

Solemnity of John the Baptist

Adult Confirmation

Holy Rosary Cathedral

24 June 2018

Dear brother priests; dear *confirmandi*, that is, those about to be confirmed; and dear sponsors, parishioners and visitors to our Cathedral today:

Introduction

This morning we give the Lord thanks and praise for this group of adults vested in red in the front pews, who are about to be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation. They have completed a period of preparation and have learned to recognize the wonderful things that the Holy Spirit has done, is doing and will continue to do in their lives. The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the grace of Baptism and pours out in abundance the Holy Spirit with his sevenfold gifts upon those who receive it.

From Pentecost

On the day of the first Confirmation, that is, the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit renewed the Apostles *from within*, filling them with a power that would give them the gifts, above all the courage, to go out and boldly proclaim the Good News of God's merciful love revealed in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who came that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

Freed from all fear, these Apostles began to speak openly with and

with self-confidence (cf. Acts 2:29; 4:13; 4:29,31). Those frightened fishermen who had fled from the Cross on Good Friday became courageous heralds of the Gospel. Even their enemies could not understand how “uneducated and ordinary men” (cf. Acts 4:13) could show such courage and endure such difficulties.

Nothing could stop them from talking about what Jesus had done for them. To those who tried to silence them they replied: “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). This is how the Church was born. And it is from that first Pentecost that the Good News has come down to us.¹

What the first Apostles did, we, too are called to carry out in our own lives. Above all, to be free of fear in saying to others – and above all by our lives of Christian integrity – that we believe in God and all that he has revealed to us about what that means for daily life as a follower of Jesus.

Before proceeding to the Rite of Confirmation, in which those to be confirmed renew the profession of faith of their Baptism, and then are anointed with sacred chrism, I want to say a few words about today’s feast.

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 23rd World Youth Day 2008, n. 3.

St. John the Baptist

Usually the Church celebrates only the birth into heaven, of her saints, their feast day. But for John the Baptist, along with Mary and the Lord, the Church makes an exception. John is so important to the life of the Church that we celebrate his amazing birth. Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, had conceived a child in her advanced age. Faced with this announcement (Lk 1:13), Zechariah could not believe it, because the laws of nature did not allow it: they were old. As a result, the Lord made him speechless and unable to talk for the whole term of the pregnancy (cf. Lk 1:20).

But God does not depend on our limited human capacities. We must learn to trust in him and to contemplate in humility his plans for us, which so often exceed what we could imagine.

Today's Gospel page announces the child's birth and then focuses on giving him his name. Names then, as now, mean a lot to a family and are chosen with care. Elizabeth chooses a name foreign to the family tradition and says: "He will be called John" (Lk1:60), which means "God has been gracious." Today, the confirmands choose the name of a Saint who will be their special spiritual friend and model of virtue for their lives.

Zechariah unexpectedly confirms the choice of the name "John," writing it on a tablet – because he couldn't speak – and "at once his

mouth opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.” (Lk 1:64).

This whole event of the birth of John the Baptist is surrounded by a joyful sense of amazement, surprise and thanksgiving: “and all these matters were talked about throughout the hill country of Judea” (Lk 1:65).

Brothers and sisters: the people realized that something great happened, and asked: “What, then, will this child become?” (Lk 1:66). They were astonished and filled with gratitude.²

And so should we be filled at the wonders that God brings about in our lives. The Sacrament of Confirmation enables us to appreciate that our lives are empowered: that the Holy Spirit is at work within us and enables us to do things we couldn’t do on our own.

Think in your own life of a particular grace you have received: the ability to forgive someone you thought you never could; the meeting of a person whom you came to love and marry or develop a deep friendship with; the peace you received after surmounting a time of disappointment, trial or suffering.

The story of salvation is one of constant amazement at what God the Father does for us in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Let’s open our eyes more and more to see and experience the wonderful works

² Cf. Francis, Angelus (24 June 2018).

he brings about in our lives.

Conclusion

We now proceed to celebrate the Rite of Confirmation. After professing the faith they first professed at their Baptism, I will pray that the Holy Spirit will descend upon the confirmands. And he keeps his promise. They will be “sealed” with the Spirit, which is visibly done with the laying on of hands and the anointing with the Sign of the Cross on the forehead using sacred chrism.

These simple ritual actions sends them out to be Christ’s witnesses in everyday life. For those who have received this Gift, nothing can ever be the same! Being “sealed with the Spirit” means not being afraid to stand up for Christ, letting the truth of the Gospel permeate the way they see, think and act, as they work so that the world will come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
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³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, World Youth Day, Sydney (20 July 2008).