

Homily based on the readings from November 16, 2025 (Malachi 3.19-20a; 2 Thessalonians 3.7-12; Luke 21.5-19)

As many of you are aware, [this morning/yesterday] was a joyful occasion within our community. Bishop Reidy came to St. Mary's to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to 17 individuals, representing all three of our parishes. As is often the case, dozens of family members – along with many close friends – journeyed from great distances to support these young people as they completed their sacramental initiation into the Catholic Church. [In fact, that is actually why Father Hammond, the celebrant of this Mass, is here with us today.]

It is an incredible blessing that Confirmation is viewed by so many families as a cause for celebration. Nevertheless, as Christians, we need to remember that we are never guaranteed the love and support of our families – in fact, quite the opposite. Just think about the words from today's Gospel:

You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

You will be hated by all because of my name[.]

It is hard to imagine a *starker* contrast to the festivities that just took place at St. Mary's. As much as we may not want to hear it, the honest truth is that Christians must be prepared to accept *persecution* and *betrayal* just as readily as *kindness* and *encouragement* – even from our most beloved family members and friends.

If we want to understand what is truly expected from us, we need to consider the Sacrament of Confirmation at a more fundamental level. For many families, of course, Confirmation is viewed as a sort of coming-of-age ritual. While it *is* true that Confirmation – at least in this part of the world – is typically conferred on teenagers, it is not limited to people from any particular age group. In fact, under certain circumstances, Catholics of any age – from newborns to senior citizens – are able to receive the sacrament. We often refer to Confirmation as the

“sacrament of Christian maturity,” but that is not because it reflects any sort of maturity we possess on our own – that is not how *any* sacrament works. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit – working through the sacrament – who *makes* us mature in our faith.

To be clear, this kind of maturity does not depend primarily on knowledge of Scripture or familiarity with the teachings of the Church – as important as these abilities are. True maturity in our faith is a kind of courage, which can only come from outside ourselves. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

[Confirmation] gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross. (1303)

These are qualities that can never be taught or learned – but are imparted directly by the Holy Spirit. This passage, of course, echoes Christ’s own words from the Gospel:

Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand,
for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking
that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

As much as we might want the young people who were confirmed [today/yesterday] to live peaceful and uncomplicated lives, that is not what their Confirmation was preparing them for. While most of us have grown up with the expectation that society does not punish people for being Christians, that has not been the case throughout much of human history – and certainly will not be true in many places in the future. There is an anonymous epistle from the second century that beautifully describes both the hardships and the joys of the Christian life:

Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated.

A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do, they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. ... As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.

In other words, persecution in the name of Christ is not an anomaly, not a distraction, but the *way* Christians give witness to the truth. It is for *this* reason – *not* as a family celebration, *not* as a coming-of-age ritual, and *certainly* not as a graduation from church – that people receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. This incomparable gift from God provides us with the spiritual armor that we *need* to do battle with the forces of evil that pervade the world. That is a lesson all of us would do well to remember, whether we were confirmed [today/yesterday] or sixty years ago. *Not a hair on our heads will be destroyed*, as long as we have the courage and the conviction to entrust ourselves *fully* to Jesus Christ.