

Homily based on the readings from June 2, 2025 (Acts 19.1-8; John 16.29-33)

As I mentioned in a homily last week, the Acts of the Apostles is an incomparable treasure – providing us with a *unique* set of insights into the activities and teachings of the early Church. Today’s first reading is no exception. What we see – laid out with extraordinary clarity – is one of the earliest recorded instances of the Sacrament of Confirmation:

When [the Ephesians] heard this,
they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
And when Paul laid his hands on them,
the Holy Spirit came upon them[.]

This passage is incredibly important, for at least two reasons. First of all, it explicitly debunks the notion – which one often hears among our Protestant brethren – that Confirmation is unnecessary because it does not have any Biblical basis. Secondly – and more importantly for those

of us who are Catholic – today’s reading clarifies both what the Sacrament of Confirmation *is* and what it *is not*.

At a fundamental level, Confirmation is *not* some sort of coming-of-age ceremony – nor is it an opportunity for people who were baptized as infants to make an adult profession of faith. These may be secondary effects of the way we choose to administer Confirmation, but they are not essential characteristics of the sacrament itself. Indeed, in many branches of the Catholic tradition – particularly among Eastern Rite Catholics – infants are confirmed immediately after being baptized. The Sacrament of Confirmation, in fact, can be administered to *any* baptized person of *any* age and with *any* level of education. While we often refer to Confirmation as the “sacrament of Christian maturity,” that is *not* because we must achieve some level of maturity before receiving the sacrament. On the contrary, it is the sacrament itself that *makes* us mature in our faith. The *true* nature of Confirmation is exactly what we heard in today’s reading: when we are confirmed, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as a *completion* of our baptism.

If we are being honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we are facing a crisis today among our youth in relation to the Sacrament of Confirmation – one that is partially of our own making. Far too many young people view Confirmation as a “graduation from Church,” rather than as a sacramental initiation into a lifelong ministry. How often do teenagers who are confirmed on a Saturday not even bother to show up for Mass the following Sunday? There are numerous factors that contribute to this delinquency: popular culture, family life, peer pressure, and so on. Nevertheless, as members of the Church, we need to acknowledge that there is a great deal that *we* could do to improve the situation. While it is reasonable to couple the Sacrament of Confirmation with instructional classes or community service projects, far too often we give the impression that the classes or the projects are the actual *objectives* – rather than the transcendent reality of the sacrament itself.

If there is *anything* we owe our young people, it is to tell them the *truth* – the truth about what is right and what is wrong; the truth about the evils that are afflicting the world; the truth about the nature and the necessity of the sacraments. Withholding the truth – even when it is done out of a misplaced sense of kindness – is actually a form of cruelty. Our own confirmation – our own reception of the spirit of Pentecost – *obliges* us to give witness to the truth. The truth, of course, is more than a set of facts, more than a collection of principles. The Truth is a *person*, a person whom we encountered at our own baptism and at our own confirmation – and whom we are preparing to encounter once again in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It is this encounter that inspired the earliest Christians to proclaim the Truth to the ends of the known world – and which continues to give strength and courage to countless saints and martyrs across the globe. It is this encounter that we must boldly share with the next generation, and with everyone else who does not yet know the infinite love and mercy of Jesus Christ.