

Paraclete
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Acts 8:14-17; 1P 3:15-18; Jn 14:15-21)

At the Last Supper, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, whom he called the “Advocate” (Greek: Parakletos). A *Paraclete* is like your defense attorney in court. He is the one you give you comfort, strength, encouragement. He defends and protects you, advises you, and speaks on your behalf. When it is your time to give testimony, he helps you with the words to say. The Paraclete is the Holy Spirit of Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Piety, Strength, and Fear of the Lord.

At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples the hour had come for him to depart; he was about to leave, and the world would see him no more. They didn’t like to hear him say that, especially when it was clear he was about to die. But Jesus assured them, even though he was “going to the Father,” he would “not leave them orphans,” but send them this great Paraclete to be with them in his place.

In fact, during this Last Supper discourse, Jesus told them it was better for him to leave, and for them to have the Paraclete instead of him (Jn 16:7). Because actually, through the Paraclete, they would be able to perform even greater works than he did (Jn 14:12). And more importantly, through the Paraclete Jesus would be able to stay with them in a form that was even greater than the Incarnation.

Through the Incarnation, when “God became man and dwelt among us” in physical human nature, Jesus was among his disciples in a limited way. Limited by time and place, limited to external conversation and activity together. But through the Paraclete, whom he would send from the Father after his departure and glorification, he would dwell with his disciples in a completely unlimited way. He would dwell within the soul of each disciple, by means of Sacramental union. Through the Eucharist especially, he would “be with you always, until the end of the ages” (Mt 28:20, Jn 14:20).

So even though Jesus “leaves” his disciples and this world by means of his crucifixion and death, he does so in order to “remain” with his Church and disciples even more profoundly, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the indwelling graces of the Sacraments which the Holy Spirit effects.

And so we still have Jesus with us, but not in his physical human nature. We have him with us through his spiritual human nature (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-50), the glory of the Resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is with us through the Paraclete. And by means of the Paraclete, he continues to accomplish salvation.

That is why we need to focus on the sacrament of Confirmation. During Easter we focus a lot on the Sacraments of Baptism (by which we are incorporated into the death and Resurrection of Jesus), and Eucharist (by which his divine life is nourished in us). But we also need to focus on the Sacrament of Confirmation, by which we are given the Paraclete to be with us and help us accomplish our mission. There are three “Sacraments of Initiation” that make us Catholic, and which are celebrated during Easter. All three are important, all three are necessary.

On Easter Sunday, at the beginning of this holy season, we renewed our Baptism. On Pentecost Sunday, at the end of this holy season, we must renew our Confirmation.

There are some people who say Confirmation is not a sacrament. Martin Luther taught there are only two sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist. Because of this error, most Christian denominations are without Confirmation, having “only been baptized in the name of the Lord” (cf Acts 8:16).

In the second reading today, from Acts of the Apostles, we can see how from the earliest days of the Church, there was most definitely a second sacrament that took place after baptism, and it was distinct from baptism.

Baptism makes you a Christian, by causing you to be born again from above, in Christ’s divine life. But Confirmation completes baptism through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who brings the image of Christ to full stature in the soul. Baptism can be celebrated by any of the Church’s ordinary ministers, including deacons. But Confirmation is celebrated only by the bishop, or by a priest who has been delegated by the bishop, using Holy Chrism blessed by the bishop.

Acts of the Apostles (chapter 8) tells of Philip, one of the seven deacons ordained to assist the apostles, who went down from Jerusalem to Samaria, where he made many converts, and baptized them (Acts 8:4-8)). But since he was only a deacon, he could not confirm them. Our reading tells us what happened next:

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

They had “only been baptized.” This is proof that baptism is not enough for full initiation. Another sacrament is needed to complete baptism, and it must be celebrated by an apostle. Confirmation is an Apostolic Sacrament. It is celebrated by an apostle or one of the successors of the apostles who have the apostolic

sacramental authority. Those who are qualified are bishops, who have the fullness of apostolic authority to teach, shepherd, and sanctify, and also priests, who have a substantial sharing in the apostolic authority.

The graces of Confirmation equip the disciple for mission. They impart the “character” of Christ indelibly on the soul, by filling the disciple with the Holy Spirit who is the same Spirit that animated Christ. This is the Spirit of Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, Counsel, Piety, Strength, and Fear of the Lord.

In the second reading, St. Peter tells Christians, “*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope*” (1Pt 3:15). A Christian is called to testify and give witness, to explain and defend the truth which comes from God. Sometimes this is done with words, argument, and apologetics that manifest Understanding and Knowledge. In times of difficulty and trial, it is done with the Strength that comes from the Lord. At all times, it is done through the evidence of a pious and reverent life, the irresistible witness of Fear of the Lord. The Holy Spirit, who is within you, acts as the divine Paraclete, speaking words of Wisdom (cf. Jn 15:26-27; 16:8-15): “*he will testify and you also will testify*”.

During these final days of the Easter season, let us pray daily, like the first disciples (Acts 1:14), for the coming of the Holy Spirit, that he may “stir into flame” again the gifts we received through our Confirmation (cf. 2Tm 1:6). In this way, we will be prepared by our Paraclete to testify to Christ before the world, which puts us on trial and seeks to discredit our faith.

May we be found guilty.