

Third Sunday of Lent, Year B/Diocesan Confirmation Retreat

(150 8th, 9th, & 10th graders from 10 Parishes)

March 4, 2018

Spring is “in the air”, even though it’s still a little more than two weeks away--we can begin to see the signs all around us.

This is also “Spring Training” season for most sports. Professional baseball is in high gear in the Grapefruit League in the warm parts of the country of Florida and Arizona, with Opening Day scheduled very early this year, on Thursday March 29th (which happens to be Holy Thursday).

Many of you have probably will be having some “Spring Training” camps coming up for the extra-curricular activities in which you might participate: for band, or track, or cheerleading, or baseball.

We are beginning the Third Week of Lent, which is very much like a six-week “Spring Training” camp for our spiritual lives. We have taken on some special “training” exercises in the form of our Lenten resolutions----perhaps, spending extra time in prayer; maybe you’ve given up candy, or eating in between meals, or desserts; or maybe you’re trying to be extra patient with your siblings, or your classmates. But what Lent really is about is for us to try to spiritually focus on our relationship with God, and our relationship with one another.

Just like most regular “spring training camps” take you back to the basics----drilling over and over the routine mechanics of baseball, or being in a marching band, or cheerleading squad, or running five miles a day to get back in shape for track-----Lent also takes us back to the basics in terms of our relationship with God and neighbor.

There’s nothing more basic than the Ten Commandments, which is what we heard in today’s First Reading. Do you remember how old you were when you first learned the Ten Commandments??? Perhaps 2nd or 3rd grade---back when it was time for you to make your First Confession and to receive your First Holy Communion? And I’m sure that most of you can still recite all 10 of them “off by heart”, right?

There are 10 Commandments, but we can divide them into two major groups: the first three tell us about our responsibilities toward God---what to do and

what not to do; and the other seven tell us about our responsibilities to everyone else: our parents, our neighbors and friends, and people in general.

Some people might look at the 10 Commandments and think that God just wants to impose these heavy restrictions on our freedom; but really, the Commandments are more about very specific ways that God shows us how much He loves us.

You may not remember being 1 or 2 years of age, but I'm sure your parents have told you the stories over and over again about how often they had to tell you "no" in those years. And they still do that even these days, in different ways. And they always will. They do that----have rules for you to follow; restrictions that you have to observe; things that you are forbidden to do and places that you cannot go----because that's the way they show you how much they love you. Each of those rules is a sign of their concern for your well-being and your safety. When you were two, you didn't understand that; and maybe you cried and threw tantrums when you couldn't climb up onto the stove and play with the pretty bright flames. Eventually, we hope, you come to understand that your parents give you rules as signs of their love for you, and that's exactly what the Commandments are for all of us---they're very basic, foundational rules of life we are expected to follow----very basic.

Take for example the 5th Commandment. It tells us that the basic responsibility we have toward people is: Do not kill them! You can't get any more basic than that, right. That's a very low bar in terms of "expectations"---it doesn't tell us how to treat them beyond that; just don't kill them! And the same with the others: honor your parents, don't break the sacred bond of marriage, don't steal, don't lie, and don't be jealous or envious of other people or things.

And just like in Spring Training camps, once we understand the basics very clearly, we can go on to learn new skills, and more complex routines, so too with our Lenten practices. Once we understand the importance of prayer, fasting, and works of charity and kindness, then we can go on to understand the more complex aspects of the responsibilities we have for living our life now and into the future. And more specifically, once we understand that we can not kill people, we are better prepared to learn how we are to treat them with kindness, compassion and love.

You've been here for this retreat to help you get prepared for the very important Sacrament of Confirmation that you'll be receiving sometime in the weeks/months ahead. And so the retreat talks and discussions have focused on what it means to be a baptized member of the Body of Christ. You've focused on the sacraments, and on how you are to try to live a virtuous life.

I imagine that most of you were baptized when you were Infants, right? And so it takes a while for us to come to understand what being baptized means---and how you're supposed to live as a baptized person. We assume that you are now old enough to understand what being baptized means, and that you are willing, not only to follow the basics of the Ten Commandments, but also that you are willing to faithfully live according to the promises your parents and Godparents made for you at baptism.

Confirmation completes within you what began at baptism, but confirmation also commits you to live your life with a certain sense of "mission" and "responsibility" in standing up for and giving witness to your faith in Jesus.

That's what we saw Jesus doing in this morning's Gospel passage. He came to the Temple---the place where people are supposed to come to be able to worship God and to find a sense of the Sacred. But what did He find? That people had turned the Temple into a "marketplace"---selling animals for the prescribed ritual sacrifices, and being completely distracted from the primary purpose of coming to the Temple: prayer with God! And so Jesus took some radical action----He overturned all the tables, spilled all the money on the floor, and drove out all the animals and the merchants. Obviously that didn't go over very well, and it got Jesus into some serious trouble with the religious leaders. But Jesus saw something that was wrong, and He had to make it right.

That's what Confirmation means for you, and for me. Not only as a baptized member of the Body of Christ, but as one who is confirmed in the faith, we take on additional responsibilities to not just follow Christ in our lives, but also to point the way to Christ to others so that they too can follow Christ.

Confirmation makes us Witnesses to Christ. Confirmation asks us to share the Good News of Jesus with your friends, classmates, teammates, and neighbors----not necessarily in words, but certainly in the actions of your lives: in the ways you treat other people, in the ways you are not afraid to practice your faith, to stand up for what's right, and to go out of your way to help those in need. To be what

we sometimes call “missionary disciples”---those who follow Jesus and help others to do the same.

And just like Jesus got Himself into trouble, it’s possible that by standing up for our faith, or in not being afraid to practice our faith, we might have some of our friends make fun of us, or even disagree with us. But when we know what is right, and how we are supposed to live our lives, and why living in the ways of God is the way for us to find joy in this life and eternal happiness with God in Heaven---well then, like Jesus, when we are confronted with a wrong---a temptation---a sin, we have to do what’s right.

But the good news is that we are not just left on our own to do that. We have the best Gift of all-----we have the power and strength of the Holy Spirit Who comes to make His dwelling within us----to make our bodies true “temples of the Holy Spirit----and He makes available to us the Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude (Courage), Knowledge, Piety, Wonder and Awe/Fear of the Lord. We also have the Church, the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist; we have our prayers and devotions, and the tender guidance of Our Blessed Mother.

These weeks of Lent and this weekend retreat, are both like “spring training camps” that make sure that we don’t forget the basics and that we can build on that basic knowledge and skills so that we can be faithful to our increasing responsibilities as we get older and live in a more complex world. We just need to keep focused on what our life in this world is leading us to---eternal life in Heaven; we have to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, and open ourselves to the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that, as St. Paul told us, “*we can proclaim Christ crucified....the power....and wisdom of God.*”

God bless you!