

Sixth Sunday of Easter  
May 20-21, 2017

*“A Reason for Hope”*

Readings: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

As you have likely noticed, we are deep into “Confirmation season” as we affectionately call it. Today’s first reading is thus most appropriate. We are told in Acts that Philip traveled to the city of Samaria and there he proclaimed Jesus Christ to the people. He was convincing, apparently an eloquent speaker and it was reported “that with one accord the crowds paid attention to what was said by [him].” Philip was a powerful instrument in the hand of God for healing—demons were cast out, illness expelled from the paralyzed and lame, and many were restored to health. It is not surprising that the text exclaims, “There was great joy in that city.”

But as powerful as his words must have been, as convincing his logical defense of the faith, there was one thing he could not do. He could not impart the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the new believers. It is important to note that this Philip was **not** Philip the Apostle; rather he was Philip the deacon, (Acts 6) one of seven men who were chosen by the apostles to assist them as co-workers. Nothing against him— I greatly admire deacons named Philip!

Philip baptized the people of Samaria in the name of the Lord Jesus. But there was a qualifier. The passage says the new believers had **only** been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This is neither a denigration of Baptism, nor an insignificant detail added in for kicks. It’s just the opposite. The newly baptized needed to receive the Holy Spirit through the hands of an Apostle to confirm their new life in the Church. It fell to Peter and John to lay hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit.

It is a matter of divine and Catholic faith that the bishops are successors to the apostles. They maintain us in their persons as an

Apostolic Church. They are **not** the *replacements* for the apostles; only Matthias was chosen as a replacement for Judas. Rather, they are the successors. Without the apostles, the Holy Spirit could not be fully imparted and something essential would be missing from the Church. The gift of the Holy Spirit

The Sacrament of Confirmation, held here this past month several times per week is a wonderful moment in the life of a young person, and it is among the greatest joys of serving here as rector. I say this because on multiple occasions per week, I get to the faces of young people of all backgrounds and personalities, receiving the fullness of initiation in the Church and to see their manifest joy.

While it is certainly true that young people may be said to “make their own” their Baptism and the promises made on their behalf as infants, it is appropriate to see Confirmation as the bishop who confirms, in the name of the whole Church, that faith which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, that is already present by grace in the soul of the young person. As our first reading indicates, only the apostle could speak for the whole church, and this apostolic connection is necessary for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmation is not only an *anointing*, but also a *commissioning* to live out our faith *in the world*. We are already called to mission by virtue of our Baptism, but at Confirmation we are endowed with gifts of the Spirit (like the Apostles in Acts 2) to be “ever greater witness[es] to the Gospel in the world.”<sup>1</sup> As disciples and witnesses to Christ in both Church and world, we are sent out to act on behalf of the poor and vulnerable, promoting the life and dignity of every human person.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [Sacrament of Charity], no. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), no. 1319.

By means of the fullness of initiation, you the baptized are incorporated in Christ, he who is priest, prophet and king. You share Christ's priestly mission by giving of yourselves daily in union with Christ's supreme sacrifice on the Cross. As prophets, you announce the Kingdom of God in both word and deed and you witness to the Gospel in your family, social life, community and in your commitment to human life and dignity. You share the kingly mission by seeking God's Kingdom of justice in the world.<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Spirit is our Advocate (from L. *advocare*), to call to one's side. This Holy Spirit, entrusted as a gift to the whole Church, but uniquely to the Apostles, is the guarantor that our faith is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. As Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphans." Next Saturday Archbishop Hebda will place his hands on the heads of ten chosen men of Jesus Christ who will become sacred ministers acting in the person of Jesus, and it is the Archbishop who will provide the necessary link to effect the Sacrament of Orders.

Let us shine the light back upon our young people, living reasons for my hope. I rejoice when I see them remaining strong in their commitments, actively engaged to protect innocent life in the womb, properly preparing for marriage, frequenting the sacraments including Penance, never something easy for young people to do.

And they do it willingly and with vigor. At the same time, we must give them reasons. Somehow, even amidst the "vale of tears" we too must become beacons of hope. Young people are idealistic, and some of that ought to rub off on the rest of us. Our legitimate concerns about the world must be tempered with the virtue of hope, showing that we believe that God is indeed in charge.

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<sup>3</sup> Confirmation: Strengthened by the Spirit, Called to Action, USCCB 2013