

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Pentecost Sunday 2018; Archdiocesan Confirmation

Pentecost Sunday

Archdiocesan Confirmation

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

May 20, 2018

It's the great feast of Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles and the Virgin Mary and imparted to them his seven gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, as well as wonder and awe. After the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles truly understood who Jesus is; they were able to experience his love as never before; and they were emboldened to go out and bear witness to Him. On the very day of Pentecost, the Apostles brought some 5,000 people into the Church. This is how the Church's mission of preaching the Gospel and winning souls for Christ began and it continues to this very day, some 2,000 years later.

Dear candidates, this is the perfect day for you to be confirmed. You are to receive the fullness of the same Holy Spirit and the very same gifts of the Holy Spirit that changed everything in the lives of the Apostles. I hope you will not see this merely as a step you have to take in order to get married or to finish off your religious formation, a sort of graduation from the faith. Quite the opposite! For you as for the apostles it should be a new beginning in your life of faith. And I'm here to offer you a four part plan, right out of today's Scripture readings, for making a new beginning in your life of faith. You should be happy this plan has four parts. When I get to

number three, you'll know there's only one more to go! So here goes!

The first part of the plan is that we need to repent of our sins. What was the first word Jesus ever spoke publicly? It was "repent". And what do we find Jesus doing in this afternoon's Gospel? He is breathing on the disciples, that is, he is giving them the Holy Spirit so that they will share in his power to forgive sins: "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23).

In preparation for your Confirmation, I hope that all of you received the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. In this sacrament our sins, be they big or small, are forgiven by the power of the Holy Spirit who connects us to Jesus' saving love. When the priest says, in the power of the Holy Spirit, "I absolve you from your sins" - your sins are truly forgiven and you are freed from the burden of all those things that spoil your relationship with God and with those around you. It is a sacrament you should not just receive once or twice but frequently because we are always in need of the Lord's forgiveness. Being free of sin is the first condition, the threshold condition, for allowing the Holy Spirit to work in your lives. Jesus' first word to us is "repent" so the first part of the plan is to receive the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation frequently.

Part two of the plan is taken from Jesus' second word to us: "believe". When we are stuck in our sins we have a difficult time believing. But once we've experienced God's forgiving love it becomes easier. Yet believing is not something you and I can do on our own. St. Paul tells us in our second reading, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). To believe does not mean agree to a lot of complicated and improbable ideas. No, believing is all about encountering Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Believing is all about letting the Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we can believe in love - so that we truly believe that God loves us, that he loves us infinitely, that he sent us His Son Jesus to save us, that he walks

with us, cares about us, and leads us to eternal salvation. Once we've encountered Jesus and experienced his love, then what the Lord teaches us through the Church makes sense. Because the Lord and the Church are proposing for us a way of life and a way of love that makes us ready for heaven, that make us love others the way God loves us, with a love that is pure, generous, and self-giving.

Part three is being formed in the Gospel. Let me say a word to those of you getting married soon. You know it's one thing to meet your future spouse and to fall in love and quite another really to know your future spouse. That's going to take time, patience, and a lot of listening. It's the same with the Lord Jesus. It's one thing to fall in love with Jesus, another thing really to know him and really to make our own what Jesus teaches us in and through his Church. Now, we might say, "I don't understand some things the Church teaches, and some of it seems pretty far removed from my daily experience" - that might be just how you feel right now.

Well, let's go back to our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Before the Holy Spirit came upon them, they often misunderstood what Jesus was trying to teach them. Sometimes they missed the point of his parables. At other times, they thought of Jesus more as a political leader than a Savior. When Jesus spoke of laying down his life and rising, they were bewildered. Even after the Resurrection, some of them entertained doubts. But when the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and their companions, the Spirit reminded them of all that Jesus taught them. They not only understood what he taught, it transformed their lives. So part three of the plan is to ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and accept all that the heart of Jesus is speaking to your heart through the Church.

Now, let's recap so we can move ahead. Part one is repent; part two is believe; part three is to pray and reflect. Now you should be happy because we made it to part four: Jesus sends us forth! After the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, they didn't stay in the Upper Room. They didn't say, "Let's form a study club" or "Let's issue a

newsletter”. No, they went right out the door and started bearing witness to the Gospel. The Holy Spirit gave them wisdom, the understanding, the knowledge, & judgment and above all courage so that they could go out and bear witness to Jesus bringing to one and all reverence for the name of God and a joyful sense of wonder and awe. Well, that’s part four of the plan. You’re not going to stay in this Cathedral forever. Tonight you’ll be at home, tomorrow at work or school, and next week the decision will be yours whether or not to come to Mass and the week after whether or not to go to confession. Every day the decision will be yours whether to share your faith with others, especially your children and your grandchildren, your co-workers, and friends, and to live in a way that people see you have repented, that you believe, that you’ve taken time to pray and reflect on your faith, and that you are on a mission.

That’s the four part plan - and it can only happen in the power of the Holy Spirit. Moments from now, by the prayer of the Church, the laying on of hands, and the anointing with the sacred chrism, you will receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. May this be a new beginning in your life of faith - a springtime of repentance, faith, prayer, and zeal for Gospel!

God bless you and keep you always in His love!