

Confirmation Homily 2012

My Young Friends,

I come to be with you today (tonight) as a friend. And as a friend I come to share gifts with you – gifts which express great love for you.

Your immediate reaction might be – well you certainly are uniquely dressed, but you're not in Santa Claus' uniform, so what gifts do you bring?

I am bringing those gifts that you won't outgrow, will never fall apart, won't be broken or stolen. You won't grow tired of them and if you truly use them, they will bring happiness, genuine, authentic happiness, that cannot be taken away.

As you reflect upon the gifts you cherish most, they are those that reflect love – that say to you how much someone loves me, cares for me – how much I mean to them – how much I am valued and considered to be important to them.

Obviously, the most important gift of all is that of life – your being on earth and enabled to be a person capable of living and being with others. Your instinctive recognition is that this most precious gift of all is from your parents. They gave you life and over the years enable you to grow and experience the quality of life by their generosity and sacrifice for you.

Tracing back the origins of life and identifying the one who engaged your parents as partners in the creation of each of us is God. His only motivation in creating each of us is love. He desires to share the happiness, the fulfillment, the goodness which he experiences in the interior relationship as Father, Son, and Spirit. Thus, today (tonight) he continues this gift giving, this wonderful care for us among the community of the Church.

After you were born, your parents took you to Church. There they rendered you to God, acknowledging this God as your creator. In being baptized, you were redeemed from sin which separates all in the human family from God and you were infused with God's life and identified fully as his child. The same words that the Father spoke as Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist were spoken of you – "This is my beloved daughter." "This is my beloved son."

You come for Confirmation in order that this relationship with God as loving father and you as precious son or daughter might be confirmed. You are old enough now – so that you can affirm the reality and accept the identity that you belong to God – you are his child. You can reach out and respond to the powerful love of God with your own expression of love for him. This mutual expression provides great consolation and comfort.

As a public expression of this relationship I will anoint each of you with Chrism, which I consecrated at the Chrism Mass in March. This Chrism will be used for all those confirmed in the Diocese of Des Moines this year. It is the one Christ that is present to each of you but also the one Christ who is present in the 700 or so who are confirmed in our diocese this year.

What this Chrism does is mark us, seal us as the seals of letters and official documents of the past did. We truly belong to God. The Holy Spirit lives in us and identifies us with God. You welcome this identity, but as you know, it is a challenge to live up to it. You recognize that today and tomorrow involve choices. You welcome and look forward to ever greater freedom that will come your way. But don't you want to use that freedom to become absolutely the best person you can be?

That is where the gifts I bring – the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit – come into play, like love, forgiveness, compassion. They are not physically present in a package but we know they are real. They exist. And if we use them what a difference they can make.

They are particularly valuable for you right now. Like any teenager – pressures and temptations for you are constant and challenging. It can be a struggle to stand up for what's right and best.

You need the Holy Spirit's gift of courage in order

- to make the best choice in sexuality, that very beautiful and powerfully positive human gift, which is designed exclusively for the loving relationship of marriage between one man and one woman
- to refuse to participate in activities that compromise or destroy your freedom – in particular those involving drugs and alcoholic beverages
- to create an environment of respect and acceptance for the elderly, the handicapped, minorities, those who in any way are different or vulnerable and whom we might make fun of or take advantage of
- to speak a language that reflects intelligence and class and education and rejects that which is foul, ignorant and demeaning
- to be strong to lead, to give good example, to speak out for what is right
- to strive to get along with your parents and all your family and friends

As you are faced with choices – many will insist that freedom is achieved simply in making decisions – to be free to do exactly as I want. NOT SO. Freedom is achieved by making good choices. Pope John Paul II has described this reality as The Truth of the Human Person. We, as humans, are created with a specific purpose, design and structure.

We are free and truly become ourselves when, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit as expressed in the Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus, we make good decisions.

