

August 16, 2020

St. Augustine Cathedral

2:00 p.m.

**20th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Parish Confirmation Celebration**

Today's celebration is special for several different reasons. We come together for our regular Sunday celebration of our Faith, but perhaps for many of you, since coming together regularly has not been very possible due to the Pandemic we've been dealing with and the subsequent restrictions we've been following for many months now, this may be the first time you've been back to Church in person for a good while. So, I'm really glad you're here!

And not only that---we had hoped to celebrate your Confirmation on the Feast of Pentecost, as we usually do for our St. Augustine Cathedral Confirmation Classes. So, not only were we not able to do that, but since School abruptly ended, you didn't even get to finish out your 8<sup>th</sup> grade, whether that was here at our Cathedral School or at another School. So, this may be the first time that many of you have been back together since then. So, once again, I'm so glad you're here. And let me add a word of Congratulations on your Grade School Graduation, even if it was not all that you might have expected it to be.

And our celebration is so special that it's even at a special time, here in the middle of this beautiful August Sunday afternoon, so that we can gather all 22 of you together with your Sponsors, and several of your family members, to celebrate your Confirmation on this, the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. And although not all your family members and friends are able to join with us here in person because of our social-distancing requirements, they all are able to "be with us" virtually as we're livestreaming this special Mass---so I'm really glad that you're here, and you're there.

The Scripture Readings we have just heard help us to come to see how God reveals His extraordinary Love for us through the ordinary realities of life, and how God tries to tear down the artificial barriers we put up to separate ourselves from one another.

In today's First Reading, we hear the Lord God teaching this truth: "*Observe what is right; do what is just, for My salvation is about to come, and My justice about to be revealed.*" It doesn't matter who you are or where you live; this teaching from God is a universal truth for all people to listen to and to live by. The Chosen People knew they were special to God; but they had to come to realize that God, Who created ALL people, also loved all people, and wanted everyone to choose to love Him in return. And so, we continued to hear in that same Reading that: "*The foreigners will also come to my holy mountain...My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

In today's Gospel, we see that Jesus has traveled outside His own area of Galilee and entered into the region known as Tyre and Sidon---it was considered "foreign territory"; the home of pagans---the unclean Gentiles. And almost immediately, Jesus is approached by a Canaanite woman of that district, which presents two big problems: first, she is a woman, and secondly, she's a foreigner. At that time, there were two important social rules: men and women were not to associate with each other in public; and, good practicing Jews were to have nothing to do with pagans/Gentiles. And yet, this unnamed, non-Jewish woman becomes a true "model of faith" for all of us. She was a woman on a mission: she was a mother whose daughter was in trouble, and she wasn't going to let anything keep her from going right to the One Whom she was convinced could help her daughter---she believed that Jesus could heal her of the terrible evil spirit that was afflicting and trying to kill her.

At first it seems that Jesus was ignoring her, but she is unrelenting in making her case; when Jesus appears to rebuff her, she just fights right back. Finally she throws herself at Jesus' feet and begs: "*Please Lord!*". And that's when Jesus responds with that powerful, loving statement: "*O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done as you wish.*" And the Gospel concludes by telling us that from that very moment, the woman's daughter was healed---just by a Word from Jesus!

My dear Candidates----On this special day of your Confirmation, you are about to recommit yourselves to the Baptismal Promises your Parents and Godparents made for you a life-time ago. So much has changed over the course of your young lives. You've all changed dramatically from the babies you were on the day of your Baptism, into the young adults you are in the process of becoming on this, the day of your Confirmation----when you complete your initiation process into the Catholic Faith. But not only have you changed; the world has changed as well. Obviously we are dealing with a world-wide pandemic that doesn't seem to want to go away, and which has radically changed all of us and every aspect of our lives---including how we're able to practice our Faith. And besides that, our country is going through a time of tremendous social unrest, racial tensions, political divisions and cultural intimidation.

