

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Group Confirmations

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Group Confirmations

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

October 8, 2017

First, let me say how happy I am to see all of you today and to share with you the wonderful sacrament of Confirmation. You come from various parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore but this impressive Cathedral of Mary Our Queen is also your parish – After all, the Cathedral is the principal church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and that means it is our common spiritual home. So I hope you will visit the Cathedral often and worship here frequently.

I know that some of you are older or younger than others and that you are at various stages in the journey of coming to know the Lord and in learning how to follow him in the life of the Church. Some of you are the regular age for confirmation –either in the upper grades of elementary school or in high school. Others of you are a bit further along in life – but none of you is as old as I am! And whatever your precise situation, we all have this in common: we all need the Holy Spirit in our lives if we'd be real followers of Jesus and active members of the Church he established for us and for our salvation.

In fact, in today's readings the Lord has something to say to us about being followers of Christ and good members of the Church. The reading from Isaiah and the passage from Matthew's Gospel suggest that we should think about the Church as a vineyard. If you've ever been to a vineyard where grapes are grown for making wine then you know it's a pretty impressive operation. It helps when the owner is involved and interested. And to get good grapes for making good wine a lot of things have to go right. You need just the right soil and climate. Those who tend the vines need to have both skill and dedication. And the harvest of grapes is carefully scrutinized to see if they will end up making wine that is good, bad, or indifferent.

In the Gospel Jesus compares the Church to a vineyard. Its owner and grower is no mere human being but God himself. And just as an ordinary owner would plant the best vineyard he could, so God gave to the Church everything we need to become the good, virtuous, and holy people God intends us to be. That's why God gave us Scripture, Church teaching, the Mass and Sacraments, and so much, much more. By reading Scripture, studying the faith, coming to Mass each Sunday, going to confession regularly, praying at home, striving for virtue... in all these ways we create the right climate to grow in God's love and we cultivate our minds and hearts, just as the soil in which grapevines grow needs to be cultivated. And the more we cultivate our minds and hearts, the more closely attached we are to Jesus... like the vine and the branches.

As baptized Catholics, we are part of the Lord's vineyard, that is, the Church. In the Sacrament of Confirmation, you receive the strength of the Holy Spirit so that you can live your baptismal calling to be a follower of Christ and a member of his Church all the days of your life. So today, you might say, you are making a covenant, an agreement with God the Father, the "owner" of the vineyard that is the Church. By being confirmed you are saying, "Yes, I believe in you, my God. Give me your Holy Spirit, so that I might belong to you and never be separated from you, from your Son, or from your Church; that I might bear witness to you by my words and deeds, on good days and bad days."

And God the Father, for his part, responds by sending you the Holy Spirit so that you can be uniquely wonderful images of his Son Jesus and live in the Church and in the world as his witnesses. And when the Church prays over you and anoints you with Holy Chrism, the Holy Spirit brings to life in your souls seven wonderful gifts that will help you follow Jesus as members of his Church your whole life long. These are: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, fortitude, knowledge, reverence, and wonder and awe, or as it is sometimes called, 'the fear of the Lord.' These seven gifts are given to you today, permanently. It's up to you whether you will use them to cultivate your minds and hearts and so produce a wonderful harvest... or whether you will put these tools away and so run the risk of producing a bad harvest.

And speaking of the harvest, what is it, anyway? What's God want out of us? What kind of a harvest does God expect of us? St. Paul gives us an answer in our second

reading when he tells us to think about 'whatever is honorable, just, pure, beautiful, gracious, excellent, and praiseworthy.' In other words, we are called to be different and live differently than much of what we see all around us in our culture today. Instead of producing wild grapes, we are called to produce good grapes.

Or, to understand even more the kind of harvest God expects from our lives, we might turn to another passage in St. Paul, this one in Galatians, where he outlines the fruits the Holy Spirit... in other words, the expected outcomes in a person who has been confirmed. What qualities should be evident in your life? St. Paul lists nine such qualities: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (There should be an app for our iPhones so that we could check up ourselves every day to see if we are growing in those qualities or not.)

It's important that we do so... for at the end of our lives and at the end of time, we will all want to be a part of the eternal harvest in God's love. As the French novelist Léon Bloy wrote, "There is only one tragedy in the end, not to have been a saint!"

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!