

[Spirituality](#)



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May 3, 2018

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Before we celebrate this sacrament, it's important for the candidates, but also for parents, sponsors, family and friends who are here to reflect on the Scripture lessons that we just listened to that help us to really get a deep understanding of what is happening today.

I think to put it in a good setting, it's helpful for me and I hope for you to remember the Gospel that we had just a few Sundays ago. It was from St. John and it was what happened on Easter Sunday night.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

[April 29, 2018](#)

Acts 9:26-31

Psalm 22

1 John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8

St. John tells us that night (Easter Sunday) after the word had begun to spread that some of the women and Peter and John had seen Jesus, the disciples got together, went back to the upper room and locked themselves in. They were afraid and they thought that perhaps what had happened to Jesus might happen to them: They would get arrested, be tortured and executed. So they're hiding in fear.

Then suddenly Jesus is there with them. What's the first thing he says to them? "Peace be with you." He wants them to calm down, be at peace.

That was, I think, very important for them also because they had all run away, remember? Peter had denied Jesus. Judas had betrayed him. But the first thing he says is peace. In other words, he's forgiving them. Then he breathed upon them and he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. As God has sent me, I now send you."

That's what's happening today. Jesus is in our midst in this community, this family of faith, in our own spirits, and will be present in the Eucharist in a few moments, the same Jesus who appeared to those disciples.

Jesus is saying to all of us, but especially to you who are being confirmed today, "Receive the Holy Spirit. As God has sent me, I send you."

That's a tremendous charge, responsibility. Jesus is giving to you the responsibility to be one of his disciples, to spread the good news that he came to teach us — that the world could be transformed into the reign of God. Jesus is asking you to be witnesses to that, to spread this good news.

Today's lessons, I think, help us to understand even more deeply what is happening through this sacrament.

First of all, that image that Jesus uses in the Gospel, "I am the vine; you are the branches." What is he trying to tell us by that? In the vine and the branches, it's the same life, the same energy that flows through the vine to the branches, keeps them alive. It's a deep union and that's what Jesus is saying about his relationship to you, to all of us, "I am the vine; you are the branches."

Jesus is saying: I am living in you in a very deep and special way. God is in your heart, in your spirit, the same God who was the God of Jesus. The same God who told Jesus, "Go and spread the good news." That same God is saying the same thing to you.

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If you want to know what, most of all, is the good news and what we have to do to spread it, we have to change our lives. In that first lesson, St. Paul had just undergone an extraordinary change of life, a conversion. He was a persecutor of the Christians. But then on his way to Damascus (you probably remember the story), he fell to the ground because suddenly there was a light all around him.

He heard Jesus speaking: "It is I you are persecuting."

He said, "Who are you?"

"Jesus" was the answer. "You are persecuting me when you persecute my followers."

Paul was changed dramatically, his whole life turned around. He began to live as a disciple of Jesus.

So that's what has to happen to us, to each of you now in a deeper way than ever before, allow yourselves to be changed, to become more like Jesus, to follow him and take his message into our world.

What is the most important thing about following Jesus? If we listen to the second lesson again, "My dear brothers and sisters, let us love, not only with words and with our lips (that's easy, right?), let us love in truth and in deed." Just before, John writes those words, "This is how we have known what love is: Jesus gave his life for us. We too ought to give our life for our sisters and brothers." John also says, "Whoever keeps the commands of Jesus remains in God and God in them. It is by the Spirit of God that God has given us that we know God lives in us."

The most important way to show that, to give witness to the world, is by loving one another. Jesus, when he spoke to his disciples for the last time at the Last Supper and told them, "This is my one command: Love one another as I have loved you. No greater love than this does anyone have than to give your life for another" — that's the kind of love God is asking of us. Most of us won't be expected or faced with the reality of someday actually giving our life for somebody else, but it could happen.

You could be challenged even to that extent. It happened just a few weeks ago in Parkland, Florida, where that terrible atrocity happened where the former student came into the school and began to shoot and kill. But one student stood out in a very extraordinary way. He's 15 years old, just about the age you are. His name is Anthony Borges; he is of Venezuelan descent. Apparently, he was the last of a group of students rushing into a classroom to seek refuge. He shut the door behind him (he was the last one in), and frantically tried to lock it.

But in an instant, the gunman was at the door. Anthony couldn't get the door locked, so he stood there holding the door shut, standing against it to protect all the other students who had already come into the room. He was shot five times in the legs and torso. Then the killer went on.

Anthony phoned his father to say he had been wounded. He was rushed to a hospital and he survived. Photos show him with wires and tubes snaking from him. He still can't walk and it's unclear whether he will be able to, but fellow students say he saved their lives. No one else in that classroom was shot.

That is an extraordinary example of the kind of love that God asks of every one of us: "Love one another as I have loved you."

In between, we're not going to hit that extreme, probably none of us. We pray God we never would face that. But at the same time, this is what we're saying if we say we want to follow Jesus, that we will make love such an important part of our lives, we will love one another in such everyday ways. Every day in simple ways, we will show love and learn to be loved and love one another starting in our families, in our community, in this parish family, in our neighborhood, in our country, in our world. We have to love, give up violence, give up hatred and give up killing.

Love — that's the message of Jesus and that's the message that we say we follow: "Love one another as I have loved you."

So today as we celebrate this sacrament of confirmation, these young people are committing themselves to follow this way of Jesus. As I said before, I know they are well-prepared. They're ready to live according to the teachings of Jesus.

I hope all the rest of us who are already baptized and confirmed renew our own commitment to be witnesses to Jesus in our world, a world where there is so much hatred and violence and killing, that we will change things by being the way Jesus shows us, to love one another as he has loved us.

That's what these young people are committing to. That's what I pray all of us are recommitting ourselves to. As we do that, we will experience the presence of Jesus within us in a very deep and special way. But we also will begin to spread this good news, and gradually the reign of God will happen, for God's love will be over all and all of us will be able to share in the fullness of life and joy and peace that Jesus came to bring us.

So we pray for these candidates today. We pray for ourselves that all of us may give witness to the message of Jesus, the message of love.

[Homily given April 29, 2018 at St. Philomena in Detroit, celebrating confirmation. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]