

Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

On the feast of Pentecost, I had the privilege of celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation with seventeen 10th graders from St. Columbanus in Weston and St. Patrick in Neola.

Some excerpts from letters that each of the young people provided for me are encouraging.

“I have learned a lot about my faith in the confirmation process. I look forward to learning more about my faith and continuing throughout my life.” - Emily Frieze

“I can’t wait to see where this leap of faith takes me in my life!” – Mackenzie Attkisson

“I’ve taken the name Francis after the Pope and my grandfather. I hope to grow and be a man of great faith as they are.” - Andre Ryan

“I chose St. Emily because it is my great grandmother’s name and I aspire to be a great, loving person just like her.” - Madison Ploen

One of the great joys of being a bishop (and there are many!) is the privilege of conferring the sacrament of Confirmation on our young teenagers.

The moment is obviously significant as they come in their Sunday best. They are excited. It is a command performance for the siblings. I am impressed how many older siblings travel from college for the occasion and of course the always faithful and loving grandparents are there supportive as the faith is consciously passed from generation to generation.

Some three years ago, the diocese advanced the age of Confirmation from eighth grade to 10th. This year, nearly every parish has caught up to this age level. In my mind, it has been a beneficial move. The recipients of the sacrament are much more alert to the experience and are able to invest significantly in personal preparation. It has also dramatically increased the number of high school youth involved in parish catechesis and youth programs. All too often in the past, Confirmation was administered at the conclusion of grade school and, unfortunately for many, that ended formal youth catechesis.

The placement of the sacrament at this age juncture also provides for the incorporation of two sacraments in preparation for confirmation which accompany the faith journey and enable those being confirmed to mature appropriately in their practice.

Reconciliation – This sacrament was introduced in the early Church when it was realized that the second coming of Jesus was not imminent. What, then, to do about serious sin after Baptism? The same situation might be experienced by us. Thus, at their particular age, the confirmandi are able to be accountable for their sins, confess them and experience the healing power of God. Baptism is renewed! Among the most genuine confessions I am privileged to hear are those of teenagers.

Eucharist – Along with Baptism and Confirmation, Eucharist is a sacrament of initiation. Tenth graders are at a point where they can intensify participation in this great sacrament through selection and reflection on the readings, involvement in singing parts of the Mass and an overall understanding of the Mass. Consequently, they see the relationship of the sacraments to one another and begin to understand them to be an expression of the central sacrament, the Incarnate Jesus.

In addition, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted on the confirmed have pertinence in their lives as they face the struggles and challenges as they grow into adults. Especially valuable at their stage in life are the gifts of:

Courage – which provides a moral compass for them in an age where relativism and material satisfaction predominate.

Understanding – offers them insight into God's providence and the Spirit's companionship through life.

Knowledge – addresses the thorny question constantly surfacing in their young lives: "What is it Lord that you want me to do with my life?"

The experience of Confirmation is not only significant for the young recipients. It can also be life-giving for the parents. Hopefully, mother and father aren't mere spectators but allow the preparation journey of their daughter or son and the actual anointing to be a moment of renewal for them. In turn, we pray that the Chrism moistens on the foreheads of all supporting the young confirmands and renews commitment to prayer, Eucharist and charity, especially to the poor.