NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Confirmation means a transformation of the spirit

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 26, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

I'm sure sometimes people wonder, why do I do that? Because, after all, they have prepared over a period of time and they're dressed up in their confirmation robes and everybody's here to celebrate with them, and so why would I ask the question, "Do you want to be confirmed?" Well, the reason I do -- and this is important for the candidates especially, but for all of us because we can remember our own confirmation and what it means. {C}

When you say, "Yes, I want to be confirmed," think about it: What are you saying yes to? You might think, Well, it's a ceremony, and we'll go through a ritual -- the ceremony -- and it'll be all over in 45 minutes or so. Then we leave and that's it. But that's not it, is it? When you say, "I want to be confirmed," you're really saying yes, not to a ceremony, but to Jesus. You're saying, "I want to follow Jesus Christ. I want to be his disciple just like those first disciples who dropped everything and followed Jesus."

Third Sunday of Easter
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19
Psalms 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9
1 John 2:1-5a
Luke 24:35-48
Full text of the readings [1]

That's what you're saying, "I want to follow Jesus." That means you have to live in a certain way because Jesus taught us values that were very special to him -- very important in making us the best people we can be. When you say, "I want to follow Jesus," you mean, "I want to follow his teachings, I want to live according to his way, his values." That means something very important for all of us. It means we have to be very serious about trying to listen to God's word -- when Jesus speaks to us -- watch how we act so we follow his example.

That's what it means to follow Jesus, to begin to accept the values and to live according to his way. Now if we listen to the Scriptures today, but not just today, I think it's important during the Easter season to remember the last couple of Sundays: Easter Sunday and last Sunday. When we listen to Scriptures, I think we find what it means to follow Jesus. In today's Gospel -- we'll start there -- I think probably the most important words were right near the beginning.

You have to get the context -- two disciples had been walking away from Jerusalem toward a town called Emmaus. They were very discouraged. You may remember this story because it's quite well-known. As they were walking along, somebody comes and walks with them. They begin talking about what had happened in Jerusalem two days or three days before. This person doesn't seem to know anything about it and they say, "Don't you know about Jesus?"

Then this person begins to instruct *them* in the Scriptures. They're about to end their walk and as they come to the end, Jesus (this person) looks like he's going to go away. They say, "Join us for supper," and so he does. Now, in today's Gospel, they come back to Jerusalem, where the rest of the disciples are still afraid, they're hiding; this is Easter Sunday night. They say, "Look what happened! We were walking along the way, and Jesus joined us, and we knew it!" In the breaking of the bread -- that's how they knew it was Jesus -- the breaking of the bread.

They're talking about the Eucharist. Most of the time, we talk about the Eucharist as Jesus being in the bread,

Jesus being in the wine, but they said the breaking of the bread. That's how the early Christians talked about the Eucharist, what we celebrate as Mass -- the breaking of the bread -- because that, for them, was the real message of the Eucharist, that Jesus, as he said at the Last Supper, taking the bread, "This is my body, given for you, broken for you." Jesus was ready to give himself totally for all of us. His body is broken in the suffering, the crucifixion. It's his gift of love for all of us. That's how they recognized him -- in the breaking of the bread. That tells us about what has to happen in our lives.

We have to be like Jesus, willing to give of ourselves. St. Paul wrote about Jesus when writing to the church at Philippi. He said, "Jesus, though he was God, did not think his divinity something to be clung to, but emptied himself -- emptied himself -- became human, even to the point of becoming a slave for all of us." He gave himself over to death even, the ignominious death of the cross. That's what Jesus did for us. He gives himself, so this breaking of the bread is a sign of how we have to begin to live our lives.

Then we're ready to let go of some of our bad habits and our tendency to get angry, or maybe our tendency to be selfish, or maybe our tendency to gossip about other people, or whatever. We have to begin to change, to be broken, if you will, to be like Jesus who totally gave himself for us. There are a couple of things from the last two weeks. We're just beginning today the third week of Easter. The last two weeks in the Scriptures -- if you go to John's Gospel that we heard last Sunday, the second Sunday -- the Gospel tells about how the disciples in that upper room are afraid. Just like in today's Gospel, Jesus suddenly is in their midst. The first thing he says to them is, "Peace be with you." He's giving peace to them.

