

May 28, 2023 11:30 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Solemnity of Pentecost/Sacrament of Confirmation

On this picture-perfect “summer-like” day, we rejoice in the celebration of one of the three most important Feasts of the Church Year, and the only one not to have become commercialized in any way. We don’t find a “Happy Pentecost” section in the Hallmark Card store; we don’t see too many ads for “Pentecost” special sales at Meijer’s or Menard’s. Yet, Pentecost is a major Feast---a “Solemnity” in the Liturgical Calendar. It’s the 50th, and final, day of the Easter Season and the last day for the Paschal/Easter Candle to burn brightly during Mass.

We sometimes refer to Pentecost as “the Birthday of the Church” because we truly do celebrate the beginning of the Church’s mission, initiated by the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles in the Upper Room, as we heard in today’s First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles. So I wish you all a Happy Birthday/Happy Pentecost/Happy End of the Easter Season

But this year, Pentecost comes at another special time for us Americans---the Memorial Day weekend. So, I also wish everyone a very Happy Memorial Day, as we pray especially for all those fellow Americans who have given their lives in service to our Country.

Today, there is a third and very important “special event” we’re celebrating today at this Mass---and that is the Sacrament of Confirmation for these 37 young people from St. Augustine Cathedral and from St. Thomas More Parish. I welcome all of you, dear Candidates---your Pastors (Fr. Bob Creagan and Fr. Paul Redmond, along with Deacon Joe Schmidt and Deacon John Bodway), your Catechists/Teachers, and all your proud Family members. And in a very special way I want to welcome, and thank, your Sponsors.....

Pentecost is the day when all of us as baptized and confirmed Catholics need to remind ourselves what an integral and essential role the Holy Spirit plays within each of our spiritual lives. The Holy Spirit first came into our lives on the day of our Baptism. And today, for these 37 young people, as they have completed their Initiation into the Church, they receive this powerful Sacrament of Confirmation,

and shortly, will be “sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit” as I anoint your foreheads with the Sacred Chrism in the sign of the Cross.

Today’s Scripture Readings are powerful----but it might be helpful to make sure we understand their proper chronological sequence. Today’s Gospel actually took place on the first Easter Sunday....Then would have come the actual Pentecost event that we heard in our First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which took place 50 days later. And finally today’s Second Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, which would have been perhaps another 20-30 years later.

Let’s first think a bit more about today’s Gospel.....the Apostles have been behind locked doors since Thursday night when Jesus had been arrested----they all ran away, and found comfort hiding with one another back in the Upper Room where they had just had the Last Supper with Jesus. It was into that locked room that the Risen Jesus came---and His first words were: “Peace be with you!” Then He showed them His Hands and His side---His credentials---His “badge of courage” so to speak. But immediately what did He do? He gave them a Mission: “As the Father has sent Me, so I now send you.”

My dear brothers and sisters---especially my dear Confirmation Candidates---all of us who are Baptized AND Confirmed are given a Mission. Jesus says those same words to us today. But, like the Apostles, we might all be wondering----Who, ME??? What can I do? I can’t do what the Apostles did; I certainly can’t do what the Saints I’ve been studying about did! And God knows, I can’t do what Jesus did. Well, on our own, NO---we can’t. But what does Jesus say immediately following? “He breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit!’” And why did He breathe on them??? He breathed the Spirit of God that was within Him into them. On our own, we’re not up to the challenges of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus---of what it means to be a strong witness to the Faith. Jesus knows that----that’s why He gives us what we need. He never gives us a “mission” without giving us the “resources” to complete the mission. Our mission is to be His joyful disciples in the world; our Resources are “the Gifts of the Holy Spirit”.

I know the Confirmation Candidates have been studying about these Gifts of the Holy Spirit----I know that from the beautiful Letters that you’ve each written to me. I love reading your letters---I read each and every one. You know about the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit---- Wisdom, Understanding, Council, Fortitude/Courage, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord/Wonder and Awe. I

think most of you made reference to them in your Letters----*read from two of them.....*

So you know what the Gifts are. But what do they do???? Perhaps you also studied about the 5 Effects of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit??? (according to the CCC)

1. They root you more deeply in knowing that you are a beloved son, or daughter, of God;
2. They unite you more closely in your relationship with Jesus Himself;
3. They enable you to apply the Gifts in your daily circumstances;
4. They strengthen your bond with the Church---you are a full member of the Body of Christ;
5. And very importantly---they give you the Strength of the Holy Spirit to stand up for the Faith as true witnesses of Christ, and to live your Faith with conviction, and not to be ashamed of who you are and what you believe!

We definitely need the Holy Spirit to allow those “effects” to be lived out in our lives----all of us, not just these 37 Candidates, but each and every one of us.

So Jesus gives us the Mission, and He gives us the Resource. Then what??? Well, that’s up to us. For 40 days, Jesus remained with His Apostles----after prying them out from behind locked doors, and spent those 40 days giving them His final instructions. On the 40th Day, Jesus gave the Apostles, and the entire Church, what we call the “Great Commission”---*Go out into the whole world and make Disciples of all the nations, baptizing them and teaching them this Good News that God loves them, that Jesus has brought them salvation, and that the Holy Spirit empowers them to find their way to Heaven by following Jesus.*

But it was what happened on the 50th day---as we heard in today’s First Reading on the great Feast of Pentecost---that made all the difference. The Holy Spirit dramatically came upon them in a new way, and this time, they were open to receive that powerful Spirit with all His Gifts----and they began to take up that “Great Commission”, with most of them, paying the ultimate price of martyrdom, but in the process, spreading the Faith to the ends of the Earth.

That’s how we received the Gift of Faith---a Gift that is transmitted from one generation to the next, from parents to children, from priests to their people. The

question is: As with any gift, will we use it? Are we “ready” to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s Gifts?

And that’s where today’s Second Reading helps us. St. Paul reminds us that, in addition to the Seven Gifts, we are all given different gifts that we might have particular need for; and when we use those Gifts as a person of Faith, then they all work together for the “benefit” of the whole Body of Christ---the Church. All of us need to proclaim boldly that “Jesus is our Lord” in our own unique life circumstances. That means that no one, and no-thing else, can be the “lord” of our lives. That’s why St. Paul says that we can’t say “Jesus is Lord”, and really mean it, without the Power of the Holy Spirit.

I know the Confirmation Candidates have studied about the Works of Mercy, correct? The reason why we need to do that---the reason why “service projects” are a part of Confirmation preparation----is because Jesus’ ultimate command to ALL of us is: “To love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength; AND to love your neighbor as you love yourself”---as Jesus loves us! So we need to do that in BIG ways, like truly loving people that are not easy to love, to forgive others when it’s really hard, to go the extra mile and turn the other cheek. But we also need to love others in the small, normal, day-in, day-out ways of helping others JUST BECAUSE they have a need---what St. Therese, the “Little Flower” referred to as “the Little Way of Love”. There’s a great little saying: “See a need, fill the need”.

All of us have been given the “Great Commission”---and ALL of us have been given the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today would be a very good day for all of us to recommit ourselves to open our hearts and lives to the Holy Spirit’s Presence, to accept and use the Gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us live in the Father’s unconditional Love for us, and to allow those Gifts to bear the Spirit’s Fruits, to continue being faithful members of the Church as we give witness to our Faith in Christ by the ways we live, in our joys and sorrows, successes and failures, happiness and in our sorrows, following always the example of the Risen Jesus, and living in His Peace.

And that’s how we make that beautiful prayer of the Psalm Response come true: *“Lord, send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth”*.