



From A Bishop's Journal (703)

“Be Sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Gift of God” (2)

I published my fourteenth annual pastoral letter on the occasion of the 2007 Pentecost Sunday. This year, it is on the sacrament of Confirmation that I write. I have only one hope: that we help one another rediscover the wonderful gifts we have received.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

“The way the gift of the Holy Spirit is conferred, from the very beginning has given rise, in the Church, to different rites. In the East as in the West, they underwent varied changes while always preserving the same meaning: to communicate the Holy Spirit. In several Eastern rites, it seems that from Antiquity there prevailed the rite of chrismation, without being all that separate from baptism. This rite is still in use today in most of the Eastern Churches. In the West, there are very ancient reports relative to this part of Christian initiation in which the sacrament of Confirmation was clearly seen. In fact, after the baptismal bath and before the eucharistic banquet, several ritual gestures were indicated: anointing, laying on of the hand, and signing.” These words of Pope Paul VI are in his Apostolic Constitution of August 15, 1971, in response to the Fathers of Vatican Council II. Aware as they were of their pastoral charge, the Fathers had carefully studied the sacraments of Christian initiation and had decided to revise their rites to better adapt them to the mentality of their faithful.

Apostolic Decree

Paul VI noted that throughout the centuries questions and doubts were raised on what belongs with certainty to the essence of the sacrament of Confirmation, especially the importance of chrismation and the laying on of the hand. By his supreme apostolic authority, the Pope decreed and established that in the Latin Church the following would henceforth be followed: *“The sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: ‘Accipe Signaculum Doni Spiritus Sancti’.”* The official translation recognised by the Holy See is: “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The Gifts of the Spirit

I address myself especially to each of the confirmed so that a great feeling of thanksgiving arise in their hearts for the coming of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and so that each of them may begin to unwrap the beautiful gifts that the Holy Spirit is preparing to give them: a spirit of wisdom and

understanding, a spirit of counsel and knowledge, a spirit of filial love, a spirit of strength, of worship and praise. These are most excellent gifts, that we shall never cease fathoming their beauty and grandeur, but which we have to appreciate today.

I know that at the Confirmation preparation, those to be confirmed had the opportunity to reflect on these gifts of the Holy Spirit – their letters to me are there as proof – that is why I say to them: Do not stop considering the gifts you are about to receive in the sacrament of Confirmation. These gifts will help you at all times and everywhere, in the most exciting moments as in the more difficult ones in your lives, in happiness and sadness, as much in freedom as in moments of difficulty and rejection.

Who Can Describe...?

Who can describe the beauty and richness of the gift of wisdom?

It is the gift that makes us recognise the presence of God in our lives.

Who can describe the beauty and richness of the gift of understanding?

It is the gift that enables us to understand the Word of God and apply to in our lives.

Who can describe the beauty and richness of the gift of counsel?

It is the gift that allows us to choose what we must do to live according to the Gospel.

Who can describe the richness and beauty of the gift of knowledge?

It is the gift that makes us understand the true meaning of life and that helps us to answer the main questions of our existence.

Who can describe the beauty and richness of the gifts of filial love, strength, worship, and praise? What beautiful gifts we have to unwrap, throughout our lives! It would be good to start unwrapping today and to give thanks for these wonders.

The “Fruits” of the Spirit

Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us wonderful gifts. These are mentioned throughout the New Testament. Saint Paul mentions several by name: joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control, and justice. These “fruits” are vital signs: to see whether we are in good health we must check our blood pressure and heart rate. These are a good indication of our state of health. In the same way, to know whether we correspond really with the gifts of the Holy Spirit which we have received, all we need to do is to check whether there is in us any joy, justice, and peace in our lives.

One who loves and respect one’s neighbour bears good fruits of the Spirit.

One who has kind and loving words for others, and who spends his/her time speaking well of others, bears good fruits.

One who always shows a happy face, who is calm and relaxed is a witness to the joy of the Spirit in him/her.

One who sows love, hope, and faith wherever he/she passes, responds to the Holy Spirit’s desire for peace.

One who prays, forgives, and loves produces fruits of fidelity which the Holy Spirit asks for.

One who shows acts of kindness and goodwill to others corresponds to the wishes of the Holy Spirit. One who exercises patience day after day corresponds to the wishes of the Holy Spirit who wants us to be patient, kind, and loving.

Effect on Our Daily Lives

Confirmation produces effects in daily life, it affects each of our days. May we always produce beautiful and good fruits! A very simple prayer reminds me of these beautiful gifts of the Spirit:

“We pray you, Lord, to sustain in us
the spirit of clarity to stimulate us in the search of truth,
the spirit of discernment to commit us to the decisions of the Gospel,
the spirit of strength to inspire our courage, at narrow gates,
the spirit of counsel that hastens us to the aid of our troubled neighbour,
the spirit of prayer that draws us closer to you,
the spirit of expectation and desire that keeps our faith and hope alert,
the spirit of love, that brightens our face turned to heaven
and to our brothers and sisters of the world.”

+ *François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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