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Pentecost Sunday

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 11, 2006 The Peace Pulpit

ttConfirmation for six young adults today, so the homily begins directed at
ttthem.]

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Perhaps I'll say just a word about why it's important
ttthat you say, "Yes, I want to be confirmed!" and that you say it in a
ttvery loud and clear, firm voice and with enthusiasm. Because, and I really want
ttyou to think about this as we go forward with this sacrament, what are you
ttsaying yes to? Is it to a ceremony that will be over in 45 minutes or an hour
ttor so, then we all leave the church and that's it. No! When you say,
tt"I want to be confirmed," you're saying "yes" to
ttJesus. You're saying "yes" to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
ttYou're saying, "Yes, I want to follow Jesus. I want to be his
ttdisciple. I want to live according to his values. I want Jesus to be the one
ttwho guides me in a very special way throughout my whole life. I wish to follow
tthim."

That's a very important decision in your life, a very important
tt"Yes!" No one should just say "yes" to Jesus sort of
ttcasually. It's too important, because if you really mean it, it's
ttgoing to set the direction for your whole life. When you say "yes" to
ttJesus, you say I will live the way Jesus did, what he taught, and that's
ttnot always easy and it takes great determination and real commitment. And
ttagain, it's not just for today or a short time. It's for the rest of
ttyour life, in fact, forever, when you say "yes" to Jesus.

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Perhaps we should take a couple of minutes to think about what that
ttmeans when I say, "I'm going to follow the teachings of Jesus, live
ttaccording to his values." Of course, there are many, many values that
ttJesus shows us, but in this community I'm sure you're very much aware
ttthat we put a lot of emphasis on Jesus as one who is compassionate, loving,
tthealing -- one who rejects violence for any reason whatsoever. These are values

ttthat you don’t find so clearly in the world around us. I read just the
ttother day that almost two-thirds of the people of the United States -- and this
ttincludes, of course, Catholics and other Christians who say they follow Jesus
tt-- two-thirds of the people of this country would agree that you could torture
ttsomeone to get information from them. Now if you know the Gospel, can you ever
ttimagine Jesus torturing someone? Of course not! That would be totally contrary
ttto Jesus! But if you follow the ways of the world around us, you fall into that
ttsame pattern and say, “Yeah, torture’s OK if you need to do it.”
ttNo, it’s not OK, not if you follow Jesus.

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This past couple of weeks there has been a lot in the news about the
tttterrible atrocities that took place in a small town in Iraq called Haditha.
ttU.S. soldiers, Marines they were, executed 24 civilians -- men, elderly men,
ttwomen, and even tiny children -- shot them in the head, shot them through the
ttchest. It was an atrocity. And some people might say, “Well, that’s
ttan exception.” But war is an atrocity! You cannot imagine Jesus entering
ttinto war ever. So when you say “I’m going to follow Jesus,”
ttyou’re going to stand out if you really mean it and you live according to
tthis way. Your life will be different. You’ll choose a way that will make
ttyou stand apart from a lot of people around us. And if we do it well, though,
ttand really witness to the way of Jesus, well then we can help in the work of
ttJesus. As you heard in the Gospel, “As God sent me, I send you.” The
ttwords of Jesus can transform this world so people *will not* commit those
ttkinds of atrocities. That’s what’s happening today -- you’re
ttaccepting this call to follow Jesus and to live according to his way.

There’s one place in the Gospel where I think the way of Jesus is
ttdramatized very, very clearly on these two points especially -- how he rejects
ttviolence and how he is compassionate, reaching out to heal and to forgive. This
tthappened on Holy Thursday night and you find it clearly described in
ttLuke’s Gospel. Remember how the crowd, the mob was coming to Jesus to
ttarrest him and to torture him and to execute him. They come forward and Judas
ttwalks up and kisses Jesus and Jesus responds with a word of love for Judas --
ttfriend, he calls him. But then, remember, one of the disciples takes out a
ttsword and begins to fight, to defend Jesus with violence. And Jesus says,
tt“Put away your sword! Anyone who lives by the sword will die by the
ttsword.” He rejects violence so clearly, even to defend himself, a totally
ttinnocent person. No, he will not allow violence. But instead what does he do?
ttHe reaches down and he picks up the severed ear and heals the person who was
ttwounded. That’s the way of Jesus -- a way of compassion, forgiveness and
ttlove, rejecting all violence.

