

✠ JOHN 16:12-22 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

Today we celebrate. We do not celebrate instead of mourn, for we too weep for the destruction that plagues our community. In the midst of fear from tornadoes, devastation from lost homes, displaced loved ones, and even those who suffer the loss of loved ones; we celebrate. It is not the morbid, macabre celebration of those who worship death, but the holy celebration of those who worship God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

But no one should think that our celebration is as the world celebrates. We do not break out champagne and fireworks. We do not have drunken parties and all-night blowouts. We do not celebrate by indulging our flesh and pandering to our sinful lusts of pleasure. No, we celebrate as those eagerly waiting for the day of redemption. We celebrate as those whose sorrow has turned to joy. For though we shed meaningful tears in the face of such seemingly useless violence and destruction, those tears are fleeting, for our Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and invites us to celebrate at His Table where our life is swallowed up in His and our tears of sadness are replaced by tears of joy and celebration.

It is fitting, then, that today we bear witness to these three young men and two young women as they come seeking the forgiveness and life offered in our Lord's Banquet by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. So also we are reminded today of our Christian faith and life by hearing them confess their faith in solemn vows before God and His Church on this, their Confirmation Day.

What is Confirmation? It is a two-part process. First the catechumen, the one receiving instruction, confirms his or her faith by professing the one catholic faith as it is taught in the Small Catechism or some other short book of orthodox instruction. Second the pastor, on behalf of and in the name of the congregation, confirms that the catechumen has indeed learned and will continue in such doctrine and faith.

Dr. Martin Luther of blessed memory had this to say in regard to the importance of being catechized, or instructed, in Christian doctrine: "Those who are unwilling to learn the catechism should be told that they deny Christ and are not Christians. They should not be admitted to the Sacrament, accepted as sponsors at Baptism, or practice any part of Christian freedom. They should simply be turned back [to their sinful flesh and], indeed, to the devil himself."

Confirmation is not a sacrament or a dispensation of grace, but is a solemn rite whereby the Church publicly recognizes those being confirmed as those who are in and who intend to remain in the true faith of the holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

Therefore, dear catechumens, and all of you who would call yourself Christian, do not think of your Confirmation as a one-time ordeal or a singular event in time. But rather look at your Confirmation as a concentrated rite that will be repeated every time you come to confess your sins, every time you come to the Lord's Table, and indeed, every time you pray the hallowed words of the Lord's Prayer.

It is through the Church of God that the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, gathers you in the name of Christ, enlightens you with the gift of faith, and sanctifies you with the Word of God. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives you all your sins and the sins all believers, and on the last day He will raise you all the dead and give eternal life to all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true. So do not neglect your instruction, but treasure it and delight in it.

For it is not enough that we learn the teachings of Christ once in our lives only to forget them on the morrow, for then we are like the man who built his house on the sand. Our faith will be dashed by the waves of doubt and pounded by the rain of unbelief, finally sinking into the sea of sin and death. But rather we should flood our minds and hearts with the Word of God so that no wickedness and perversities may encroach upon what God has placed His name upon. As it is written, “Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord and on His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). As such, I admonish all of you, not just our young confirmands, to read the Small Catechism daily, memorize it, study it, know it; for in it is spelled out the true doctrine of the Christian Church as found in Holy Scripture.

But someone might then say, “O pastor, I have and can read the Bible, why do I need the Catechism?” But that is like saying to the baker who gives you bread, “O baker, I have wheat, water, and all the ingredients to make bread, what do I need you for?” all the while not having a clue of how many parts of wheat to water to make proper dough, nor at what temperature to bake the dough, or how long it should be baked, or anything else that the baker would know about making bread.

Does a mechanic build cars before he knows the parts of a car? Does a child speak as one skilled in languages before he or she knows the alphabet? Such is the logic of one who says that the Catechism is not needed beyond Confirmation.

The public rite of Confirmation is the demonstration that those confirmed are continuing to live their lives in the promises and grace of Holy Baptism; putting to death the old Adam so that God in Christ may raise us anew in righteousness and purity. It is not graduation from going to Church, or reading your catechism, but a solemn vow before God almighty and His Church that you fully intend to continue in the faith and life of His blessed Church.

Therefore, in just a few moments, you the confirmands will stand before this congregation and answer the same questions that were asked of you when you were baptized: Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways? Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? At your baptism these questions were answered on your behalf in the hope that you would hold fast to the promises of God in the holy waters of Baptism. So you have held to the promises of God, and so you are asked again to confirm you in the faith that God has planted and caused to grow in your souls.

In this the Church will pray for you; for there are not many in this sinful world who will stand fast in the promises of God in Christ, as our Lord says, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Stand firm, then, resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7). That is, stand firm in the doctrine that you have learned and it will save your soul, as it is written, “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

And what is this doctrine that you have learned; what is this Word of God implanted in

your souls? It is quite simple really.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed took bread and having given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them saying, "Drink of it all of you; this cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do as often as you do it in remembrance of me."

Listen to the words of Martin Luther concerning this Holy Meal: "God has instituted a lofty, beautiful worship; namely, His remembrance and the glory of the passion of Christ, and to it He has borne witness that He is well-pleased with it. If you want to engage in a marvelous, great worship of God and honor Christ's passion rightly, then remember and participate in the Sacrament. In it there is a remembrance of Him; that is, He is praised and glorified. If you practice this same remembrance with diligence, then you will assuredly forget about the self-chosen forms of worship, for you cannot praise and thank God too often or too much for His grace revealed in Christ" (*Admonition Concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord*, Luther, 1530).

And so we come full circle back to the celebration of the faithful. For here, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is the full promise of God in His Son Jesus. By partaking of His body your flesh becomes as His flesh, holy and without blemish; and by drinking His blood you receive His life in you, as it is written, "For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life" (Leviticus 17:14). And also it is written, "In [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood" (Ephesians 1:7).

For the Christian, then, the Lord's Supper is the culmination of Christian worship and life, the full expression of the Gospel that for our salvation God became man and suffered and died for our sins and rose again on the third day for our justification.

The Lord's Supper is not just something the Christian does, it defines who the Christian is: one who is incorporated into the mystical Body of Christ and eats the manna of heaven and drinks from the Rock, which is Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5). Come to the Holy Supper to receive from God the benefits of Christ: life and salvation.

You have confessed your sins, you have been absolved of your sins, and now you are invited by Christ to come and taste and see that the Lord is good. For whoever seeks shall find, and to whomever asks it shall be given, and for whomever knocks the door will be opened.

Do not come because of your righteousness, for you have none; or because of your holiness, for you are not holy in yourself; do not come because you deserve it or have merited it, for you haven't, even with all your hours of diligent study and questioning. Come because you need the life of Christ. Come because you are a miserable sinner in need of God's grace; for here His grace is made sufficient for you. Come because the Lord has drunk the cup of God's wrath to give you the chalice of God's peace.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