

## ***He Emptied Himself***

This Sunday, I celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation with fifteen young people at St. Mary's Cathedral in Cheyenne. This is the homily.

Young people often ask me, “*Will I feel any different after Confirmation?*” One of the students asked me, “*What did Confirmation feel like for you?*” They want to know the effects of Confirmation or what difference it will make in their spiritual life. I am still feeling the effects of my Baptism and Confirmation. In fact, I feel the effects more today than on the day I was confirmed.

In the Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul described the effects of Baptism and Confirmation. He reminded the people of Philippi the grace they received as he wrote, “***If there is any encouragement in Christ, any participation in the Spirit, and any compassion and mercy***” (Phil. 2:1) The Sacrament of Confirmation strengthens “***Christ's encouragement***” within us.

More and more, I am aware that the Risen Lord is with me. He constantly guides me and encourages me. That is why Christ gives you his Spirit. He wants to help you and guide you. Another name for the Holy Spirit is the ‘Paraclete.’ Paraclete means “the one whom you call to your side” to help you. Because of Confirmation, you will experience the closeness of the Holy Spirit guiding you and encouraging you. When you call out for help, he will be right beside you.

Confirmation strengthens your “***participation in the Spirit***” or spiritual communion. The Holy Spirit dwells in you. You are given wisdom to think like God, right judgment to discern what is right, and the courage to do it. Today pray for the wisdom, right judgment, and courage of the Holy Spirit. He will be with you.

However, your experience will depend on you. If you pray, then you open yourself more readily to God's grace. If you don't pray, the grace will lay dormant in your soul like a seed that doesn't sprout. In part, the effects of Confirmation depend on your prayer life. Praying is like opening the door of your heart to God's grace. The more you pray, the more you will feel the effects of Confirmation.

The goal of Baptism and Confirmation is to make you and me like Christ. St. Paul wrote, “***Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.... though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.***” (Phil. 2:5-7)

To be *confirmed* is to be *conformed* to Christ. It means to draw near to Jesus on the cross – to receive his Life poured out for you, then to give your life for others. This is one the most beautiful descriptions of Christ's love. “***He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness . . . he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross***” (Phil. 2:6-8). This passage was a hymn sung by the first Christians. Even though he was God, Jesus emptied himself into weak human flesh. He lowered himself to be with us in sickness, in the brokenness of sin, in the darkness of death.

As the first Christians looked at the crucified Jesus, they described his love by saying, “***He emptied himself.***” He selflessly gave his life for sinful humanity. Jesus continues to empty himself at every Eucharist. As Catholics, we are required to have a crucifix near the altar. The sacrifice of the cross is poured out on the altar. The mystery of the cross is renewed at

every Eucharist. Similarly, the Risen Lord empties himself by pouring out the Holy Spirit. The Spirit conforms us to Christ so that we can empty ourselves for the sake of others.

The saints show us what it is like to be conformed to Christ. They show us how to empty ourselves like Jesus. One of the students chose St. Maximilian Kolbe. He wrote: *“I chose St. Maximilian Kolbe because when he was in a Nazi concentration camp, he used his faith to face his oppressors.”* As he faced death, St. Maximilian had the courage of Christ. With fortitude, he emptied himself for a man whom he never knew.

A prisoner escaped, so the commandant announced that ten men would die of starvation. He randomly chose ten who would be starved to death. One of them cried out for mercy because he had a wife and children. Then St. Maximilian Kolbe spoke out saying, *“I would like to take that man’s place. He has a wife and children.”* The commandant was dumbfounded, then ordered Kolbe to join the other nine. In the cell, they were ordered to strip naked, and they starved in the darkness. St. Maximilian led the prisoners in prayers and singing religious songs. He was still alive after two weeks, so they injected him with carbolic acid. (*Saint of the Day*, 6<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., p. 237)

In 2005, I visited the cell in Auschwitz where he died. An Easter Candle was burning in the cell, and I felt God’s presence in a powerful way. When Kolbe volunteered to take the place of the man who cried out for mercy, he did not know him, but he emptied himself for him. About thirty years later, a television interviewer asked this man what it felt like to have been saved from death, to have another man die that he might be spared. He replied, *“Ever since that day I feel that I have been walking in another man’s shoes. I feel impelled to live with his attitude, by the values for which he lived and died”* (*Proclaiming His Kingdom*, John Fuellenbach., p. 89).

That is a perfect description of how you and I should feel because of Confirmation. We should feel so gifted by Jesus who emptied himself for us. We should be impelled to live like him, compelled by his Spirit. That is why St. Paul wrote, ***“Do nothing out of selfishness ... rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but those of others. Have the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.”*** (Phil. 2:4-5)

This is what St. Paul was saying, “If the mystery of Christ’s love has had any effect on you, if you have had any experience of his compassion and mercy, if the Holy Spirit has touched your heart, then have the attitude of Christ. Empty yourself for the good of others. Take the posture of a slave. Wash the feet of your enemies.”

The effect of Confirmation is seen more by actions, than by words. One Confirmation student chose St. Francis of Assisi because he acted like Jesus. The student wrote: *St. Francis said, “Preach the word of God daily, and if you must use words.” The actual quote is, “It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.” Like St. Francis I want to be a witness by action, not so much as a biblical scholar.*

It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching. St. Francis reminds us that actions speak louder than words. Confirmation gives you the grace to act like Christ. That is what people should see in you. Work each day to be like Jesus. But be patient with yourself. It takes time.

Read a short passage from the gospels every day so that you keep learning from him. Pray each day for the grace of the Holy Spirit. Ask Jesus to give you his attitude. Be faithful in receiving his love in the Eucharist each Sunday. If you do those things, you will be conformed to Christ.