

Easter - 6th Sunday

- The season of Easter is quickly drawing to a close.
 - It ends with Pentecost...which is only two weeks away.
 - But our first reading is already giving us a preview.
 - It focuses...on different aspects...of the Holy Spirit's work among us.
 - And it relates directly to a couple of sacraments.
- 1st of all...we see the Holy Spirit working through Phillip...
 - in order to bring salvation to the people of Samaria.
 - In the power of the Holy Spirit...he's proclaiming God's Word.
 - And it's having an incredible effect!
 - People are receiving healing and deliverance...
 - and therefore the freedom of heart...
 - to better choose Jesus...
 - as the Lord and Savior of their lives.
 - And there is great joy throughout the entire city...
 - as they do choose Him...and are baptized.
- When this good news...reached the ears of the Apostles in Jerusalem...
 - they sent Peter and John to see things first hand...
 - as well as...to pray for the Holy Spirit...to come upon them.
 - But why? They were already baptized.
 - The saving grace of Jesus was already in them.
 - What more did they need?
 - In a strict sense, they didn't need anything...
 - they had everything that they needed...
 - for salvation...in Jesus Christ...
 - But God's love and His grace is always diffusive and fruitful.
 - It's never meant just for ourselves.
 - It's meant to be shared.
 - It's meant to be a blessing...that multiplies.
 - And so the Holy Spirit is given...to those who are already baptized...
 - in order to better share that grace with others.
 - So there's a two fold movement of the Holy Spirit here...
 - as well as in our own lives.
- The Holy Spirit is at work for our own salvation at baptism.
 - And the Holy Spirit is poured out again in Confirmation.
 - That's what this passage is all about...
 - but this time the Holy Spirit fills us...
 - with all the gifts and charisms we'll need...
 - to share that salvation with others.
 - That's basically the theology of Baptism and Confirmation in a nutshell.
 - One is for me...for my salvation
 - One is for others.

- Over the years...the theology of Confirmation has become an absolute mess.
 - I won't talk about all of the problems or we'll be here for weeks!
 - But there is a question of age - at what age should it be received?
 - In 1910...Pius X lowered the age of First Holy Communion...
 - in a desire to share that grace...
 - with children at a younger age.
 - But when he did that...
 - he didn't lower the age of Confirmation.
 - The same reasoning...it could have easily applied.
 - And as a result...
 - the sacraments of initiation were out of order.
 - For centuries...upon centuries...the traditional order has been:
 - Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist.
 - But the changes of Pius X...
 - as well as the aftermath of Vatican II...
 - have created great confusion about Confirmation...
 - causing many people to get "creative" with what it actually is.
 - Many in their 30's...40's...and 50's...
 - probably heard something like this in your Confirmation class:
 - At baptism your parents chose the faith for you...
 - and the sacrament of confirmation...
 - is when you get to stand up...
 - and choose the faith for yourself.
 - Do you know where that line of thinking comes from?
 - It actually comes from Martin Luther!
 - It's not Catholic theology at all!
 - In fact...he taught that...
 - in order to distinguish himself from the Catholic Church...
 - because he didn't believe that Confirmation...
 - was a sacrament at all.
 - And based on that definition alone...
 - it wouldn't be a sacrament for us either.
 - Do you remember the basic definition of a sacrament?
 - Baltimore catechism still works great:
 - *"A Sacrament is...an outward sign...instituted by Christ...to give grace."*
 - In other words...God is the one at work in a sacrament.
 - When we receive a sacrament...
 - we're merely cooperating with that grace.
 - So when we say that Confirmation...
 - is when we get up and choose our faith.
 - What is the grace that's being given?
 - What is God doing in that sacrament?
 - By that definition alone...Nothing.

- I think it's much more simple to think of Baptism and Confirmation in terms of salvation.
 - Baptism is geared towards our own salvation...
 - but of course with the caution that...
 - we still have a lifetime of cooperating with that grace...
 - while Confirmation is geared more towards the salvation of others.
 - It's when we are filled with the gifts and charisms we'll need...
 - that's the grace that's being given...
 - so that we can get out there and share our faith with others.
- Those in their 60's and beyond will remember this image for Confirmation:
 - Confirmation makes us a soldier for Christ - remember hearing that?
 - The sacrament equips us with the weapons and armor we'll need...
 - to get out there and win souls for the Lord.
 - Children also have an important part in that to play in that battle.
 - As a pastor I can't tell you how many times...
 - I've seen the Lord work through children...
 - to draw their parents back to the faith.
 - And so they too...need to be strengthened with these gifts...
 - That's one of the primary reasons why the Archbishop...
 - lowered the age of confirmation.
 - We need that grace at a younger age.
- But of course right now...
 - we are running into a different problem...
 - in trying to get that much needed grace to our children.
 - We can't gather in groups of people larger than 10...
 - and we have over 100 kids...
 - who were supposed to be confirmed this weekend.
 - Let alone all those in RCIA...who wanted to join the Church at Easter.
 - When will we be able to do it?
 - How will we be able to do it?
 - Even if we break it up into smaller groups...
 - We're going to have to wait for things to open up a bit more...
 - before we can proceed.
 - Will you join me in praying for that grace?
- And for the rest of us...
 - over the course of the next two weeks before Pentecost...
 - the rest of us need to be praying...
 - for a fresh outpouring of the grace that has already been given us...
 - in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation...
 - for our salvation...and for the salvation of others.
 - Because with all that going on in the world today...
 - we need all the grace we can get!