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That’s the way you are choosing to follow and I hope everyone in
ttthis church is reminding yourself -- all of us went through this -- that we
tthave committed ourselves to follow Jesus. Not just these young people today but
ttall of us must renew our own commitment; open ourselves to the coming of the
ttHoly Spirit once more so that *we* can recommit ourselves to follow the
ttway of Jesus. And it will be very difficult, but if we listen to the Scriptures
tttoday, we’re reminded that God sends the Holy Spirit in a very powerful
ttway, to change us, to enable us to have the strength and the courage and the
ttlove and the compassion of Jesus.

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In John’s Gospel it is presented in a very simple way. Jesus says,
tt“Peace be with you,” and then he breathes on the disciples and says,
tt“Receive the Holy Spirit.” And it happened right at that moment and
ttthey were transformed.

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In Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, he spells it out in a more dramatic
ttway and he uses a lot of symbols to help us understand what happens when Jesus
ttbreathes upon us and gives us the Holy Spirit. Luke says there’s a driving
ttwind, the whole house is shaking and those disciples who read this account of
ttLuke would understand that driving wind because it’s the same word used in
ttthe Book of Genesis. It’s like the driving wind that God sent forth over
ttthe unformed chaos and formed the world. That’s the Holy Spirit, that
ttpowerful Spirit of God that brought the first creation about and now we become
tta new creation through that power of God’s Spirit, the driving wind.

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Luke tells us also about the fire and that reminded those first
ttdisciples of the time when God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and provided to
ttMoses what we call the Torah, the Law that was the binding law of the covenant
ttbetween God and the people and at that moment, there was the sign of fire and
ttso now God is telling us through the Holy Spirit, Jesus gives us the new Torah,
ttwhich, of course, is the law of love. That’s the law of Jesus -- the law
ttof love. And so we receive the Holy Spirit just as those Chosen People in the
ttdesert at Sinai received the Spirit. Through the fire we receive the Spirit now
ttin the same way. And the Spirit brings us those gifts that Paul speaks about in
ttthe letter to the church at Corinth -- all the various gifts: gifts to be
tttteachers and apostles and evangelists and healers. All the gifts that are given
ttto the whole community, we receive those gifts. They’re spelled out as you
ttprobably learned when you were preparing for the sacrament -- it’s the
ttgift of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, love and awe
ttof God. Those are the gifts that you receive today and so all of us, through

ttthose gifts and the coming of the Holy Spirit, can be changed so that we can ttlive according to the way of Jesus. It's a very difficult calling but ttit's possible for every one of us if we open ourselves to the coming of ttthe Holy Spirit as we celebrate this sacrament of Confirmation today.

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The next thing I'll do is to ask everyone, as we proceed with the ttsacrament, to pray in a very special way, to pray with great fervor, for the ttoutpouring of the Holy Spirit upon these young men and women of our parish ttfamily. But when we do that, pray for all of us. Pray that the Holy Spirit will tttruly come upon this whole church this morning and fill us with the power of ttGod's love so that when we leave the church, not just our newly confirmed, ttbut all of us will go back out into our everyday lives ready to live according ttto the way of Jesus, to fulfill Jesus' command -- "As God sent me, so ttI send you," -- to transform our world, through compassion and love, the ttway of Jesus. I know that if we pray for this, God's Spirit will come upon ttus and every one of us will be able to live now more faithfully according to ttthe way of Jesus for the rest of our lives.

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