



May 27, 2012

Pentecost—Last Sunday of Easter

"And all were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamations as the Spirit prompted them."—Acts 2:4

Dear Friends;

Today we conclude our fifty-day celebration of the Paschal Mystery, Jesus' Passover journey from death to new life. And we celebrate our new life in him. **This weekend we celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with our Vicar General, Fr. George Mockel.** It is appropriate on this weekend to celebrate the Sacrament, which confers in a special way the Spirit.

The best way to understand Confirmation is in between Baptism and Eucharist. Together these sacraments as are defined in the Catechism are the Sacraments of initiation. They are how we become part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

BAPTISM

Before entering into the Temple area in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, people had to first ritually purify themselves in the ritual baths (mihkva). Then they could enter into the temple precincts and the court of Israel. John the Baptist was baptizing out by the river where tradition held that the people first entered in to the land. And he predicts one who would come to baptize with fire and the Spirit. By this he was proclaiming a new beginning for God's people. Jesus submits to John's baptism as this new beginning.

Christian baptism is our entrance into the temple which is the body of Christ—the Church. We have been purified by Christ's word. And have entered into the land of the promise and are headed to the New Jerusalem which is the Reign of God.

CONFIRMATION

Ancient Israel saw itself as a "nation of priests." The observance of the Law written on the stone tablets given them by Moses set them apart as this nation of priests. The role of priest was to offer sacrifice to God. The sacrifice that Israel offers to God was the observance of the Law—to enact its justice so we might have God's peace.

As the people of God we are part of the priesthood of all believers. Confirmation is our ordination to this priesthood. The law that we observe is not written on tablets of stone but on our hearts. The Spirit of God sets our hearts on fire with divine love. Our sacrifice is the offering of thanks and praise, and lives that proclaim the Gospel and enact God's justice.

There are two ancient Jewish symbols that we use in Confirmation—the laying-on-of-hands and anointing. The laying-on-of-hands expressed the giving of the Spirit. Moses laid hands on those who were to assist him in his work. We see Jesus touch people and they are healed by his touch. And Jesus touches those whom others would not. Those touched by Jesus and the disciples will also be seen as filled with the Holy Spirit. So we lay hands upon those to be confirmed.

The second symbol is anointing with Chrism (olive oil mixed with scented oils). The word "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It is a title. "Christ" comes from the Greek word (*Christos*) translating the Hebrew word *Messiah*—Messiah. It means "anointed one." In the Hebrew Testament we see that prophets, the High Priest and the King were anointed to set them apart. Jesus is seen as God's anointed one—messiah or Christ. The Spirit confirmed this at his baptism by John "This is my beloved Son."

In Confirmation we are anointed by the same Spirit that makes Jesus Messiah and Lord. Like Jesus we are prophets of the Good News of the Reign of God. Like Jesus we are priests offering a sacrifice of praise and thanks through the gift of our own life. And the role of King was to gather and hold the people together as one. And so like Christ our King we continue his ministry of gathering all peoples together. This is the work for which we are anointed.

EUCCHARIST

Each year the People of God were commanded to celebrate the Passover feast. They celebrated their liberation from slavery in Egypt and the journey to freedom. In his earthly ministry Jesus used meals as a prophetic sign of the coming Reign of God. In that Reign all peoples will be gathered as one. And on his last night on earth Jesus used the meal to communicate his love and the gift of his very self. And he invites us to do the same. And just as in life we cannot eat only once and continue living. Eucharist is given as our ongoing food to sustain us in our own journey from sin and death to new life, justice and freedom in God's reign. It is the feast of our freedom. It is our on-going initiation and exercise of our priesthood. In this meal we become what we eat and drink—the body of Christ and offer the sacrificial gift of our life in Christ.

And all of this is the gift and work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the bond of Love between Jesus and the Father. The Spirit now binds us together as the Body of Christ. The Spirit moves us and sends us forth to proclaim the burning love of God.

Shalom—Peace,

Fr Ron