

Pentecost, Adult Confirmation at Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

The Spirit Given Sacramentally

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we heard that, "when the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."

I am happy to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday because this same Holy Spirit will be given to you who are being confirmed. In a moment, I will ask our candidates for Confirmation: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who came upon the Apostles at Pentecost, and today is given to you sacramentally in Confirmation?" When you say, "I do", what are you agreeing to? It is this:

The Holy Spirit changed the Apostles from being timid and confused followers of Jesus into bold, fearless witnesses of the Gospel. The same Spirit, the 3rd Person of the Blessed Trinity, strengthened them in bringing the Good News to the whole world. Now, that same Holy Spirit is given you sacramentally, that is to say, by the prayer of the Church, by the laying on of my hands, and by anointing with holy oil, known as Chrism. Even though no tongues of fire appear and the Cathedral will not shake in the wind, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give to you seven spiritual gifts: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, right judgment, courage, reverence, wonder and awe.

If you receive these gifts with an open mind and heart and allow them to become a part of your life, they will really help you to be true followers of Jesus in your daily life and active members of the Church who worship God in spirit and truth and join with the Church in serving the poor and the needy. To use Pope Francis phrase, these gifts will help you be “full time Christians, not part-time Christians.”

The Sacrament of “Goodbye”

Let me tell you something that concerns me as a pastor of souls. Every year I administer the Confirmation to many people and Bishop Madden, who joins me for this celebration, confirms even more people than I do. It’s always a very joyful celebration but sometimes after it is over we don’t see the people we confirm anymore. Often they don’t go to church anymore. They don’t participate in the Church’s ministries to serve the poor. And some, sadly, live as if God doesn’t really matter all that much. In fact, Pope Francis has the same concerns as Bishop Madden and I. Recently he called Confirmation, “the Sacrament of Goodbye”! He really knows how to turn a phrase!

It would be as if the Apostles said to one another after the coming of the Holy Spirit - “That was beautiful! But let’s keep it to ourselves. We’ll have a little party followed by a nice dinner. And then we can all go our separate ways. No need for us to go the synagogue to preach or to gather for the Eucharist even though the Lord told us to do this in his memory. We might have a reunion at Christmas and maybe at Easter to talk about the olden days.” If the Apostles had done this, what then would have happened? Most of the Apostles would then have returned to commercial fishing. St. Luke the Evangelist would have returned to his medical practice and St. Matthew would have started collecting taxes again. And you and I would have no clue about Jesus. In fact, we might not even know who he was.

The Sacrament of “Hello”

Now when this celebration of Confirmation is over, what’s next? Some of you are

still in high school, others in college or graduate school. Some of you will be getting married and need to be confirmed and still others weren't confirmed years ago at the regular time. Whatever has brought you here this afternoon, I'm delighted. This is *your* Pentecost, *your* moment to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is a one-time event with life-time implications.

But what will happen? Will we go our separate ways, have a party and a dinner, and then just go back to business as usual? Will we return to church only at Christmas and Easter and, for the most part, go about our daily lives with God at the margins? Or do we look at Confirmation as getting a diploma from a school to which we never have to return again, except for alumni events? And if we do this, will we really know the Lord at the end of our lives when we meet him face to face at the entrance to eternity? Or will those who come after us have any clue who Jesus is and how much he loves us?

The Sacrament of Confirmation is not meant to be the Sacrament of Goodbye but rather a Sacrament of "Hello" - it is one of the Sacraments of Initiation. It is meant to help us put our entire Christian life on only sound footing there is: a personal relationship with Christ and his Church, made possible by the Holy Spirit. It is meant to help us, no matter how old or young we are, to deepen our commitment to the Lord and to his People by living lives of faith, worship, and service, by being the Lord's followers and witnesses in the world. Confirmation, in fact, brings to completion your Baptism through which you began to share in the Risen Life of the Savior. It strengthens you, so that no matter what you may face in life, you will be remain strong as a follower of Christ & a member of His Body, the Church.

By praying each day, coming to Mass each Sunday to receive the Lord in the Eucharist, and by having our sins forgiven in Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, the Holy Spirit remains in our hearts and in fact grows stronger. Through the Holy Spirit we are connected in love to Jesus and the Church. We learn

to make decisions on the basis of what is right, true, and good. We learn to treat one another with love and generosity. We learn to live our vocations in life faithfully and to serve the poor. In a word, we show we are followers of Jesus because the fruits of the Holy Spirit, enumerated for us in today's second reading are evident in our lives: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control", these qualities describe Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit they can describe who we are and how we live.

May prayer is that Confirmation really will be for you the Sacrament of Hello - not just for today or tomorrow but for the rest of your lives until you greet the Lord in eternity filled with fruits of the Holy Spirit and hear him say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter the joy of your Lord!" May God bless you and keep you in His love!