Then John tells us, "He breathed on them," breathed on them. The word that he used in the Gospel is the same word. The only other place it's used in Scripture is in the book of Genesis, where in the story of creation, God is described as forming a human creature out of the dust of the earth, and then God breathed on that creature and it becomes alive. The spirit of God begins to live in this human form, and that's creation. Now what is happening on Easter Sunday night, Jesus is saying, "This is a new creation."

You have to change yourself totally -- be transformed -- become a new creation, be different from what you were before. When you receive the Holy Spirit, if you're really open, God will change you dramatically so that you become more like Jesus. What's the next thing he says to his disciples that night after he says, "Peace be with you," and he breathes on them? He talks about forgiveness: "Whose sins you forgive, they'll be forgiven; the evil you restrain, it will be restrained." He wants us to be reconciling people like he was, ready to forgive as he forgives all of us all the time. We have to begin to forgive one another.

That's not always easy is it? To forgive and to be the first to reach out if there's been some kind of a breakdown in our relationship, be the one to go back and say, "I'm sorry. Let's reconcile. Let's come together again." It can happen in our families, it can happen in our neighborhood, whatever or wherever, but we have to be that kind of people. This is what it means to begin to follow Jesus. I'll just give you one more thing. This was last Sunday, in the first lesson. St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles describes how that first community of disciples of Jesus understood the transformation that they had to make, and they began to do it. You may not remember this, but it's an extraordinary thing.

Luke says about the community at Jerusalem that no one was in need among them. No one was in need. There were poor people, but no one was in need, and why? Because they shared with one another. They shared what they had so that no one was in need. Behind that is a very profound understanding of the goods of the earth and the goods that we have, whatever material things we've accumulated. They don't really belong to us. This is the truth that Luke is getting across and the disciples understood. God made the world for all, not for a few. All of the goods of the earth are so that everyone can have a full human life and not a few of us accumulating a lot for ourselves. We have to share because they don't belong to us.

God gave the world for all, not for a few. That's a very deep truth and it underlines the values of Jesus who was

ready to give himself totally for others. We have to begin to have that spirit. Now that isn't very easy in the culture in which we live. We live in a culture that talks about "my right to private wealth -- it's mine; nobody can take it from me." If you follow Jesus, you understand it's not really yours, it's God's. What is God's belongs to all.

We have to begin to be people like those. Imagine what it would be like if every community of Christians, disciples of Jesus like this community, if we really looked around and said, "How can we share what we have so that nobody among us is in need?" That would be a miracle, really, but that's what God calls us to begin, to make such a miracle happen. The first Christian community did it. They didn't do it perfectly and it didn't last on into the indefinite future. They had their shortcomings, too, but at least that was their spirit: Share whatever you have so that no one is in need. How quickly our world could be changed starting in our own local communities, then the larger community, and the whole world community, if we really caught the message of Jesus.

So today, we're celebrating the sacrament of confirmation. The Holy Spirit is going to come upon this church in a very powerful way if we open ourselves, especially on these young people being confirmed, but on the rest of us, too, because the spirit of God is being poured forth all the time if we open ourselves. As we go on with the sacrament of confirmation, I hope that every one of us, these young candidates especially, but all of us, will pray that our hearts will be opened so that we will be deeply touched by the spirit of Jesus, and so that as we leave the church today, we'll be transformed, at least a little bit further in our transformation, to become a real disciple of Jesus, who follows his way.

We'll go back out into our world. We'll be ready to be witnesses to the love and goodness of Jesus. This message of Jesus now will begin to spread even more because all of us open ourselves to the spirit of Jesus, and we leave this church to be witnesses to Jesus for the rest of our lives.

[Homily given at a Mass where confirmation took place at St. Donald Parish, Roseville, Mich. 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.]

Source URL (retrieved on *12/10/2013 - 01:11*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/confirmation-means-transformation-spirit

Links:
[1] http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042212.cfm
[2] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup