

Confirmation and the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

So, just to recap what happened in the first reading: we heard that Philip goes to the town of Samaria, preaches the word of God, and the Lord heals and delivers some people through him. Then he baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But then we hear that when Jerusalem hears that the people accepted the word of God, they make the decision that they have to send Peter and John up to Samaria to lay their hands on the Samaritans so that they may receive the Holy Spirit.

What's going on here?

What is going on here is that the Philip who is named is not the Apostle Philip. The Philip who is named is Philip the deacon, who we heard last week was elected, because a deacon does not have the ability to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation. And so the apostolic line of Peter and John—or it could have been Philip the Apostle; it doesn't really matter—the apostolic line of the apostles had to be sent to lay hands so that these baptized ones could receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

That's what's happening here. And that is, in a nutshell, the Catholic theology of the Sacrament of Confirmation and why it has to be a bishop, or in some cases a priest—like at the Easter Vigil when the priest is delegated, because obviously the bishop can't receive everyone into the Church. That would be an extremely, extremely long Easter Vigil for our diocese.

Now, this is good timing because we are two weeks from Pentecost, and every Pentecost we are meant to renew our Baptism, yes, but especially our Confirmation.

Baptism is a sacrament that is about, really, in a sense, Father, Son, and Spirit, the principal grace being our adoption as a beloved child of the Father. Now, the Holy Spirit is given in Baptism, including the seven gifts: wisdom, knowledge, understanding, fortitude, right judgment, piety, and fear of the Lord. They are given in Baptism, but the fullness of those gifts is not fully released until the completion of the baptismal grace in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

That's what's happening in our first reading today.

Now, you might be saying, "So what?" The "so what" of this is that every Pentecost we are meant to prepare ourselves for a deeper outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our community and upon our individual lives.

The Archbishop will be here on Thursday to confirm our forty-plus youth and about ten adults this coming week. In thinking about Confirmation and preparation, what it got me

thinking about primarily is something within our theology as Catholics that we call—this is going to be a big word, and I'll explain what it means—*reviviscentia sacramentorum*.

Who can translate that for me? Just kidding. I'm not going to ask you to do that.

The Reviviscence of the Sacraments

Reviviscentia sacramentorum comes from a concept going all the way back to St. Augustine, but it is really defined by St. Thomas Aquinas and others: that the sacraments that are given us, the permanent sacraments—which includes especially Confirmation—give a sacramental grace that is complete.

So, in Confirmation, you actually received a complete gift and grace equivalent to what the apostles received on the day of Pentecost. That might surprise you.

The reason the apostolic lineage is connected to the Sacrament of Confirmation is that you are actually given in your Confirmation, in potential, the entire Pentecostal grace that was given to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

Wow.

In our theology, though, the reason that full Pentecostal grace unfolding is not equally evident in every Christian is connected to that *reviviscentia sacramentorum*. In a sense, the entire sacramental grace, in most cases, gets blocked to some degree within us.

Why? Because our disposition has to be there. We have to sanctify Christ as the Lord of our hearts completely for that sacramental grace to fully unfurl.

And so, as we approach Confirmation, or as we approach Pentecost, the question isn't so much, "What extra graces do I need?" I believe the question is, "What sacramental graces have I potentially blocked that the Lord is asking me to sanctify more clearly, so that the grace already given becomes more fully alive?"

An analogy in Baptism: water is often used as an image for the Holy Spirit, appropriately. Think about it. In Baptism, an irrigation channel has been dug that goes right into your heart. In Confirmation, that irrigation channel gets deepened significantly, and it's aiming right at your heart. But because we get in the way, there might be a block in the channel. Not everything is getting through, or maybe very little is getting through.

I can speak for myself. When I was confirmed, I think I've shared with you before, my disposition was not ready for that sacrament. And so, although I received the fullness of the Pentecostal grace given the apostles on that day when I was confirmed, when I was sixteen, it didn't actually start working so much. It didn't become active and alive in my life until I sanctified Christ as the Lord of my heart more fully.

So dear friends in Christ, as we prepare, please pray for our young ones and older ones receiving the sacrament on Thursday, that their hearts will be ready to receive that intense grace.

But also, as we prepare for Pentecost, what I'm asking us to do is not to ask for extra things from the Holy Spirit—though He can give those that don't belong naturally to that grace, but are other things the Lord has given—but that we simply reflect upon sanctifying Christ as Lord of our hearts, so that the sacramental grace given in Confirmation can become more fully alive.

Sanctify Christ as Lord of the Heart

If you desire that, for your sacramental grace to become more fully alive, repeat this prayer after me. It is really about sanctifying Christ as the Lord of our heart, because it really starts there. It is Christ who heals us. It is Christ who removes the barriers. And it is He who has bought us our salvation.

Lord Jesus, come into my heart.
I desire that You be the Lord of my life.
Make my heart into a manger
where You may lay Your head.

Come and touch every fear,
every doubt,
every anxiety,
that keeps me far from You.

Lord Jesus, I know and believe
that You died on the cross for my sins.

I believe in Your forgiveness,
and I desire that You help me refrain from any temptations
that would keep me separated
from Your everlasting love.

Come, Lord Jesus.
Come into my heart,
for You are welcome here.

Amen.