

Here is the mission

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 22, 2010 The Peace Pulpit

This is the homily for the Confirmation class at St. Constance Parish in Taylor Mich.

This is a moment that is very, very important for each one of you. It's a moment when the spirit of Jesus enters into your heart, into your spirit, in a very deep and special way, so this is a moment that can really change your life. So it's important, not only that Father Leo and your teachers feel you're ready, but it's very important that you feel you're ready for this sacrament, and what's even more important than that, that you really want to be confirmed.

So I ask you now, "Do you wish to be confirmed?"

[Confirmands: "Yes!"]

You did that very well, thank you. You may be seated now. Most parishes I go to, I have to get the candidates to do that at least twice before everybody in the church can hear them, but you spoke out very plainly, clearly and with a lot of enthusiasm, so I congratulate you for that.

You candidates, and maybe other people in the church, might wonder why I would ask a question like that at this point, because after all, they have been going through a preparation program over a long period of time. Every ~~Thirty Sunday of Easter~~ ^{Acts 5:27-32, 40B-41} they're all here today; why would I ask "Do you want to be confirmed?" It should be very obvious. Well, there are a couple of reasons. First of all, one of the things you learned, I'm sure, as you prepared for this sacrament is that when you are confirmed we often say, "Now you become an adult member of the parish family, the parish community," and it's because you're maturing in your faith and now you're approaching adulthood. That means that as an adult, you have responsibility. That's what it means to grow up and be mature. You accept responsibility. Well, the responsibility you accept as an adult member of the church, as a disciple of Jesus, is the responsibility to give witness to your faith. In the opening prayer, I prayed that God would send holy spirit upon us to make us witnesses before the world. That's what we have to be -- witnesses -- so when you say, in a loud and a clear, enthusiastic voice, "Yes, I want to be confirmed," you're giving witness; you're already beginning to do what the sacrament calls us to do. You're ^{Revelation 5:11-14} ~~standing up in front of your family~~ ^{John 2:1-19} standing up in front of your family, your friends, the parish family, and you're saying, "I believe. I believe in God. I believe in Jesus and the holy spirit," so you are giving witness to your faith. Now it's important to do that here every Sunday, but it's also important to do it where you live and actually, as you go through life, your life will speak more of a message than your words, so if you really live according to the way of Jesus, then you will be witnessing.

A second reason why I ask that question is that I really want every one of you to be very much aware that you have to continue to grow in your faith. So when you say, "I want to receive the sacrament of confirmation," it means that you're taking this step forward, that you're going to continue to grow in following Jesus. And that's very important because when you receive the sacrament of confirmation, and when you say, "Yes, I want to be confirmed," what are you saying yes to? Is it to a ceremony that will be over in a very short time and we leave the church and that's it? No; when you say, "I want to be confirmed," you're saying yes to Jesus. You're saying,

"I want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I want to follow Jesus. I want to live according to his values. I want to, as closely as I can, model Jesus for the world to see," so that's what we say yes to. We say yes to Jesus, and it's not just for today; it's for the rest of your life.

As we say that yes to Jesus and we say, "I want to live according to his way," how do we discover the way of Jesus? How do we know what it means to follow Jesus, to live according to his values? One of the really important ways you're going to learn how to do that is if you take seriously what Father Leo said, that you begin to read the New Testament, the Gospels, and you read those Gospels and complete the reading of all four gospels before you finish high school. That will be a way to learn about Jesus, to learn what his values are, but it also happens every week when we come to church on Sunday. If you listen to the readings, over a period of time you begin to really absorb what God is saying to us, what Jesus says to us in his words and also by the way he lived, and the way he died, forgiving his enemies. You learn about Jesus.

Just briefly, today if we listen to the lessons, we discover more about Jesus that enables us then to try to follow him, follow his way. First of all, Jesus is teaching us when he made that third appearance to the disciples on the shore of the sea of Tiberius, and they were out fishing. That reminds us (I think it should at least) when Jesus first met these disciples, they were people whose work was to fish. They were fishermen and Jesus had called them and said, "I will make you fishers of people. That's what I'm going to do. You won't fish in the lake anymore; I'll send you out into the world to be fishers of people, drawing people into my family, my community."

