

Homily for the Conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation, 2021

My young friends, having already received the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, today's Confirmation will complete your Christian initiation. From today onwards, you will have everything you need to be Jesus' hands and feet in the world.

This sacrament is called Confirmation because the faith given in Baptism is now confirmed and made strong. During our Baptism, our parents and godparents took responsibility for forming us in the faith; by being confirmed in the Church we accept responsibility for our own faith. As a sign of this we renew our baptismal promises.

It is customary to have a confirmation name, taken from a saint or biblical figure whom we admire and whose protection and guidance we seek. We also have a sponsor, who plays a role somewhat similar to a godparent at Baptism. In this way, we have both earthly and heavenly support as we take this step into spiritual adulthood.

We believe that when we are confirmed we receive a full outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our soul and are strengthened to live the Christian life. Scripture and tradition speak of seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which we receive in a special way in the Sacrament of Confirmation: wisdom (knowing what really matters), understanding (knowing how we ought to live), counsel (knowing how to judge between right and wrong), knowledge (of God), fortitude (courage), piety (reverence), and fear of the Lord (wonder and awe).

As part of the Confirmation ritual, the bishop (or the priest appointed by him) lays his hands over us and prays that we be "sealed with gift of the Holy Spirit". To be sealed means that God claims us as belonging to him in a particular way. Because of the COVID situation, I have to apply the sacred Chrism with a cotton bud this year, instead of my thumb.

And then there's the famous slap, which I must admit is one of my favourite things about Confirmation, and which is something the candidates are always fascinated by as they're getting ready to receive the sacrament. This is the second year I get to be the main celebrant at our confirmations, and because of COVID, for the second year in a row, I'm not allowed to administer the slap – which, really, is one of the biggest tragedies about the whole COVID situation. (I'm just kidding. Kinda.)

When explaining the rationale behind the slap, I always like to compare it to the ritual of a soldier being knighted in the Middle Ages, with the sword being touched on the shoulders by the king. If you think about it, that's a pretty vulnerable situation to be in—the king could just go "off with your head"—but in a sense it's a way of preparing the knight for the fact that being a knight is hard, and they'll face many difficulties as they strive to defend the kingdom.

Well, being a Christian in our world is also hard, and the slap is a way of saying “brace yourself”. Don’t forget, our Lord was treated harshly by the world, and ultimately, put to death by the world—and the disciple is not greater than the master—so we should expect opposition ourselves as we strive to follow our Lord in the midst of the world. And it’s not just opposition from the world – a lot of the times it’s just fighting against ourselves. It’s making the effort to go to Mass each week when we’d rather sleep in. It’s making the effort to pray when we’d rather be doing something else. It’s refraining from being selfish when we have a chance to be generous. It’s having the courage to go to confession, even if we’re feeling too embarrassed. It’s putting others first, out of gratitude for all that God has given us.

However, at the same time as the slap is given, the minister says, “Peace be with you.” And the peace being referred to there is the peace that Jesus said he came to bring – a peace the world cannot give, and a peace the world cannot take away. This is a peace that we have access to not just when things are going fine, but also when we’re in the midst of great difficulties. As so it’s precisely *as* we receive the slap—a sign of the opposition we may face from the world for being a follower of Christ—that we are offered the supernatural peace that the world is not able to touch.

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Our Catholic faith is not just about being good, or about striving to help others. Lots of non-believers can be good and generous people. Nor is Christianity just about following a bunch of rules or having certain beliefs. The rules and beliefs are important, but they are secondary. First and foremost, Christianity is about a person – a person who loves us intensely, and who asks us to love him in return.

My young friends, maybe you’ve heard me say this before, but it’s worth repeating over and over: Jesus *knows* you – he knows you better than you know yourself. And Jesus *loves* you – he loves you more than you love yourself. So he can be trusted. And his plan for your life can be trusted. So don’t just strive to be good. Strive to know Jesus Christ more and more, strive to love Jesus Christ more and more, and strive to serve Jesus Christ more and more.

As you get older, you may have some questions about it all – the faith, the Church, God. That’s fine – search away. Look for the truth – but commit to seeing it all the way through. Because we also believe that the Truth is a Person – that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life.” And so any genuine search for truth will ultimately lead a person into the arms of the living God.

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And so, as you become today full members of our Lord’s Church, I plead with you – do not be lukewarm Catholics. Do not be a half-hearted follower of Jesus. We’ve had enough of those. The life of a lukewarm disciple is no fun for anybody, especially for

the lukewarm person. Instead, commit now to strive for the only type of life worth living – to be a *saint*.

Be someone who allows the God to have his way in your life. Be someone who allows God to use them as an instrument in his glorious work of salvation. Be someone whose life whole-heartedly proclaims the glory of God, so that others might come to know and love him as well.

Because, when it's all said and done, we have been made for eternity. In the fullness of time, everything in this world will pass away. All that will remain is the grace won from things done for the love of God. That's what will live on forever. And our way of preparing for this here and now is to strive to do everything for the love of God.

This is the real meaning of the word *holiness*. Striving to please God with everything we think, say, and do. And this call to holiness is the *duty* and the *privilege* that is about to be yours, as a disciple of Christ, and as a full member of his Catholic Church. And so I congratulate you, I assure you of my prayers, and I ask you never to take your faith for granted. God bless you all!