

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - A  
Acts 8:5-8, 14-17;  
I Peter 3:15-18;  
John 14:15-21  
Little Flower - 5/14/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers a happy and blessed Mother's Day!

In today's Gospel, Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, to be with us always. The Holy Spirit enables us to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus.

You may remember that last Sunday's first reading told the story of the institution of the diaconate. Deacons were chosen to handle the distribution of food to the Greek widows. In my homily, I mentioned that "diaconal ministry quickly morphed into something more." In today's first reading, the deacon Philip was proclaiming Christ and working miracles in the city of Samaria.

After the people of Samaria accepted the word of God, the church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria. We are told that the people of Samaria had not received the Holy Spirit because they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The apostles laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

We want to note two things. Today some churches continue to baptize only in the name of Jesus. The Catholic Church does not recognize baptisms in the name of Jesus as valid because of Jesus' words at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...*" [Mt. 28:19-20]. Also, in today's reading, we see the beginnings of the sacrament of confirmation as distinct from baptism.

Priests often focus their homilies on the Eucharist and/or the sacrament of Reconciliation. Rarely do we talk about confirmation in a Sunday homily.

When I was growing up, almost all Catholics were confirmed because they were confirmed as young children. For example, my class at Little Flower received three sacraments in three days. On Friday, we made our first confession. On Sunday morning, we received First Communion. On Sunday evening, Archbishop Schulte confirmed 139 of us.

When we were preparing for confirmation, the one thing we learned was that confirmation would make us soldiers of Jesus Christ. As a sign of that, the Archbishop would slap us on the face. We were able to choose a confirmation name, and, if the Archbishop was in a good mood, he might give us a free day, which he did.

Two weeks ago, Archbishop Thompson confirmed 11 of our young people. Since the age of confirmation was raised, many Catholic young people have not been confirmed.

If you are an adult or young person who has not received the sacrament of confirmation, I would strongly encourage you to consider receiving the sacrament. To be fully initiated members of the Catholic Church, you need to have received all three sacraments of initiation: baptism, Eucharist, and confirmation. Also, if you want to serve as a godparent in the Catholic Church, you must be confirmed. Likewise, the Church encourages confirmation before marriage. Some parishes and dioceses even insist on it.

We believe that the Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism. In Confirmation, we receive a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The word *confirmation* can mean strengthen. Confirmation strengthens our faith, love, and hope. When we receive the Holy Spirit in baptism, we are enabled primarily to be receivers of faith. When we receive the Holy Spirit in confirmation, we are empowered to share faith with others.

My brothers and sisters, in today's second reading, Peter encourages us to always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks us for a reason for our hope, i.e., our faith in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. However, we are always to do it with gentleness and reverence. Unfortunately, as William Barclay wrote, "There are many people who state their beliefs with a kind of arrogant belligerence." We are not to be that way. Peter reminds us to be gentle and respectful of others when we share our faith with them.