

## ***Paschal Generosity***

This weekend we celebrated the opening of the synod in every parish. Also, I celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation with young people in Torrington on Saturday, October 16, then in Cody on Sunday, October 17. The homily is below.

Can you explain what the paschal mystery is? Were you taught that to be a Christian means to share intimately in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ? That is the paschal mystery. The paschal mystery defined Jesus' life, so it defines discipleship. To be a disciple means to walk together with Jesus inside of the Paschal Mystery, sharing in the cross and resurrection.

Were you taught that being baptized and confirmed includes a gift and a task? We are gifted with the grace and the Holy Spirit flowing from the cross of Christ. We have been immersed into the life of the Trinity to live as a child of God – enfolded in divine love, like a child enveloped in the womb of its mother. The gift of the Spirit that empowered Christ empowers us. As a result, we have received a baptismal communion with God and all the baptized.

Many students write that Confirmation is their commitment to live the faith. It makes me wonder if they were taught that Confirmation is first a gift. It is much more about God's initiative to love us, than our initiative to love God. It would be better to say, "I am being confirmed to *embrace* the gift of the Holy Spirit. I am being confirmed to *respond* to God's great love for me."

It is true that we have to make a commitment, but only after humbly accepting the Spirit as gift. We walk in the power of the Spirit to serve like Jesus, to be his hands and his feet. Our task is to give our lives away for others like Jesus did. Baptism and Confirmation set us on a paschal journey to walk together with Jesus inside of the Paschal Mystery.

It is appropriate to celebrate Confirmation together with the Opening of the Synod. The two go hand-in-hand. Both mean to walk together with Jesus toward the cross and the resurrection. Through the synod, Pope Francis is asking us to reflect on how well we are living our Baptism and Confirmation. Are we walking under the influence of the Holy Spirit like Jesus did? Are we journeying together like Jesus journeyed with the apostles and the crowd, pouring out his life for them?

In this gospel, Jesus reminds us that his entire life was a journey to the cross. He said, "***The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many***" (Mk. 10:45). His mission was to pour out his life on the cross as a ransom for others. When people observe how we act, do they see the same paschal generosity? We saw it in Mother Teresa. We marvel at how she emptied herself in serving the least. She was inspired by Jesus words, "***Whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did to me***" (Mt. 25:40). She lived with paschal generosity.

We need to constantly reflect on the gospel to learn from Jesus how to walk. He walked with immense generosity even while others were selfishly grasping for power. To fully appreciate this scene in the gospel, we need to recall that Jesus had just told the disciples that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem. That makes this conversation even more strange. Immediately after he told the disciples about his passion, James and John said, "***We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you ... In your glory, let us sit at your right and your left.***" (Mk. 10:35-37). Talk about self-serving and presumptuous.

If that's who Jesus chose as disciples, he can work with us too in our selfishness. He was so patient with them. Yet, he kept challenging them. He responded, "***Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?***" (Mk. 10:38). In the Garden of Gethsemane he mentioned the same cup, "***Abba, Father. For you everything is possible. Take this cup away from***

*me. But let it be as you, not as I, would have it”* (Mk. 14:36). His attitude is so different from ours. The disciples say, “Give us whatever we want.” Jesus says, “Father, I will do whatever you want.”

It took the disciples a long time to get it. But they wrote the gospel and became martyrs. They lived and died for others so eventually they got it. To be confirmed is to imitate Jesus’ selfless love on the cross. To be a synodal church is to journey together, even with selfish people, and to generously give our lives for others.

This is exactly what St. Paul wrote to the Philippians. He challenged them to love like Christ. ***“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any communion in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, [that is, if Christ has touched your heart with his love, etc.], then complete my joy by being like-minded, with the same love, the same soul, the same mind... Have in you the attitude that was in Christ Jesus”*** (Phil. 2:1-5).

Through the synod, Pope Francis is asking us to reflect on how well we are living our Baptism and Confirmation. Are we walking under the influence of the Holy Spirit like Jesus did? Are we on a Paschal Journey together, like Jesus who poured out his life for others? Do we willingly share in the suffering of the sick and the poor? Who is being ignored by society? Do we care for them with compassion like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Teresa of Calcutta, or St. Dominic Savio?

We are to walk like the saints you chose for Confirmation. I love reading the stories of the saints because it shows me that the faith can be lived in every age. They show us that we can live like Jesus right now, in the particular problems that arise in our day.

St. Francis of Assisi is a great example. He believed that he could live like Jesus. He was inspired by the gospel and applied it to his life in the early 1200s. His dad was a merchant of expensive cloth, and Francis sold the cloth to help the poor. He did what Jesus told the rich man, ***“Sell your possessions and give to the poor, then come, follow me”*** (Mk. 10:21). Christians were fighting in the Crusades, but he went to the Holy Land to seek peace. He crossed the battlefield, entered the Moslem camp, and spoke with the Sultan. Francis looked at the situation of his day, reflected on the Gospel, and followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

That is what Pope Francis is asking us to do. In the synod, he invites us to prayerfully reflect on the gospel, and to let it speak to the problems of our day. He asks us to listen to one another speak about our struggles, all the while listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning what God is asking of us. Will we respond in our day like the saints who lived the gospel in their times?

God told St. Francis, “Go out and build up my house for it is nearly falling down.” Today the church has its own struggles. People have been scandalized by sexual abuse. They are weary from the pandemic. Political division has crept into our families, work, and church. Social media poisons the atmosphere.

Pope Francis asks us to reflect on these issues in light of the Gospel and guided by the Spirit. In the synod, he is asking us to reflect on how well we are living our Baptism and Confirmation. Are we walking under the influence of the Holy Spirit like Jesus and the saints did? Are we journeying together, like the saints who poured out their lives for others? It is fitting to celebrate Confirmation together with the Opening of the Synod. Both mean to walk together with Jesus toward the cross and the resurrection. To walk with paschal generosity.

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