

**Knowledge of God, Joy, Gentleness**      The Sacrament of Confirmation      Friday, May 10, 2019    Is 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9;    Rom 5:1-2, 5-8;    **Lk 8:4-10a, 11b-15**    (By changing people the Holy Spirit can change our whole world, and this is what actually God intends to do. Are you in?)

Before I begin my homily, I would like to say that every year we have had some excellent young people receiving the sacrament, being interviewed, and so on. But this year I absolutely enjoyed it the most because you, this year, **have garnered a very high level of insight**, which previously I did not actually see in young people; and **this year I heard the best questions**, and I love questions. So **I really enjoyed the interviews this year more than ever**, which I do not say to slight any other class or any other year, but to say that you really deserve to hear this and that I think many of you, including those who are struggling with the idea of faith itself, that **you are engaged in this in a meaningful, wholesome, and holy way**. And of course it also means that **your teachers must be doing something right. So congratulations to all of you**.

Now the **parable of the Sower and the Seed** happens to be an excellent way to introduce the idea of Confirmation, because taken in itself before the explanation, if you just hear the parable itself, what it really says, what it reveals, is that **Jesus himself had what I would have to call a supercharged optimism about his own mission**. Obviously he is the sower of the seed, and he is saying in this parable well, yes, I know that a lot of the seed I am sowing is being wasted, but those who are receiving it are so rich, are so fruitful, are so filled with God that **the harvest is just miraculous**. And I believe that Christian people have to keep this in mind: that Jesus himself had a very positive attitude toward the eventual success of the mission, his mission, God's mission, which is **to renew the world, to save us from ourselves**. And if Christian people are going to lose that hopefulness, that is really bad. I hear Christians sometimes who sound like prophets of doom. This is not good. I did not hear that from you.

Now on the way to this happy outcome, there are a lot of problems. **Jesus was a realist**, not just an optimist; he was a realistic man. He saw what was really going on in life. **He saw that there were people so beaten down by adversity or misfortune or bad choices that they were like a footpath, hard and worn**. He knew that they were never going to be his disciples, not unless something plowed up this hard footpath and made it open to receive a seed. Now that means—it's really a very sad observation, it's a good one, it's a true one, but sad because it means—that here people cannot actually live out the potential that God has placed in them. Why? Because that's

what the word does; the word releases the potential of all those who are born from God and designed to be the image and likeness of God. Now this is not necessarily their fault. A lot of people in the world are beaten down **by forces beyond their own control, and we must never express a sort of judgment about those who are in such a dilapidated state.**

Now there are others, that's the second group, who forego the potential within them because they really never think deeply about life, so they become or remain **shallow, and there's no spiritual mind for the gospel to plant itself in.** You could call these people **the rootless among the rocks. They simply don't reflect enough about: what life is, why they are.**

Then there is a third group mesmerized by the world or so concerned about the bottom line or preoccupied with passing things that **the breath of God is actually choked out of them.** This third group **abiding among the thorns.**

And yet the failure of various people to grasp the message and to bear fruit does not deter Jesus from what he wants to do or what he believes will happen, so you might wonder now: **what is this harvest like and how do those who produce fruit, how do they differ from those that don't?** That's a legitimate question. I will focus only on a couple points. Dan said I cannot have more than one hour.

First, the seed of the gospel opens up the divine potential which, as I mentioned, is in all people made in the image and likeness of God. I will look at only one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the gift of the Knowledge of God or **the Gift of Knowledge.** To know God or to know in the Spirit, in contrast to know by reason, **is to have a profound empathy for all of creation, especially fellow human beings called to this voluntary life with God,** this voluntary communion with God, this voluntary shared work with God that we call the kingdom of God. Now all the saints in the history of the Church were full of empathy. Knowledge is not a head thing, not this kind of knowledge. **It is rooted in the heart and does not exist among ordinary emotions,** which are often colored by our own personal experiences. This is from the Spirit; it's from a higher place within us.

Now in our world today **empathy is in short supply,** as you can see. People's concern is so often limited to a very small number of people that they care about: their clan, their family, their business, their whatever. And you can see and you can feel that prejudice abounds in our world today; that is lack of empathy, lack of the Gift of Knowledge, ignorance of the Spirit. But if knowledge of God were to spread to the peoples of the earth, this alone would motivate all the

cooperation necessary to solve all our pressing problems, be they political, economic, environmental, social, or what have you. **The reason people are not motivated to do something is that they don't care, and they don't care because they don't have this knowledge of God, this gift of the Spirit.** And without it, sad to say, and I don't want to be a prophet of doom, but sad to say **without it the gradual destruction of life on earth is plausible**; it is a plausible outcome. When, I don't know, but it could happen. Now this is only one of the seven gifts, and it's so important.

Now you may ask, well **how does his knowledge of God spread to the world? Well that's what the sower is doing. The question tonight is: do you want to be part of it?** Do you want to share in the sowing? Obviously this is not simply a matter of going to church and taking class, although our worship and our formation programs are very important to equip us for this work of sowing the seed in the world. But the seed has to take root in us; **we have to become that fertile ground changing us before we can witness to others.** This transformation of our minds and souls involves both the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Now most of you are aware of the **ruinous effects that alcohol and drugs can have in people's lives**, not that there isn't a proper place for alcohol and for medication, but they can be ruinous. But drugs and alcohol come into us from outside. **There is within us an equally toxic reality, which we could call negative emotion that really deprives us of sobriety.** When 1 Peter says, "Stay sober and alert. The devil is prowling like a lion to devour you," he is not talking about avoiding wine or whiskey or drugs. He means avoid **negative emotions**. They are a powerful poison. **They deprive us of sobriety and make us sick.** The Holy Spirit comes to our rescue with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. **The fruits of the Holy Spirit are life-affirming emotions that are a positive influence on ourselves and others, and are the fruit of a committed and intentional relationship with Christ.** It is our hope that you will make an intentional commitment to Christ, not only formally tonight as you speak, but actually **in your heart**.

It is the **fruits of the Holy Spirit that give us true sobriety.** I will only mention two of them; there are about eight, two I will mention only: **joy and gentleness.** I'm sure you know **people who are joyless, perhaps obsessed with sadness or worry.** These negative emotions stem from an appraisal of the world absent the influence of God. So they are very sane and rational if you have no sense of God. You have also met **bullies who think that they can push you around and get their way.** They are evaluating the world through the windowpane of their own small maybe

frightened egos. And people with small, frightened egos try to act big and project the strength they don't have. Terrorists are just bullies on steroids. **These unpleasant and negative behaviors are rooted in a perception of life minus the Holy Spirit.** So you see the Holy Spirit is not simply another word for faith. People can have faith, people can be religious, and not have the Holy Spirit. **That's why Confirmation is such an essential sacrament, not just for you as an individual, but for the Church as a community.** So in a godless world bullies make sense, joyless people make sense; in a God-filled world they do not.

God sends the Holy Spirit to be our constant companion, and **two of the ways in which we experience that companionship is joy and gentleness.** They are hallmarks, two very important hallmarks, not the only but **two very important hallmarks of Christ's followers.** In our society they are countercultural and like all the fruits of the Holy Spirit are health-giving emotions that expand and elevate our sense of self: who I am, who I believe myself to be. And they reflect the qualities of Christ himself, which is his whole idea. **He became human to give us all these qualities.**

Now I have only mentioned one gift and two of the fruits. **By changing people the Holy Spirit can change our whole world, and this is what actually God intends to do. Are you in?**