And so, it's this world in which we're living that you, young women and men, are being asked to be, like this unnamed woman in today's Gospel, unrelenting in your Faith. You are being asked today that no matter what the challenge you encounter, what the problems are you deal with, or what fears you face, that you'll continue to stay close to Jesus and never hesitate to say: "Please Lord, help me!" That's not a sign of weakness; that's a sign of courage---a sign of strength----a sign of wisdom, that you know where to turn when you are in need.

And as you are about to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, again like today's unnamed Woman who was on a mission to save her daughter, you will be young women and men also on a mission----and that mission is to live your Faith, and be witnesses to your Faith in Jesus, in the midst of a world that will probably ignore you, rebuff you, and maybe even try to find ways to silence you. What will make the difference and be your strength will be the precious Gift of the Holy Spirit that you receive in this Sacrament of Confirmation. When I anoint your forehead with Sacred Chrism, and say those powerful words, "Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit", you will be changed. Just like the woman's daughter who was healed with just a Word from Jesus, with those words I say, you too will be filled with the Holy Spirit and the Gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Courage (Fortitude), Knowledge, Piety and Wonder and Awe (Fear of the Lord) which He brings to you, ready for you to put to use whenever you need them in the future. But none of that works like magic. Rather, it's like any Gift---it will help you if you allow it to do so.

I want to thank you for the Letters you wrote to me, requesting this Sacrament of Confirmation. You may not remember them, since I think you wrote them back in March---which seems like "forever" ago. But they were very nicely written, and they really helped me to get an insight into what your understanding of this Sacrament is, why you chose the Confirmation names you did, why you chose the Sponsors you have with you today, and what your intentions are as you prepare to live the rest of your lives as good, faithful Catholics.

I want you to know that I too wrote you a special Letter. And I want each of you to have a copy of this letter which I've titled "*Love is all that matters*". I hope that you will take some quality time to prayerfully read it and reflect upon it. Because in this Letter, I try to let you know what a significant moment this is as you receive this very special Sacrament. It's not just another box to check off on your "spiritual to-do list". This is intended to be a life-changing moment for you; the completion of your Initiation period, and the beginning of the rest of your life

to be a “witness” to your Faith in Jesus, and a “missionary disciple” who makes every effort to put your Faith into the actions of your life. When I say “Love is all that matters”, I say that because Jesus told us that the two greatest of all the commandments is to Love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. So, in the end, when all is said and done, to Love as Jesus has shown us is what truly matters.

You’re about to begin your High School years. These years will be exciting, and they’ll also, I’m sure, be challenging. But these years, and all the many, many years of your lives to come will also be fulfilling and enriching as long as you stay close to Jesus.

As I wrote in this Letter to you: *“In the end, Love is all that matters. Regardless of the situations in which we currently find ourselves, including pandemics, political turmoil, racial tensions, economic hardship and worries about the future, if you stay focused on the Person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will enable you to see Jesus Present in the Eucharist, to comprehend what the Eucharist is---the Gift of Jesus Himself given to us as our Food and Drink, and to help you to choose to be a witness to Jesus’ love by treating everyone you meet with the Love of Christ---with dignity, respect, justice and mercy.”*

In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul told us that God wants all people to know His Mercy. There is nothing that God will not forgive. As Paul wrote: *“The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!”* But He can’t forgive us if we don’t ask; He can’t reassure us of His Love if we refuse to come to Him for Mass; He can’t let us know of His Love for us if we don’t spend time with Him in prayer.

As God’s gifts are “irrevocable”, and as the Woman in today’s Gospel was “unrelenting”, I pray that each of you will allow this great Sacrament you are about to receive to “change” you into “Temples of the Holy Spirit” who will be ready to face this world equipped with all the Gifts you need to succeed in every way, but especially in the way that matters eternally: that you will do as today’s First Reading urged us *“to observe what is right and to do what is just”*.

Just as the Woman in today’s Gospel overcame any and all obstacles that stood in her way of coming to Jesus, so may each of you continue to come to Jesus, no matter what problems or challenges you face, so He can give you what you need, and so He may say to each of you what He said to the Woman: *“O you of great Faith! Let it be done to you as you ask!”* God bless you, now and always!