

Sharing the Paschal Journey

I celebrated Confirmation with 23 students from St. Laurence O'Toole and St. Paul's Newman Center in Laramie last Friday, and with 11 students from St. Ann in Saratoga on Saturday. The homily for the Saturday Mass is below.

I read Confirmation letters from students across the state. Their main desire is to be closer to God. They want a deeper relationship with God. A student from Saratoga wrote, "I want to be confirmed so I can become closer to God. I want to be able to more connected to God and the Church. I want to know that I'm being protected by God and the angels. I want to be able to love and serve God at all times."

Jesus said, "***I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father***" (Jn. 10:14-15). Jesus knows his sheep, his disciples, the way the Father knows him. And his disciples know him the way he knows the Father. Do you believe that he knows you that well?

God is close to you, closer than your parents. Even if you are ornery and sinful, Jesus patiently watches over you. He protects you, and he guides you, unless you refuse to listen to his voice.

In Jesus' day, shepherds knew their sheep by name. At night they brought them into a stone enclosure to keep them safe. Several shepherds brought their sheep to the same enclosure. In the morning, each shepherd would come to the gate and call his sheep by name. He did not count them out of the gate. Instead, he called each one by name, and they stood up and walked out.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows your struggles. He knows if you are shy, outgoing, afraid, or depressed. He knows the troublemakers, wanderers, and stubborn ones.

In 1992, I spent 6 weeks in the Holy Land. One day we were walking on a side street and a little Palestinian boy fell ahead of us. He cried for his dad in Aramaic: "***abba, abba, abba.***" Immediately I thought of Jesus' relationship with the Father whom he called *abba*. As I heard the little boy crying out for his dad, I realized that Jesus related to the Father with childlike trust. He wants us to have the same relationship with God. As we heard in the First Letter of John, "***See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God? . . . Beloved, we are God's children now.***" (1 Jn. 3:1-2). To be a disciple is to believe that he loves you unconditionally. You are loved like God's own child.

Looking at the cross, we see that he loves people even when they reject him. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter reminds us that Jesus' love is firm despite being rejected. "***He is the stone rejected by the builders, which has become the cornerstone***" (Acts. 4:10). He loves you, even when you reject him. He forgives you immediately, if only you ask.

To be confirmed is to embrace God's love and to imitate his love. To follow a Good Shepherd who was rejected means that we will be rejected. To be baptized and confirmed is to embrace the cross of Christ. It is to suffer with him. We share in his paschal journey, which is his passion, death, and resurrection.

God has made you his own adopted children, and you feel his consoling love. But you will also share in his suffering love, his paschal love. You will be rejected like the saints that you chose.

One student chose St. Lawrence who was martyred by being roasted on a gridiron. The student wrote: "I chose Saint Lawrence because of his sense of humor even when he was dying. He died from toasting to death on a griddle. About halfway through, he said, 'I am cooked on that side, turn me over.' He was among the seven deacons of Rome serving Pope Sixtus II. They were all executed during the persecution under the Roman emperor Valerian." St. Lawrence had a sense of humor as he was being roasted to death because he was given the strength of Christ. He shared in Jesus' passion and in his strength.

To be confirmed is to be conformed to Christ. That means you will share his rejection and his strength to endure suffering. Sharing in Jesus' suffering is painful but positive. Suffering pushes us to depend on God's strength. And it brings new life to others, just as Jesus' death on the cross gave new life to the world.

This suffering love is God's plan to restore humanity. Often, we see rejection as a negative thing. We view sickness or suffering as negative; yet they are ways of sharing in the cross which brings new life. These are ways of sharing in Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. They are graced moments of sharing his paschal journey.

How well have you come to know Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Are you in awe of how Jesus laid down his life for his sheep? That he loves you even when you sin or reject him? Have you let Jesus' faithful love pierce your hearts? Finally, are you willing to be rejected like him and lay down your life? Are you willing to witness through the power of the Holy Spirit?

Ask for the grace to be conformed to Christ. Ask for the grace to share his paschal journey because you have given his strength, trust, and sacrificial love.