Ask any person who has been addicted to drugs or alcohol or who has experienced the pain and emptiness which come from sexual activity apart from the relationship of marriage and you will be told that choosing alone is not the ticket to freedom nor does it bring happiness.

Thus, as you grow into your own person, the coming of the Holy Spirit today, with His gifts of wisdom and understanding will help you grow into life-long habits of making good choices and in the process achieve lasting freedom while attaining a sense of well being and fulfillment.

You seek to be imbued with the Holy Spirit's gift of knowledge in order that you might realize what purpose God has in mind for you.

- Is your life to be involved with the explicit work of Jesus and the church as a priest, religious, deacon, a lay minister serving the community in catechesis, liturgy, music, social justice or administration? I encourage you to listen closely for such a call.
- Is it to choose a career of service as a teacher, doctor, social worker, police officer, coach or politician?
- Is it to continue the work of God as a partner in ongoing creation – as a farmer, architect, engineer, tradesman – electrician, plumber, painter or a business-person?
- Perhaps you have been gifted with athletic ability and your dream is to play for the Hawkeyes, the Cyclones, the Panthers or the local bulldogs. Maybe you might reach the pinnacle of athleticism and play one day for the Vikings or the Twins. Some of you may have artistic or musical ability and will be called upon to enhance culture and contribute to the experience of beauty.

But no matter what you do – how you do it is equally, if not more, important. And that comes down to a matter of *WHO* you are as a person. Today, you welcome the Holy Spirit's Gift of Reverence – by which you recognize yourselves as daughters and sons of God and have the insight to see all of your brothers and sisters in the human family as the same – all beloved by God. It is from this realization that you are inspired to build up the human family by your commitment to human life – from conception to natural death. You are also to recognize the dignity by according justice, to each of our brothers and sisters. Led by the Holy Spirit, each of us contributing our individual best, in unity with the ONE God of all, can be instrumental in achieving a new day for all people.

Being an adult means taking responsibility for ourselves – our eating, our studying, our health, our money and our relationships with family, friends and in particular God. This relationship with God is not an automatic and will not take root and flourish unless you as a responsible person take action.

Supported by the Holy Spirit's Gifts of awe and wonder– the caretaking of this relationship is based on three simple initiatives:

1. Making the time and taking the effort to talk to God every day in a personal way that shows you know God to be a loving God.
2. Attending weekly – by your own choice – the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Jesus and the Holy Spirit uniquely and powerfully present to us and our community. If you are knowledgeable about the Eucharist and truly engage yourselves in its celebration you will say good-bye to so-called boredom. You will discover friendship and freedom and the ongoing gifts of the Holy Spirit readily present to assist you in making good decisions all your life. I guarantee it.
3. Reaching out to others in service – to the poor, to the unpopular, to the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. The Holy Spirit will open within you deep reservoirs of strength and loving – helping you to experience the paradox that it is in giving – that you will receive and receive abundantly. Celebrating here at the [Cathedral or Basilica] helps you realize how many are of your age who treasure the great gift of faith. It also opens the vision – just look around you – there are many from your parish – think of what a positive difference you can make in your schools, on your teams, at work, and in your families. You are being called to share the great conviction of faith. Stand together as an emerging generation whose hallmark will be love and high hopes for our *world*. Such action *is* evangelization; it is making Jesus Christ known and loved in our times simply by how we choose to live together. And the Holy Spirit – the breath of God – will be in you all to help turn the world upside down.

This Sacrament of Confirmation affirms your relationship as God's precious child. In order for you to live up to this identity the Holy Spirit of God comes with his seven gifts today to strengthen you and be with you in your struggles and moments of greatest need. He is your faithful companion as you become adults.

Because of what God is doing for you today Father _____ and I are thrilled and privileged to be with you, my young friends and your families. But even more so, we are happy to be with you because of our genuine love for each of you.

And so we invite you to open wide your minds and hearts and arms as we pray –
Come, Holy Spirit, Come.