

Homily

Pentacost

May 31, 2020

Who remembers their confirmation? I was in eighth grade. I truly tried to prepare myself for the Sacrament. I truly made a commitment to myself that I would become a better person; not sin anymore. I considered those things that I did that I should not do and those things I didn't do that I should. I was going to become a soldier for Christ.

Confirmation day came and I was resolved. Confirmation happened and I was a new person; I knew the Holy Spirit had entered me and was at work in me. And the day after Confirmation I realized I was the same person I was before. Yes, I received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and yes, I knew I was now a fully initiated member of the Body of Christ, but I still did those things I shouldn't and didn't do those things I should.

It has taken some time, but I realized over that long period of time that growth is a process. It doesn't happen quickly; and it requires effort, a lot of effort.

The Holy Spirit influences us, all of us, in different ways. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord affect us all but in unique and varied ways. And none of these gifts work without our permission, our effort.

Wisdom is often considered to come with age. In most cases this is true, but, wisdom is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense and insight. It starts with the decision to apply these assets. It is a choice.

Understanding is the sympathetic awareness of the world around us, especially the people in our lives. It is a choice.

Counsel corresponds to prudence, the discipline of oneself by the use of reason, caution and good judgement. It is a choice.

Fortitude is the firmness of mind that is required in both doing good and enduring evil. It is a choice.

Knowledge allows us, as far as is humanly possible, to see things from God's perspective. It allows us to perceive the greatness of God and his love for his creatures through creation. It is a choice.

Piety perfects the virtue of religion. Pope Francis said that piety is a recognition of "our belonging to God, our deep bond with him, a relationship that gives meaning to our whole life and keeps us resolute, in communion with him, even during the most difficult and troubled moments." It is a choice.

Fear of the Lord is like wonder or awe. With the gift of fear of the Lord, we are made aware of the glory and majesty of God. It is a choice.

A person with all these qualities, these gifts, sounds like they would be good; this is the kind of person we would want to be and have as a friend.

In John's Gospel today, we hear of Jesus breathing on the disciples and telling them to, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

We believe this is the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation when Jesus gave our priests the authority to forgive or bind. This is the saving power of salvation, from our fallen nature to the glory of God.

When we were confirmed, we received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We were given what we need to be good people.

When seminarians are ordained to the priesthood, they have received not only the same gifts in their confirmation but are also given the authority to forgive or bind sins. Good people helping good people.

We all struggle with what this world offers us, the good and the perceived good. But we are not of the world; we are meant for the Kingdom of God.

And we don't have to struggle alone. Yes, we must put forth the effort to become good. It is a choice. And yes, we will sometimes fail and fall. That is when we need to seek out a good person, a priest, to ask forgiveness. It is then that we pick ourselves up and start again.

When Adam took and ate the forbidden fruit, God began the process of Salvation. And throughout Salvation History, God has given us the means to come back to Him, including the gifts of the Holy Spirit and especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Make time, even now during these strange times, to seek out a priest. He wants to hear our confession and offer absolution. And we need to ask for and seek forgiveness, receive absolution and rejoice in the love and mercy of our triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a choice.