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Pope Francis an inspiration to act like the Good Shepherd

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 25, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

Editor's note: This homily was given at a confirmation Mass.

Now that you've publicly asserted that you really wish to be confirmed, it's important to reflect for a few moments on what that will mean in your life, becoming a confirmed disciple of Jesus. I might mention that probably almost every one of us here in this church is a confirmed disciple of Jesus. So it's important for all of us to reflect once more, "What does that mean? What does it mean to me as a disciple of Jesus to be confirmed around the Holy Spirit?" To understand it and to reflect on it for a few moments, it's important to go to the Scriptures of today and to listen deeply to God's word. That will guide us and help us to understand what we're doing, what this sacrament is about.

But even before we look at today's Scriptures, to put today's in kind of a context, I remind you of the very beginning of Mark's Gospel (the other Gospels, too, but especially Mark's), when Jesus is beginning his public life. He proclaims, "The reign of God is at hand. The reign of God is right here, ready to break out into the world, into history." The reign of God. Then Jesus says, "Change your lives; enter into this reign of God."

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Acts 13:14, 43-52
Psalms 100:1-2, 3, 5
Revelation 7:9, 14b-17
John 10:27-30
Full text of the readings [1]

I suggest that our first lesson today gives us an idea of what the reign of God means. Now, this is a vision that John the seer has when he's exiled on the island of Patmos, and he has this extraordinary vision: "After this, I saw a great crowd, impossible to count, from every nation, every race, people and tongue, standing before the throne and the land, clothed in white with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out with a loud voice, 'Who saves but our God, who sits on the throne, and the lamb?' All the angels were around the throne, the elders and the four living creatures. They bowed before the throne and they cried out, 'Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power and strength to our God.' "

John, that visionary, has this vision of the fullness of God's reign, when everything has come to the full creative richness that God has put into all of creation, and there's one human family rejoicing and praising God, living with the fullness of their humanness, coming into construction. The reign of God -- and Jesus says it's right here, ready to happen -- the reign of God.

What's our responsibility, then? What was his responsibility? To try to transform our world, transform this world in which we live into the reign of God. All of creation is called to enter into God's reign, where God's love is over all, bringing all to fullness, every one, all of creation. That's happening as Jesus himself begins to move out into the community, begins to bring the love of God into every person's heart.

We're called to be disciples to do that: to transform our world into as close an image of the reign of God as possible. That's what Paul was doing and Barnabas, when they were in the town of Antioch and they said, "For we were commanded by God," and here are God's words to them: "I have set you as a light to the nations so that you may bring my saving love to the ends of the earth." They are a light to the nations, to all people. That's what every disciple of Jesus is called to be, a light to others, so that they see the love of God present in us, and they're drawn to that. They're changed by it, and our world gradually becomes transformed so that we become one human family bound together in the spirit of God, in the spirit of love, where there's peace and joy, fullness of

life, for every person.

Now we're a long way from that, as you know, because of what we see all around us. There are so many that don't have the fullness of life that God is providing for all. There are so many that are caught up in wars and violence. It's happening in our countries, we know, so dramatically from this past week. The reign of God isn't here in its fullness, but it's ready to come forth. That's what Jesus said -- "It's at hand" -- and he began to make it happen as he traveled to the towns and villages and cured people, healed them, blessed them, gave them life, brought joy and peace into the hearts of all he met.

Who's to do that now? All of us who are disciples of Jesus. When we say yes to Jesus, "Yes, I want to be confirmed; yes, I want to be a disciple of Jesus," we're saying yes to the work that he calls us to do: transform our world. So where's there's hatred, we have to bring love. Where there's poverty, we have to bring plenty. We have to share. We have to change things, and it could happen. But each of us has to do what God has called me, as a disciple, to do.

Our Gospel lesson today is about Jesus the Good Shepherd, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them. They follow me and I give them fullness of life." Jesus is still at work being the Good Shepherd, nurturing, giving life, but how does he do it now? Through you and you and me, all of us. That's how Jesus is nurturing our human family so that it becomes transformed, but each of us has to take the responsibility to carry on the work of Jesus, to be that Good Shepherd who knows others, loves them, draws them into life.

Aren't we blessed right now because of the new bishop of Rome -- the pope, Pope Francis? Isn't he acting like a good shepherd? This is what's important: it's much more important what you do than what you say. We're going to be witnesses to this good news of Jesus; we're going to be trying to transform the world; and so we do have to speak up. We have to share the message of Jesus, but we do that more than any other way by how we act. Look at how Pope Francis has caught the attention of the world because he reaches out to people. On Holy Thursday, he goes into a jail, [to] the most pushed-away people I suppose you can think of, those that we punish, we push outside of our society. He goes there, where Jesus would go. He washes their feet; he blesses them; he kisses them, drawing people in.

In that instance, he also shows that we're all one human family. Muslims were there -- he brought them in, embraced them with God's love. And even though technically the law says he should not be washing women's feet, he says, "No! There's equality. We're all one. In Jesus, there's no male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free, rich or poor -- we're all one," and Francis was demonstrating that. He was really preaching by what he's doing and he shows us what's important, not material goods. We share our goods. He lives a simple life. He doesn't live in a palace; he lives in a simple apartment. He doesn't have a limousine; he takes the bus to work. He did that when he was the archbishop of Buenos Aires. He lived in a tiny apartment, and he still does; cooks his own meals. He shows us simplicity of life.

He's really imaging Jesus, and that's what all of us have to do. That's how we proclaim the good news that the reign of God is at hand. We begin to act like the Good Shepherd, like Jesus, and gradually, things will change. I know that can happen. We can see how Francis, as our new pope, is raising the hopes of people everywhere, and that will gradually transform our world. When all of us catch that spirit and act according to the spirit of Jesus, act like the Good Shepherd -- reaching out, drawing everybody in, sharing what we have -- the reign of God begins to come more into its fullness in our world.

So today, as we celebrate the sacrament of confirmation and this holy Eucharist, we gather around the table of the Lord, break open the Scriptures and break the bread, and we're changed. We're going to go back out into our everyday lives and we're going to try to live like Jesus, like the Good Shepherd, and that will make the reign of God spread wherever we are. As Christians and followers of Jesus everywhere act according to his way, his way of love, this world of ours will be transformed into the reign of God, where justice and peace and love and joy

and fullness of life will happen.

So that's what it means to be confirmed. Your task now is to be like Jesus the Good Shepherd, to bring his love into our world. That's the task of all of us, and we recommit ourselves to that this morning as we celebrate the sacrament of confirmation and this holy Eucharist.

[Homily given at St. Charles Borromeo Church. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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