

Chaplain's Assembly – Father Philip Murphy SSC
16th October 2014
“Confirmation”

This week our theme at Assembly is Confirmation. One of the seven Sacraments of the Church.

But perhaps I should recap first from last week when I spoke about Baptism.

Confirmation, like Baptism, is a Sacrament of the Church. A Sacrament is a way in which God meets us and promises us of his presence. A Sacrament is an outward and a visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. In other words, it is something which we can see, giving us God's grace which we cannot see. In Baptism what we can see is the pouring of water on a person as the words of Baptism are said – while at the same time that person becomes a Christian, a member of the Body of Christ.

There are seven Sacraments. Baptism is the door to all of the others.

Last week I mentioned how I was baptised at only a few months of age – and showed you a picture of me with my parents on the day of my Baptism. Of course Baptism involves promises – promises to follow God and accept a belief in the One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A baby cannot make those promises, so they are made by the parents and godparents on the child's behalf.



That is where Confirmation comes in. Confirmation is the completion of the act of Baptism. It is a strengthening. The outward sign which we can see is the Bishop laying his hands on the person to be confirmed and anointing them with oil. What we cannot see, but what is happening is the strengthening of the person with the gift of the Holy Spirit and being sealed with God's Spirit.

And to complete the picture gallery, this is me on the day of my confirmation, again with my parents.



In Confirmation we are given the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are: Wisdom – to value the things of God; Understanding – to grasp, to understand the mysteries of faith; Counsel – the gift of making wise decisions; Fortitude – to strengthen a person’s will; Knowledge – to enlighten the mind; Piety – to love and serve God and finally the Fear of the Lord – to respect the majesty of God. Seven gifts which are given in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

So what? Here we are on a Thursday morning at Assembly with a day of school ahead. Out in the world there are all sorts of issues going on, war, unrest, the threats of war – and closer to home in Hong Kong we still have unrest, deeply divided opinions and increasing tension. What has Confirmation got to do with any of this?

Perhaps it is that Confirmation is a part of a process of CHANGE. It is where we open ourselves to God, like Baptism, and are willing to change in order to live a life which follows God’s will, rather than our own.

After all, one of the problems of our world is that everybody wants to change the world, but nobody wants to change themselves.

Just think for a moment of all the different people in Hong Kong who are involved in the protests in one way or another – all with different opinions, different backgrounds, different values and ambitions.

- Whether it is the students from the start of the boycotts;
- the politicians
- the police
- the protestors on the streets
- the anti-protestors, themselves protesting
- or people defining themselves as pro-Beijing or anti-Beijing.

How much does the whole situation, how much does each and every one of these people, need:

Wisdom; Understanding; Counsel; Fortitude; Knowledge; Piety and the Fear of the Lord?

The Sacraments, such as Baptism and Confirmation, are there to guarantee to us, to promise us, the presence of God and his gifts. They are not events or acts which make us retreat or hide from what is happening, but instead they encourage and empower us to be involved in what is happening.

In other words the Sacraments do not take us OUT of the world. Instead, the Sacraments help us to LIVE IN the world. And to do so as people who not only want to change the world, but who truly want to change ourselves, so that God is the focus of all that we do.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is available to anyone who is Baptised. If anyone at St Paul's, student or staff, wishes to be prepared for Confirmation, they can speak to me about it.

Spirit of God, grant us:

The gift of **wisdom** to see the world through your eyes;

The gifts of **knowledge** and **understanding**

to use our minds to know you and to love you;

The gift of **counsel** to make difficult decisions;

The gift of **fortitude** to have the courage to live in the faith despite the difficulties and disappointments;

The gift of **piety** to be able to express our special love and commitment to you;

and the right kind of awesome **fear**

that makes us pause to wonder and revere God's love.

Amen.

Perhaps I will leave the last words to an American Bishop – reminding us that we can change the world – with the right gifts.

(In a video which was then shown, the Bishop was heard saying: "Wisdom and all ... and all these gifts, and if the person is willing to use these gifts, recognise the power of these gifts ... my goodness gracious, if everyone who was confirmed did that, we would change the world.")