

Thoughts from the Second Floor Front  
The IV Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 3, 2019

Confirmation Part II

While the gifts of the Holy Spirit the confirmand receives are the same (wisdom, counsel, knowledge, understanding, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord – AKA Awe in the presence of the Lord) the manner in which the liturgy for Confirmation has been celebrated has varied throughout the history of the Church. Initially joined to the other two Sacraments of Initiation, then over time separated, Confirmation has once again re-emerged as a sealing of what began at Baptism and a strengthening for the life of discipleship and the challenges inherent in living the Gospel message.

What does Confirmation do for us? Think back to the early pages of the Acts of the Apostles. Before His Ascension, Jesus gathered His followers together and told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Spirit. *...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”(Acts 1:8) The very first definition of the Holy Spirit is power. With the arrival of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles on the first Pentecost, the original band of followers were empowered. Prior to the Holy Spirit's arrival, what were the Apostles and other disciples doing? They were hiding in fear. Still locked in the Upper Room, even after witnessing the Risen Christ, they obviously did not grasp the entirety of what had happened. When the Spirit of God rushed on them *like a strong driving wind*, filling the entire house in which they were hiding, what did they do? How did they respond? They went out into the streets and started to preach, to proclaim the Good News – Christ has died, Christ is Risen, and Christ will come again. That is the original Kerygma the 12 preached. That is the message that the Apostles, once empowered and emboldened, preached to the people of Jerusalem that day. *Resurrexit sicut dixit!* He has risen as He said!

With the power of the Holy Spirit within three hundred years the entire known world was Christian. That is the kind of power at hand. Who could do that? Is it possible that a collection of mostly poor fisherman and a former tax collector go out and transform the face of the earth? These initial followers, aside from Matthew and John, could quite possibly be limited in their literacy. They were certainly without wealth or means or influence. What made it possible for them to take on the task of transforming the world into the Kingdom that Jesus came to establish? On a human level it makes no sense and even sounds to be impossible. But remember the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary: *for nothing will be impossible for God.*(Luke 1: 37)

With the power of the Holy Spirit we too can accomplish great things. Our greatness will not be in the arenas that the world, our contemporary society, recognizes as great. Our salvation is never so near as in the ordinary and mundane aspects of our lives. In those circumstances we are called to shine. I know a man, a convert to the Catholic Faith, who went through the program called the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). He was a baptized Christian, a husband and a father of several children. He was received into the Church at the Easter Vigil one year but for some reason he was never Confirmed. When I became his pastor, we spoke about that and I made the necessary arrangements to Confirm him in the Easter Season. He told me that he wished to take the name Joseph for Confirmation, the name of Jesus' own foster father. The reason that he wanted Joseph was because he wanted to be the best husband and father to his wife and children that he could be. That goal is an ongoing process, as is our life of faith.

In the processes of our life we will meet with difficulties. The phenomenon of the helicopter parent has been superseded and replaced with something called the snowplow parent – the parent who wants to and works toward the elimination of any challenging situation the child may face. This preemptive strike against real or imagined opposition seems to be denying the child an opportunity to

grow; despite the challenges. In a previous liturgical celebration of Confirmation, the rubric actually directed the bishop to give the confirmand “a slight blow on the cheek.” This symbolic slap was a way of indicating the opposition the newly Confirmed will experience because of their willingness to live the faith.

We are called to be the best disciple that we can be; despite the opposition we may experience. Confirmation assists us in attaining that goal with those gifts that empower us to respond to the lived reality we call our day. In and throughout our day we can collaborate with Jesus and the Spirit to build the Kingdom of God in our world.

Faithfully,

Msgr. Diamond