So today, it's a reminder that Jesus gathers there with the disciples on the shore of the sea of Tiberius, and reminds them, "Here is the mission." That's a reminder to us that when we're confirmed, when we decide to follow Jesus, we accept the mission of Jesus. He calls us to proclaim the good news, to live the good news, to proclaim God's love to the world. That's the mission of Jesus. Also in this incident on the shore, isn't there a clear reminder of the Holy Eucharist? Jesus takes bread and breaks it, and fish and breaks it, feeds his disciples. That reminds us of what he did at the Last Supper. So this is a reminder for us to gather together with Jesus in this assembly every week at the Eucharist and Jesus becomes present to us, transforms us, changes us. That's how we learn to know Jesus.

There are a couple of things that we also learn today. First of all, sometimes it takes real courage to follow Jesus. In the first lesson today, those disciples that were in court, they were before judges because they had continued to preach the message of Jesus and they had been told, "You can't do that." The civil authority was saying, "No, you can't preach," and they said, "Oh no, we have to because it's more important to obey God than to obey human laws. So we will continue to preach." Now that took courage. Even on that occasion, before they were dismissed, they were scourged, so they were willing to suffer for Jesus. It takes courage to stand up and proclaim his word when you're in a situation where that word is being rejected or you're being told you may not do it. Most of us aren't going to be caught up in a conflict with the civil law; that could happen but it probably won't for most of us.

Something occurred, and it occurs often, but this made the news a couple of weeks ago, that I think shows, especially for teenagers like yourselves, how important it is to have the courage of your own convictions. This was an incident that happened in a high school in New Jersey, where there was a new student. She was an immigrant, a 15-year-old youngster from Ireland. She started in the school and for some reason, there was a group of the teenagers who rejected her. They began to bully her. And I'm sure many went along with it just because there was what we call "peer pressure." They kept it up so much and they threatened her actually, and she became so despondent, she committed suicide. Five of those youngsters are actually in court right now. They've been indicted for a crime, but it all happened because they didn't have the courage, I'm sure, of their own convictions. Some of them just went along with peer pressure. If you're going to follow Jesus, you have to have the courage to stand up and say, "Jesus would not do that. He would not treat someone with contempt or

disdain or push them out of the crowd. Jesus would never do that. So if I'm going to follow Jesus, I have to have that kind of courage."

The final thing that I think we learn today that's very important from our scripture lesson is what Jesus says to Peter when he says, "Peter, do you love me?" and we all cried out, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you," three times. Notice each time, Jesus not only accepts that Peter loves him, but then Jesus says, "You must share that love, feed my lambs, feed my sheep, feed my sheep." Yes, it's good that you love me, but you have to share that love, spread it, and there are so many ways in our world in which we can do that. I'm sure that you've been doing that, for example, with the terrible tragedy in Haiti, that earthquake that has taken the lives of over 200,000 people, but with tens of thousands of people suffering in terrible situations without homes, without necessary water and food and medicine. Your heart has to go out to them, and I'm sure it has, but we have to keep on doing that, not only in a situation like this of extreme, dire emergency, but every day. "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep. You love me, you love one another." That's what it means to follow Jesus.

So this morning as we celebrate the sacrament of confirmation, I will come to a point in a moment where I'm going to ask everyone to pray and when I do that, I want you to pray with great fervor. Pray that God will send the Holy Spirit on these young men and women in a very powerful way, to change them to be more like Jesus and to follow the way of Jesus, but when we pray for them (almost every one of us here is a confirmed disciple), pray for ourselves that we will renew this spirit of Jesus within our own hearts so that when this ceremony is over and we have celebrated the sacrament of confirmation and we leave the church, we all go back out into our everyday life, ready to live the way of Jesus, to be the witnesses of Jesus wherever we go. Jesus said to Peter at the end of the gospel today, "Follow me," so Jesus will say that to each one of us, "Follow me," as we go out into our world, "give witness to my way, to my love."

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