

# **Confirmation Mass Homily**

## **Bishop Samuel J. Aquila**

In our Gospel reading for today we hear of the promise of the Spirit given by Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks to the living streams that will flow from Him. Those streams are a reference to the Holy Spirit who will come to dwell among the people after the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus promises the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who leads us in the truth. The Spirit is the one that you will receive in fullness today in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is important for us to recognize that the Spirit is the one who keeps us in the truth of Jesus Christ.

We live in a time that does not accept objective truth, but when there is no objective truth, chaos will reign because everyone will do his or her own thing. Think about your homes for a minute. Think about if your mom and dad and all your brothers and sisters did whatever they wanted to do. If you came home for dinner and Mom says, "I decided not to cook dinner tonight," or your dad says, "I'm not going to work any more" or your mom said, "I'm not going to work any more. You kids are on your own. Do your ironing, do your wash, do your own cleaning, everything else." Chaos would be in your homes. You wouldn't know what to do. There would be no boundaries.

God is very clear that there is objective truth, and that truth is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the one who keeps us faithful to Jesus. He is the one who helps us to live according to the plan of God.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel, "If you love Me you will keep My commandments, as I have kept My Father's commandments." The Spirit is the one who dwells within us, who helps us to be faithful to the commandments of God. The Spirit that our God gives to us is a Spirit that is a life-giving Spirit which we see in the first reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. There is that wonderful image given in Isaiah of dead bones, of fields of dead bones. The Lord speaks over them and the prophet is somewhat skeptical that God can bring those bones to life, but he prophesies over them and flesh comes upon those bones and they are given life. Our Lord makes clear, "I will place a new Spirit in you. I will place My Spirit in you so that you may have life." That promise is given by our God and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is the promise of eternal life. It is the promise of the Spirit dwelling within us.

In the second reading, we hear Paul's letter to the Romans, which reflects upon what it means to be separated from God and he speaks of hope. The Spirit living within us gives us hope here on earth, that our God is one who is faithful to His promises. Our God is one who will fulfill every promise that He has made to us, His people.

Now you who will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation tonight will receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. But all of you have already received the Holy Spirit. When was the first time you received the Holy Spirit?

*(Student responds – “Baptism”)* Baptism – You were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You entered into a whole new relationship with God. You entered into the communion of life with God, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. On the day of your baptism, sin was washed away. Original sin was removed from you and you became a new creation. Just as the heavens opened up and the Father spoke the words at Jesus’ Baptism, “This is My beloved Son,” so too on the day of your baptism did the Father speak the words, “This is my beloved daughter. This is my beloved son.” Each and every one of us became a new creation. We became the adopted daughter and son of God.

For each of us - every human being from the moment of his or her conception, is created for eternity. All of us are created for eternity, and with eternity there are two choices that we as human beings can make. Our God is clear about this choice. We can choose heaven by loving God and keeping His commandments and living in obedience to Him, or we can choose hell, living without God, living without love for all eternity. The decision and the choice is ours. Our God gives to us many graces to help us. He gives to us the gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus and Jesus alone is the one who gives salvation. No one else will give you salvation. There is no one else who can make you an adopted son or daughter of God. You have actually died with Christ in Baptism and risen with Him. That is how profound God’s love is for you. In the sacrament of Confirmation, your baptism will be sealed, it will be completed. You will be fully a son or daughter of God and belong completely to Him.

The Lord has given us two other sacraments to help us to live as faithful sons and daughters of God and all of you have received those two sacraments. What are those two other sacraments? *(Student responds – “Penance and Holy Communion”)* Penance and Holy Communion.

In the Eucharist, God loves us so much that He makes Himself present on every altar every time the Eucharist is celebrated. He makes present His one sacrifice and He gives us the gift of His Body, His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity, so that we may be nourished, so that we may receive and be in communion with our God.

If we are truly faithful sons and daughters of God then we are in Mass every Sunday because we love our God and keep His commandments. His third commandment is “Keep holy the Sabbath.” My dearest sisters and brothers, if we do not keep holy the Sabbath and do not come to Mass every Sunday essentially what we are saying to our God is it really doesn’t matter that I am your son, that I am your daughter. It is unimportant. What we are saying is “God, I do not love you.” That’s essentially what we are saying if we are not in Mass every Sunday. Our God calls us into that relationship. He tells us we are free to make that choice and that decision. But remember every choice and every decision impacts eternity, impacts our relationship with our God.

