

# Sealed by Christ

May 10, 2021

Last weekend I celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation with 38 students at Our Lady of the Mountains in Jackson (Friday), 17 students at Our Lady of Peace in Pinedale (Saturday), and 11 students at St. Patrick in Kemmerer (Sunday). The homily for Sunday is below.

Over the last four years, people have posted yard signs that say, "Love is love." When I first saw the sign, I was not sure what was intended by saying, "Love is love." For those who post the signs, the message is a way to counter hatred manifested in racism, homophobia, and other ways. But others do not think that the signs are helpful. For them, the message is too simplistic in addressing complex realities. I thought of the sign when I reflected on today's Scripture readings.

The passages for this Sunday are dominated by the word "love." The description of love in the readings offer a positive contribution to how we should address the social issues named in that yard sign. In addition, the youth being confirmed cannot live the gift of Confirmation unless they understand love as Jesus revealed it.

Love is first of all a God-thing. God is the source of love, and God defines love. One of my favorite Scriptures is the one we heard today from the Letter of St. John, ***"In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins"*** (1 Jn. 4:10). You will never get love right unless you start here.

Love is something we receive from God, then we pass it on to others. Jesus defined the concept of "Pay it forward." He washed the feet of disciples who were unfaithful. He forgave those who crucified him saying, ***"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do"*** (Lk. 23:34). When the Risen Lord saw Peter, he restored his friendship before Peter said a word. For Christians, "God is love," and Christ revealed God's love perfectly. He defined love through acts of service, forgiveness, and his sacrifice on the cross.

Through the Holy Spirit, we receive the humble love of God. The Holy Spirit is the love that flows between the Father and the Son. Jesus says, ***"As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love"*** (Jn. 15:9). Human love is a participation in divine love. We can love only because God has poured his love into our hearts. To be confirmed is to be strengthened in God's love.

Recently, some students wrote in their Confirmation letters to me. "You will seal my commitment to Jesus and his church by anointing me with oil." That is not really accurate, but many adults make the same mistake. They think that their relationship with God is based on their commitment, but our relationship with God is a free gift. It is based on God's love for us.

Confirmation is not about making a commitment to Jesus and his church. At least, that is not the main meaning of being confirmed. Rather, it expresses Christ's commitment to you. The Lord Jesus tells you the same thing that he told the apostles: ***"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you"*** (Jn. 15:16). Christ has chosen you to be his friend, and you cannot earn it.

As you are confirmed, I will seal Christ's commitment to you. St. Paul helps us understand his commitment as the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians he said, ***"You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God's possession"*** (Eph. 1:13). In Second Corinthians he wrote, ***"God has put his seal on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment"*** (2 Cor. 1:22).

The word for seal means a permanent mark. It is like the brand a rancher uses to show that he owns his cattle. The seal signifies that God makes us his own. God says, "You're all mine." He brands our hearts with the fire of his love. We need to respond to his love, but that is secondary. We make a commitment to Christ, but only after he has chosen us.

You can only live your Confirmation if you humbly receive God's love. Today, let the Risen Christ seal you with his love. Then ask for the grace to love like Christ. St. John wrote, ***"Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God... Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love"*** (1 Jn. 4:7-8).

One student chose St. Rose Philippine Duchesne because of how she loved like Christ. She wrote in her letter, "I chose St. Rose because she is known for her iron will and her determination for modesty and selflessness. St. Rose was persistent in her quest for helping Native Americans. She overcame all the obstacles and challenges that crossed her path living in the time she did and traveling through the underdeveloped frontier."

At age 49, Rose Philippine left France and came to Missouri. She desired to bring her faith to the Indians, but her Bishop did not see converting Indians as a priority. He directed Rose Philippine to instead establish a paid school for white girls in St. Charles. She negotiated a bargain: she would open a free school, and charge only those who could pay. Also, one day a week would be reserved for teaching Indians and enslaved Blacks.

Later, Rose Philippine befriended a young priest named [Pierre-Jean De Smet](#), and she talked with him about her calling and her frustrations. When the Potawatomi tribe requested a Catholic mission and school in Kansas, De Smet applied to the Bishop for Rose Philippine Duchesne. When asked how a 72-year-old woman might be of use on the Indian Frontier, De Smet replied: "She must come; she may not be able to do much work, but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us. Her very presence will draw down all manner of heavenly favors on the work." Father De Smet later said of her, "Never did I leave her without the feeling that I had been conversing with a saint."

Rose Philippine had an intense prayer life. The Indians were struck by her prayerfulness, and they named her, "Woman-who-prays-always." She loved with such generosity because she was

filled with God's love. In her we see that "love" is Christ acting in us. "Love" is the fire of the Holy Spirit shining out in us.

***"In this is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to expiate our sins"*** (1 Jn. 4:10). Just as God the Father sent his Son to expiate our sins, so Christ sends us to counter hatred with his goodness. This is the way to end hatred and racism in society. It is to be Christ's love in the world. It means to pay it forward, like Christ did. If we seek to solve society's social ills through human ingenuity and goodwill alone, we will fail miserably. Our response will be inadequate; our energy will run out. God alone can save the world. Therefore, our efforts need to be rooted in divine love.

As you are confirmed today, focus on two things. Ask God to make your heart overflow with his love and ask for the grace to serve selflessly like Christ. None of us deserves God's love. Yet, it is ours if we open ourselves to the gift. Even if you struggle with selfishness and sin, ask the Risen Lord to fill you with the Holy Spirit. God chose weak disciples and made them strong with his Spirit. He will do the same with you.