

Rev. Derek Fairman

5th Sunday of Easter A

In the second reading from the First Letter of St. Peter, we hear St. Peter explaining that the followers of the Lord are being built into a spiritual house. What does he mean? We hear in the next part: to be a holy priesthood to offer sacrifices acceptable to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The ordained priesthood is centered on offering the One Sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made on the Cross, but there is an offering besides. There is what is called the sacrifice of praise, and we join that sacrifice of praise to the Lord's own Sacrifice made present at Mass.

Whenever we come to Mass, to God's house, we are here to offer a sacrifice. What sacrifice? Not the animals of the Jerusalem Temple. Not the incense or the showbread. We are here to offer our souls, our hearts, our minds. This is not something that I mean we do literally. When we come to offer our minds, hearts, and souls to the Lord, that does not mean that we lose anything in the process. Rather, we gain something.

We might think of making an object; teaching; doing good for others in charitable works. There is a way in which we "put ourselves" into that work. The object we make reflects something about ourselves. We do not just pass on information to others, but something of our wisdom, and ourselves. We share our souls in charitable works. In this way, we do not lose anything of our souls in this offering, but our souls expand and grow.

Yet if we are going to offer ourselves at Mass, we want to offer the best that we can. This helps us to understand the Sacrament of Confirmation. One of the effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation is that it binds us more closely to the Church. The Holy Spirit brings us the gifts that we need so that we can participate fully in the Sacrifice that the Lord Jesus has offered.

Whenever we have the Holy Spirit's gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, we expand our mind, so that we can make a better offering. Knowledge answers the questions of who, what, when, and where. Understanding answers the question of how, and wisdom answers the question of why. These gifts take us back to King Solomon, who possessed them to an extraordinary degree, at least early in his reign. He uttered three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs. The Sacrament of Confirmation seals what religious knowledge has been accumulated, and provides the basis for further advancement. The religious knowledge, understanding, and wisdom provide plenty of ways that we can continue to offer to God good thoughts that fill our minds.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit brings us the gifts of counsel and strength. These gifts pertain to making decisions but also about strengthening our souls, so that our souls are not flimsy or fickle. The gift of strength gives our souls moral fiber, and enables us to remain true to the principles we have learned. Counsel means that the Holy Spirit guides us, so that we can see our way through difficulties in life, while remaining faithful to the Lord. These gifts also make our souls fit to offer sacrifice, a worthy offering. St. Peter refers to this fittingness in his letter when describing the Lord Jesus as the cornerstone.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit brings us the gifts of piety and fear of the Lord. Fear refers to reverence, rather than terror. These gifts pertain to loving God, and they help our hearts to offer a sacrifice in love, praise, and gratitude. These gifts ensure that we offer a sacrifice that increases our love for God, rather than taking anything away from it. These gifts are necessary besides knowledge. We may know about God, but without any love for God, without gratitude, can we offer Him the best worship possible?

When we come to Mass, we offer to God our minds, which includes our knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Offering those gifts does not take anything away from our knowledge, understanding, or wisdom. In fact, the more that we give those to God, the more the gifts expand and develop. When we come to Mass, we offer to God our souls, made strong and faithful through the good decisions we make. The Lord then increases those gifts rather than taking any strength away. When we come to Mass, we offer to God our hearts, so that we not only offer to God our love, praise, and gratitude, but that this is the reason why we offer ourselves. This love is returned to us, and expands our hearts.

As we approach the altar, we ask the Lord Jesus to stir into flame the faith that we have in Him, the flame of the Holy Spirit which He has sent into our hearts. If you are awaiting Confirmation at some point, pray that the Holy Spirit may strengthen you in preparation. If you received the Sacrament of Confirmation recently, realize that although the Holy Spirit has sealed your gifts, there is always more to learn, always more that can be developed, with the Holy Spirit's guidance. After all, the Catholic faith has a breadth and depth that has developed over thousands of years, and there is always more for us to develop and learn. If you received the Sacrament of Confirmation a long time ago, be grateful for the Holy Spirit's gifts, which have led you to do what is right and just in God's sight. No matter what, the Holy Spirit will help us make the best spiritual sacrifices that we can make, as St. Peter calls us to do.