

Homily for Group Confirmation on the IV Sunday of Lent, Year C

Msgr. Jarboe, my brother priests [and deacons] and dear friends in Christ,

I. Introduction: Laetare Sunday - Reasons for Rejoicing and Prayer

I'd like to welcome all of you here to the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, particularly those of you who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in just a few moments.

You are being confirmed on the 4th Sunday of Lent known as "Laetare Sunday"... The word "Laetare" means "to rejoice" - You will notice that rose-colored vestments are worn today to indicate the special hope and joy all of us share on this particular Sunday.

Today we have two special reasons to rejoice: First, with the whole Church we rejoice in the midst of Lent because Easter is near; and Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus' triumph over sin and death is the truth upon which our entire faith is built. And second we rejoice because of your Confirmation, one of the most important events of your life. In receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit you are joined more closely to Christ and to the Church. As you know, joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit - joy in your relationship with Christ and with His Church.

As the Holy Spirit whose fullness you receive in Confirmation brings you closer to Christ and to His Church, I invite you to join me this week in praying intensely for the College of Cardinals. On Tuesday the Cardinal-electors will enter the Conclave to choose the new Pope. Let us pray that the Cardinals will be guided by the Holy Spirit in the enormously important task that awaits them in the coming days. And we hope and pray that, when Easter comes, we will have a new Holy Father, a new Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ, to lead us in bearing witness to the joy of Christ's Resurrection... which, to repeat, is the center and bedrock of our faith.

II. The Prodigal Son

Now let's turn to the Gospel we just heard, the Gospel of the Prodigal Son, to see

how this Gospel helps us understand the Sacrament of Confirmation which many of you are receiving this afternoon. Let's begin with the word, "prodigal" – probably not a word you use every day. It means "wasteful" – someone who recklessly uses up what he or she has been given.

In the Gospel we just heard, Jesus paints a vivid picture of the Prodigal Son, He grew up in a wealthy and well-managed household and farm. His father and his elder brother gave him a good example and it's a safe bet that he enjoyed three square meals a day. His family showed him the path to healthy living, but the younger son decided that this sort of life wasn't for him. He decided it was time to think of himself, to have fun, to enjoy life, so off he went to a life of "dissolute living", as the Gospel politely puts it.

It didn't turn out the way he had expected. The younger son found that the more he lived it up, the emptier he became. Away from home, he had his flings, but he failed to find love. The freedom he sought and gained from a well ordered routine of his father's house was replaced by demeaning labor he found to be meaningless. Whereas once he had three squares a day, now he wanted the fodder he fed the pigs. Hungry, miserable, and lonely, he remembered that even his father's servants were better off than he was, and decided that he would return home and ask for forgiveness.

As his father caught sight of him on the road and as he caught sight of his father, perhaps the younger son realized what he was truly hungry for, what would truly satisfy and nourish his hungry soul . . . was it not the love of his father? his mercy? his forgiveness? his warm embrace? *Ultimately it is love that nourishes the human spirit*, love that is both divine and human, love that is both compassionate and ennobling. This is what the Father lavished upon the younger son and this is what the Father also pleaded with the older son to rediscover. The ring, the robe, the shoes, the fatted calf, the pleadings of a loving father – these are all signposts of how much our Father loves us even when we have been looking to fill our inner self with things that starve us spiritually, that promise to fill us but leave us feeling empty, lonely, miserable.

III. Reconciliation and Confirmation

I've been a priest nearly 36 years and, in the course of those years, I have met many people who wanted to return to the Lord. The one thing all of them have in common is that sin has made them unhappy. It left them feeling empty inside, alone, isolated, seemingly unloved. Sin is like certain foods that look good but which we really shouldn't eat ... Those kinds of food promise to satisfy our hunger but really leave us hungrier than before and harm our bodies in the process. So too, sin promises to make us happy, to make us healthy, to make us complete and then robs us of our joy, our meaning, and sometimes even our health. So often people return to the Lord because in God's grace they recognize their misery, they recognize the devastation sin has wrought in their lives.

In preparation for your Confirmation, I trust that all of you have made a good, thorough, unburdening confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If sin makes us miserable, the forgiveness we receive in this sacrament brings us the joy, peace, and freedom of God's forgiveness. It takes away from our lives what was weighing us down. It is our way of experiencing our Heavenly Father's love who is waiting so patiently to return to him, to ask for forgiveness of our sins. In exchange for our sins, he gives us his love and in giving us his love he gives us back the dignity and freedom of which sin robs us.

And why was it important for you to receive the Sacrament of Penance in preparation your Confirmation this afternoon? And why is important for you to get in the habit of going to confession regularly? The reason is this - In being emptied of sin, there is more room in your hearts for the good gifts which God the Father offers through Jesus Christ in this Sacrament of Confirmation. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, knowledge, courage, reverence, coupled with wonder and awe. By the prayer of the Church, the imposition of my hands, and the anointing, these spiritual gifts will be given to you permanently so that you may truly know Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit love Christ and follow him more closely in the life of the Church. You are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide & inspire you to attend Mass weekly, to hear God's Word, share in Christ's sacrifice of love, & receive His Body & Blood. Through these gifts you are assisted in finding and living your vocation and in bringing the truth and love of the Gospel to your homes, schools, & workplaces.

IV. Espanol

Queridos amigos, en el Evangelio de hoy, encontramos la famosa y emocionante parábola del Hijo Pródigo. Muchos santos y comentaristas a través de los siglos han sugerido que a esta parábola se le podría llamar también la parábola del Padre Misericordioso. Podemos vernos a nosotros mismos en esta parábola. Todos nosotros hemos sido hijas e hijos pródigos de Dios, y Dios ha sido siempre, misericordioso con nosotros.

Durante este tiempo de Cuaresma, estamos invitados de nuevo a recibir y a experimentar el don divino de la misericordia y el perdón, especialmente en el Sacramento de la Reconciliación. En particular en este día, en el que ustedes serán fortalecidos con el Don del Espíritu Santo en el Sacramento de la Confirmación, y que se les dará la fuerza interior para vivir más profundamente la vida de gracia, y para profundizar su amistad con Jesucristo. ¡Quiero que sepan que están en mis oraciones y que tienen mi apoyo cuando comienzan en esta jornada de fe!

V. Conclusion

Dear friends, as we approach Holy Week and Easter, and the Church sets before us this opportunity to experience the mercy of our Father in Heaven, just as the Prodigal Son did, my prayer for all of us here today, particularly for those of you about to be confirmed, is that you will know the love and mercy of our Father in Heaven more deeply with each passing year, so that we might be effective, authentic witnesses to that love and bring that love to our brothers and sisters.

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