

Beloved and Sent

On Sunday, I celebrated Confirmation with 55 students in Casper during two Masses at St. Patrick Parish and St. Anthony Parish. The homily is below.

To be confirmed only two things are essential. Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation involves lots of classes, doing service projects, having a sponsor, choosing a Confirmation saint, etc. But in the end, only two things are necessary to be a faithful disciple. First, know that God loves you. You are a beloved child of God. Second, know that you are sent to continue Jesus' mission.

This is the essence of Confirmation. God loves you, and God sends you. If you believe those two things, if you are reading to live as a child of God who is sent, then you are ready to be confirmed. Then you will be a strong disciple.

Today's gospel passage is a perfect example of God's steadfast love for us (Jn. 20:19-31). The disciples were stunned by Jesus' mercy. The last time they saw Jesus face-to-face was in that same room. He celebrated the Last Supper with them and washed their feet. When he warned Peter that he would deny him, Peter swore that he would die with Jesus, if necessary.

Imagine how he felt when the Risen Christ stood in their midst. Did Peter try to hide behind the others? All the disciples must have been anxious about what Jesus would say. But he said nothing about Peter's denial or their failure to stand beside him. Instead, he greeted them with mercy by saying, "**Peace be with you.**" They must have been dumbfounded, so he said it again, "**Peace be with you.**" He reassured them that his friendship with them was rock solid. Peter was amazed with Jesus' faithful love. He must have been flooded with feelings of unworthiness, forgiveness, and peace.

In Hebrew, the word for peace is shalom. Shalom means total well-being in every aspect of life. It means to be healthy, to have food, shelter, and complete security. Shalom means to enjoy a harmonious relationship with people and with God.

When Jesus said to the disciples "Shalom. Peace be with you," it was like saying, "All shall be well. Even though you were so weak that you denied me, I will always love you. I will always forgive you. I will always be with you. All shall be well. All manner of things shall be well." "**Though the mountains fall away, and the hills be shaken, my love shall never fall away from you, nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you**" (Is. 54:10).

Today when you are confirmed, I will say, "Peace be with you." Be confident that the Risen Christ fills you with his peace. You are being confirmed on Divine Mercy Sunday, and mercy is at the heart of God's peace.

When Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on the disciples, he breathed mercy into them. Giving the disciples the Holy Spirit and filling them with mercy was simultaneous. Immediately he told them to forgive. "**Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them**" (Jn. 20:23). After Jesus forgave the disciples, how could they not forgive? When you receive God's mercy, you feel the need to forgive.

Today be open to Jesus' faithful love, no matter how weak you feel. Even if you feel unworthy, welcome the Holy Spirit and God's mercy. That is what made Peter and the disciples great. They knew how to accept mercy. And that changed everything. They were not trapped in their weakness or sins, but they were on fire with new hope. Mercy fuels mission.

Most of you wrote in your letters that you want to be closer to God. Why do you feel that way? Where does that desire come from? It is God speaking to your heart and saying, “Let me be close to you. Trust in my love for you. Open your heart to my mercy.” God always takes the initiative in loving us first, just like Risen Christ who appeared to the disciples in the upper room.

The gift of the Holy Spirit and being sent go hand-in-hand. The Risen Christ says to you, “*As the Father sent me, so I send you*” (Jn. 20:21). Imagine how unworthy the disciples felt when they heard Jesus say that. How could he think of sending such weak men? But God does not send us based on our strength. I was not chosen to be a bishop because of my strength. Instead, God chooses us and gives us his strength. Today you will receive God’s wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, and all the gifts flowing from the Spirit.

St. Joan of Arc, St. Sebastian, St. Lucy, and St. Catherine of Siena were strong and courageous because the Holy Spirit strengthened them. To be confirmed is to be strengthened with the Spirit.

Today the Risen Christ says to you, “*As the Father sent me, so I send you.*” How did the Father send Jesus? What gifts did the Father give Jesus for his mission? He was filled with the Spirit. He was filled with the Father’s mercy to forgive sinners, to heal the sick, and to love without measure.

Like Jesus, the first disciples were sent filled with mercy. That is what we see in the saints. They were sent filled with mercy. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton expressed her love of God by saying, “God is mine and I am his.” That is what she wrote in her journal when she received her first Communion when she was 31 years old, “GOD IS MINE, and I AM HIS.” She knew that she was a beloved child of God. And she was sent filled with mercy. She founded schools for poor girls and orphanages for poor children.

Like the saints, you are given the Spirit to continue Jesus’ works of mercy. Every baptized and confirmed Christian is co-responsible for the mission of Jesus. Priests, religious sisters, deacons, or bishops share in Jesus’ mission. So do all the baptized and confirmed. All of us are co-responsible for the mission of Christ.

To be confirmed only two things are necessary. First, know that God loves you, just as Jesus loved the disciples. Second, know that you are sent to continue Jesus’ mission. Receive the Spirit with humility and gratitude. Then know that you are sent. You are co-responsible for the mission of Jesus.