

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

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Nov. 18, 2018

Introduction

Thank you, Msgr. 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, the letters you wrote to me were so good that I'd to share some highlights from them with everyone. In other words, you wrote my homily for me!

And after sharing highlights from your letters, I'd like to add one final point. If that seems okay 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 plan to 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 they invented the wheel.)

Yes, you juggle lots of responsibilities, including getting ready for Confirmation. But, you know, that’s a pretty good practice run for what life is like as an adult Christian.

Life only gets busier. Faith gets 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 life can sometimes be.

I loved your thoughts on the most and least favorite parts of Confirmation preparation. One of you visited the Vatican and saw the Pope – that’s pretty spectacular!

Several of you described the whole process as a lot of fun (not unanimous) and said you enjoyed getting to know the members of your confirmation class, e.g.: “Even though people in my Confirmation class may play different sports or go to different schools, they all want to further their Christian faith and strengthen their relationship with God.”

Some of you enjoyed the classes – perhaps not everyone, though.

But I could tell that all of you took your classes seriously because you told me you learned a lot about the faith because of them.

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?”

And some of you said you wanted 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.

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

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

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

Here’s a quote that really stood out for me: “Most people think that being confirmed is graduating from being Catholic, but it is the exact opposite; it helps you deepen your faith and become an adult in the church.”

More than a few of you made a pledge to attend Mass every Sunday and to go to Confession once a month – that’s foundational! Thank you!

Many of you also wrote to me about your service projects, for example Habitat for Humanity Projects or working as a counselor at a great camp for inner city kids from Baltimore. You recognized that helping others in need is fundamental to following Christ, even when it stretches us and takes us beyond our comfort zone.

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 a way that 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 and to be like Christ, as an active member of the Church.

Almost all of you spoke about taking responsibility for your faith. One of you said that Confirmation is not “a coming of age ceremony” ... but a way to “humbly accept the gifts of the Holy Spirit” which you then listed: “Wisdom, wonder and awe, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, and courage.”

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:

The best one was “underrated!” That’s true. Lots of people never think of the Spirit!

Some spoke of the Spirit as a guide and as a friend who walks with us through life. Others spoke of the powerful, unseen and loving presence of the Spirit.

You described the Spirit as affectionate, trustworthy, and comforting. No wrong answers here. Anyone who lives in the Spirit will agree with you!

And finally, you see how receiving Confirmation is connected to mission. You receive the fullness of the Spirit not just for your own sake but for mission.

As followers of Jesus we are 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.

“To me,” one of you wrote, “being a missionary disciple means to follow in Jesus’ footsteps by partaking in acts of kindness and compassion. Jesus always performed good deeds and I aspire to follow him as my role model.”

Or again one of you wrote, “I would like to be confirmed to state publicly how important my faith is to me. It’s a journey I plan to embrace for the rest of my life.”

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 okay. 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 - but most games are won because of hard work, teamwork, discipline, and skill that are there from start, early on in the game.

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 helps you helps you develop the virtues, teamwork, and generosity necessary to fight the good fight, to run the race, and to finish the course brilliantly.

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 who enables you to be an active and loving member of his Church.

May God bless you and keep you in his love!