

June 9, 2024 Confirmation

Pr. Steve

Texts: Philippians 4: 4-9; 2 Corinthians 5: 16-19; Psalm 16; Matthew 22: 34-40

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Two young fish swimming up the stream on a glorious Sunday morning—life couldn't get any better. And then one of the old codgers came swimming towards them from the other direction. As he passed by, he nodded, and he said, *'Hey, guys. How's the water?'* [and] kept swimming by. Two younger ones came around the bend. They looked at each other and they said, *'The old guy's losing it. What the heck is water?'*

The most important thing in their lives for a fish, and they're unaware of it for a lifetime! Kind of like us in the presence of God. There's not one second our lives are lived outside the presence of God, but most of the time we aren't aware of it, are we? *'Oh, yeah. God! That's right. I remember.'*

How's the water?

How's it feel to be in the presence of God?

Yeah, just keep swimming.

Confirmands, before you were born you were loved by God. And on your Baptism day, you were called to become Noah, Andro, Mia—that is your calling in life—to manifest the beauty, the joy, the truth of who you are. And that's why you were baptized into God, who won't let you forget when you forget. *Because the truth is all these people forget all the time, all the time, that you and we are Beloved Sons and Daughters of God.* The gift of faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit who calls, and sanctifies, and enlightens, and blesses us with a fullness of life.

Faith is not a project—trying to become good. [Stern voice] *'Next week at Peace we're having a competition to find out who the three goodest people are in this congregation. It will be fun.'* Ah, that's what we've made of the faith, isn't it? *God is some sort of nasty accountant keeping track of everything you've done wrong this week.* (Karl! Better look out, Bill; Josie, don't mess around anymore.)

No, the faith is an invitation to discover how we manifest the merciful love of God in our lives and in our time—what makes us creative, and alive, and free. Faith is an adventure, a joyous exploration of what it is to become human beings, because it doesn't happen naturally.

Jesus had this annoying habit. He always asked people if they wanted to be healed. Isn't that irritating? *'I see that you're sick and suffering. Do you want to be healed?'* *'I see that you can't walk very well. Do you want to be healed?'* *'I see that you're blind. Do you want to see?'* Why is he doing that, isn't it obvious? ...And it's not, because unless we want to participate, it doesn't make any difference.

Do you want to see, Confirmands? Do you want to see a whole New Creation, which is emerging now, in this time, in our presence? It's the Spirit who's unveiling it—but it takes eyes that want to see it, that want to see reality, that want to see truth, and know and taste truth. Do you want it? Because a whole bunch of people don't.

We're given a choice in life. Do you just want to be the ego skin bag that you are? 'I don't need anybody. I can do it all by myself. Leave me alone. I don't want anybody's help. Huh? I got it all figured out. My life is working.' Know anybody like that? Ever said that to yourself, 'It's easier going without everybody else. You know, I'm just...'

Or—do we want to become a human being who relates? That's the whole gift of consciousness and understanding—is that we can relate, live in relationship with the earth—so necessary for our times—live in relationship with each other, and the Beloved Community, live with people who make mistakes, live with unconditional love, live with the beauty of who we are.

Do we want it? Do we want it? Do we want to see? Do we want to be healed? Do we want to love?

'How's the water?' 'How's it feel to be in the presence of God?' Ahh, that's good.

I've told the Confirmands many times, 'There are three things I can't do for you—I can't eat for you, I can't sleep for you, and I can't believe for you.' But I can give you today three simple and profound practices that can make a difference in your life.

So, the first is to identify. *Identify, Become, Enjoy*. Identify those resources that nourish your connection with God. How do those come? In nature, in music and the arts, and the reading of Scriptures, in the sacraments, in working for peace and justice? What are they? Nourish them. Without an intentional nourishing, it just falls off. But with the practice of identifying what nourishes you, that will then shape who you become.

What are the values by which you live? We can't change what we've done, but *we can change who we become*. I don't care if you're 83 years old, you can change. We can be healed. We can grow in mercy.

*Identify, Become, and Enjoy*—enjoy this life. Ready? *Enjoy this life. Wherever there is Spirit and grace, there is energy, there is creativity; there is transformation.* (Whenever you're around religious people, and there's no joy, and no energy, run away. Run for your life! 'Oh my God, a religious person is going to get you. Stay away from them.') This is about nourishing who we are in that joy of the whole creation. Sometimes I think the only question at the 'pearly gates' will be, 'Did you enjoy your life?'

In the midst of harsh times, and demands, and negativity, there can still be a joy holding and embracing who we are. That's why it's so important—*Identify, Become, Enjoy*.

A couple months ago at class, Andro was seized with overwhelming, enthralling joy. He just couldn't help himself. Every question I asked him—15 questions in a row— Andro would answer—

'Where did you come from?' Andro said, 'Love.'

'Where did your grandparents come from?' 'Love.'

'What's at the bottom of the ocean?' 'Love.'

'Why do we gather on Sundays?' 'To love.'

You remember that, Andro? It was amazing. It was amazing. Yeah, that's what happens when we get fueled from the inside. Oh, what a gift it was to all of us.

And so, as we look back at our Confirmation year, we first all remember a Fashion Show which was part of worship. These guys participated in a Fashion Show, and dancing with Nana-Dietta. Fortunately, these guys are great dancers, dancing inside of the *Love* for which we've been made. They read this book called, All Saints [by Robert Ellsberg], the lives of hundreds of saints who have manifested over the centuries ways to love God—also, not all of them are Christians.

Ohh, it's getting bigger and more joyful, isn't it? Because it's about drawing everybody into this circle of—*Love*.

They learned the Abba/Imma Chi Kung Lord's Prayer. You saw that right in the center of the universe [the Labyrinth], praying with our whole being the prayer Jesus taught.

Christmas time, Noah singing. We can never forget Noah because we've had years of his presence. But it's not just the maturity of your voice, *it's the maturity of your spirit which touches us on the inside*. Thank you.

And the Seder—that profound meal of Liberation shared by the Jewish friends all these centuries—when the congregants blessed Andro and Noah with their wisdom and their encouragement, way down deep. We'll never forget that.

And, of course, *the Pentecost fire bowl that Andro carried in—he was on fire!* He'll never forget that.

And *Miss Mia, who just sparkles! Pure pizzazz. She told me recently and showed me—she's going to be a cheerleader at Carondelet* this next year. And I said, 'Mia, you've got to lead us in a cheer at your Confirmation.' So she's ... (Oh, okay. We'll wait 'til afterwards.)

Ohhh, *Vitality, Energy, Joy, Creativity*. That's what we want in life, isn't it? That's what the Gospel is all about, and you're called to it for a lifetime. You have been entrusted with the most precious gift of life. It has been said that to be born a human being is rarer than a star that shines by day [Tibetan Buddhist saying].

Your family—parents, grandparents, godparents—and friends see this treasure of life within you and are so grateful. And so, *we pray this day that you will be sustained for a lifetime with the wisdom and grace that you need to become fully human, fully alive, and filled with the Spirit—all of your days—all of your days*.

From Baptism to Confirmation, *'How's the water?'*

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.