

6th Sunday of Eastertide (A)

10th May 2026

'The Gift of Confirmation'

Acts 8: Philip in Samaria; Peter & John confirm with HSp.

Ps 32: *I will tell what He did for my soul*

1Pt 3: *Christ ... put to death in the flesh, made alive in the Spirit.*

Jn 14: 15–21: *the Father will give you another Helper, ... the Spirit of Truth ...*

The readings today prepare us for the final two great feasts of Eastertide, namely Ascension and Pentecost: *Ascension*, this Thursday, the return to heaven of the Risen Lord; and *Pentecost*, 10 days later, when the Holy Spirit comes down on the Apostles in power. In particular, these readings speak to us powerfully about the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of our receiving that gift.

The 1st reading (*Acts 8*) is well worth paying attention to, since it is very instructive about the sacraments. Philip (one of the deacons we heard of being chosen in last week's reading) is evangelizing in Samaria, which wasn't a Jewish area. He had made many converts there, and baptized them, but it took a subsequent visit of two Apostles, St Peter and St John, to bring the Holy Spirit upon them in power. This is a clear indication that from the beginning the Church understood there to be 2 sacraments here: the ritual of *Baptism* being one; its

'*Confirmation*' in the Holy Spirit being another: Philip, being a deacon could confer Baptism into Christ; but it took an Apostle (a bishop, in effect) to confer the further initiation in the Spirit. It's worthwhile making a reflection today on this wonderful sacrament of Confirmation: partly because 11 of our student community will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in 10 days' time; secondly, because those of us who have already received Confirmation could do with a reminder of its grace and power, especially since it may be many years since we were Confirmed; and thirdly, because it's the time of year when we should be making that invitation to those who are not Baptized, not Catholics, or not Confirmed, to be thinking and praying about their Christian calling, and helping them towards seeking the Lord's Sacraments of life in the next academic year.

As the 1st reading implies, the laying-on of hands is a key action through which the gifts of the Spirit come in Confirmation. This is the Spirit promised by Jesus in the Gospel today — the Spirit that, He assures the Apostles,

will come upon them when He Himself withdraws from their sight: He promises them “*another Helper to be with [them] for ever ... the Spirit of Truth*” who can come only from God. The word that St John uses in this verse is *Παράκλητος* — a quasi-technical term here translated “Helper,” but which other translations render as “Advocate,” “Counsellor,” “Comforter,” or simply “Paraclete.” The literal meaning of “Paraclete” is ‘one who stands alongside,’ as one pleading or speaking up on behalf of another. Our Lord implies that this is the divine role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as St Paul also teaches us in one of his letters (Rom 8):

[26](#) the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For when we do not know what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27](#) And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

In other words, the Holy Spirit promised to the Apostles by Jesus is to be our constant guide and companion, and by whose indwelling in our souls we can be pleasing to God.

The Spirit of Confirmation *is* this Holy Spirit who came down on the Apostles and Our Lady at Pentecost. Confirmation is, then, for us, that sacramental anointing with the Spirit that the Apostles received at Pentecost, and those Samaritans did when St Peter & St John visited them to lay hands on them. Confirmation, you see, is not principally about *my* ‘confirming’ that I want to keep being a Catholic — though it does have an element of that adult Christian commitment, the opportunity to make one’s Baptismal Profession of faith for oneself. But more importantly it is *God’s confirmation of you*, in your faith and your baptismal charisms; it’s God’s gift of His own divine person, His Holy Spirit, to confirm you in your faith, strengthen you in His Spirit, ... As the Rite says, at the key moment of the anointing with Chrism, “*be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” Our Baptismal grace is ‘sealed-in’ at Confirmation with this divine anointing and outpouring of God’s grace.

Importantly, *Confirmation is not an ‘optional extra’* to Baptism, it’s a necessary grace to confirm one’s

Baptism. So, if anyone here has missed the opportunity to be confirmed, for whatever reason, then although we're already too far in to this year's preparation for the Sacrament, still get in touch with me for a conversation, as you can always request the great gift of the Sacrament of Confirmation next year. Many of us would have been confirmed at about 14, if not younger; I remember my Confirmation quite well — it was a significant day for me, and I recall the vigour with which the bishop preached, so kindly and so well. (Providentially he went on to be the very same bishop who ordained me a priest 19 yrs later.) There are joys in entering in to that Sacrament as a teenager, knowing that the Church then considers you an adult Catholic, fully-fledged, completely initiated into the Body of Christ. But there is also a blessing in being Confirmed that bit later, at university age, when one can approach the questions of one's faith in a more mature and considered fashion, and make that request for the Sacrament in a fully committed adult way.

We each need that grace of Confirmation to fan into a flame our Christian life. If Baptism 'lights the candle,' then Confirmation 'adds fuel to the fire,' setting one alight, aglow in the Spirit. Baptism makes us members of Christ's family, our cleansing and adoption as brother/sister of Christ; and Confirmation fully activates that membership. Baptism brings us in to the Church, and Confirmation sends us out, as the Church, on mission. (It's rather as we heard a couple of weeks ago with Our Lord's self-description as *the Good Shepherd*: He both protects us in the sheepfold, but He also leads us out again into pastures new. One is Baptism, making us His holy flock; the other is Confirmation, making us His missionary disciples.)

So, the gifts of Confirmation are exactly those sorts of spiritual gifts that Jesus teaches the Apostles He will be sending upon them, when He speaks to them in Jn 14 about the Spirit. He promises:

- *Himself*, His own Holy Spirit, to be living with them & "in them";
- the *strength* to keep loving God, and keep the

commandments;

— the *ability to live by faith* (not feeling cut off from Jesus in the absence of His visible presence, but joined to Him by prayer and faith): *I am in the Father, and you in Me and I in you.*

— the *wisdom* and opening of the mind to understand the ways of God.

These are the gifts of a mature faith — gifts we each so need! — the faith of one Confirmed in the Spirit: living in the Spirit, living by the Spirit. Let us revel in this gracious gift which God pours on us in Confirmation: the joy of life in Christ. I'd like to end with the Prayer of the Confirmation Rite. Those of us who've been Confirmed, let us renew our faith in the Jesus's Spirit to animate us in His gifts; those of you who've not yet been Confirmed, take this prayer to heart and make it your own, that you will — please God — seek Confirmation in the near future:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought these your servants to new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, freeing them from sin: send upon them, O Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete;

give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety; fill them with the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.