirit is – and you were asked for one word to describe what it means to receive the Spirit. Some great descriptors were contained in your letters: “Lord and Giver Life” – as we say in the Creed, the one who heals us!

Some spoke of the Spirit as a navigator, a coach, a guide through life. Others spoke of the powerful but unseen presence of the Spirit.

You described the Spirit as affectionate, trustworthy, all-encompassing and comforting.

No wrong answers here. Anyone who lives in the Spirit will agree with you!

And finally, you see how your being confirmed is connected to the Church’s mission. You receive the fullness of the Spirit not just for your own sake but for mission. We followers of Jesus sent on mission in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to our faith and to help others discover the faith we’ve been given.

One of you described this as “leadership in Christ!”

Another said that a missionary disciple bears witness to the faith more by deeds than words.

Still others saw serving others in need as a way of bearing witness to our faith.

As you one of wrote, "I should be proud of my faith and try to spread my passion for my religion wherever life takes me!" Wow!

Concluding Thoughts

Let me conclude with a brief reflection of my own.

As you noticed, today's readings are about the end of time and they are sobering. You might wonder if such scary readings are the best choice for a nice day like today.

But really, they're o.k. They're telling us something important. Let me explain.

Many of you play sports that are divided up into quarters. As you get into the 4th quarter the chances to win are fewer; time is running out.

You might throw a Hail Mary pass in the final minute of a football game or you might shoot a basketball mid-court just as the buzzer sounds - at the last minute you might get lucky and win the game.

But most games are won because of hard work, teamwork, discipline and skill that are in evidence early on in the contest.

In life, we don't know for sure what quarter we're in, though I'm pretty sure I'm in the 4th quarter and you're still in the 1st.

Confirmation puts you in touch permanently with the Holy Spirit - who deepens your relationship with Christ and his Church, who daily helps you develop the virtues, teamwork, and generosity necessary to fight the good fight, to run the race, and to finish the course brilliantly.

So, whether you're in the 1st quarter of life or the 4th or somewhere in-between, stay close to the Lord who loves you in the Holy Spirit and who enables you to be an active and loving member of his Church.

May the God bless you and keep you in his love!