The second sacrament is that of Penance, Reconciliation or Confession. Our God knows that all of us are sinners, that all of us are in need of forgiveness, all of us commit sin. St. John in one of his letters writes so boldly and says “If you say you are without sin you are ‘a what?’” “If you say you are without sin, you are a ...” *(Student responds – “liar”)* liar – right – You are a liar, because no one can say they are without sin, and yet one of the

great problems of today is that people say, "Well, you know I never sin." All of us sin. All of us at times become impatient. Many of us participate in gossip. Many of us at times are critical of others. Many of us at times use language that tears people apart. Those are sins that need to be forgiven. Then there are those major sins that need to be forgiven, like cheating and stealing, using drugs, missing Mass on Sunday, adultery, fornication. All of those need to be confessed and if we commit a mortal sin we cannot go to communion.

If we are truly serious about becoming the daughters and sons of God, if we are serious in living that relationship out, you and I will receive the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a month. We will go to Confession every month, wanting to be the best son of God, wanting to be the best daughter of God. Our God gives to us the Eucharist and Reconciliation so that we can reach our final goal of living with God in eternity forever in heaven. That is the goal of every human being.

Now I know that all of you young people have been studying hard for the Sacrament of Confirmation and that you know well the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. I am going to go to the back of the church and ask all of these people about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are all baptized and confirmed, and they all remember the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of them aren't even looking at me. Others are looking into their programs to see "Are the seven gifts listed here?" They're getting very nervous. Some of them are saying, "Bishop, don't come too far back."

But what do we do with the gifts that our God gives to us and how do we treat those gifts that God gives to us? All of us get excited about Christmas every year. When we were younger we would go see Santa Claus. We tell our parents what we want for Christmas. But can you tell me what you were so excited about for Christmas and where the gifts are from five years ago? (*Student responds – "No"*) Can you tell me? Can you tell me from two years ago? (*Student responds – "No"*) How about this past Christmas? (*Student responds – "No"*) Not even this past Christmas can you tell me what your gifts were. How many of us treat our gifts from God in the same way? You ask any married woman here when she received her engagement ring or her wedding ring, and she will tell you. They remember the day, the time, what their husband said, they remember all of that. Has your mother ever lost her wedding ring? You know the chaos that creates? Everything in the house stops. "I've lost my wedding ring. Help me find it. I've misplaced it." Do we do that with the gifts of God? Do we have the same hunger for the gifts of God that He has given to us? So let's help all of these folks remember the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Just name one of the gifts. (*Student responds – "Wisdom"*)

Wisdom – Our God says to us in the Old Testament, "Your ways are not My ways. Your thoughts are not My thoughts." We are called to have the ways and the thoughts of God. In fact, He, in the Old Testament, goes so far as to say, "Your ways and your thoughts are as far away from Me as the heavens are from the earth." Wisdom is having the ways and the thoughts of God. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, St. Paul will say, "Put on the mind and heart of Jesus Christ." My dearest young people, think about it for a minute – those words – "Put on the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ." Imagine for a

moment that everyone, every Catholic had the mind and heart of Jesus Christ - every Catholic in the world or every Catholic in your school, or every Catholic in this parish, or every person in your home - had the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ. Would your home be a different place? Yes, you're shaking your heads "yes"-You know it would be. Would your schools be a different place? Yes, they would be. Would the world be a different place? Yes, all of us know the answer. As Catholics we are called every day to strive to have the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ, the ways and the thoughts of God. That is wisdom.

Another gift? (*Student responds – "Piety"*)

Piety – Piety is having devotion to God. Catholics have many aids to help us in our devotion to God. We even call them devotions. We have the Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic Adoration, the Chaplet of Mercy, and the Rosary. We pray before meals, we pray before we go to bed at night. All of those are ways that we become more devoted to God, that we place God first in our life, and piety, the gift of piety, is having that devotion to God.

Another gift – (*Student responds – "Knowledge"*)

Knowledge – The gift of knowledge of knowing our God, and being in relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For this particular gift I always like to go to a married couple to get some help. Are the two of you married? (*Couple responds – "Yes."*) And how many years have you been married? (*Couple responds – "About 60."*) Wow! You could be my parents! That's wonderful – that's a great witness and a great testimony. Now sixty years ago when you married your wife - Do you know her better today than you did sixty years ago? (*Husband responds– "I should – yes"*) Do you know more about your husband today than you did sixty years ago? (*Wife responds– "Oh, yes!"*) She says very firmly, "Oh, yes!" She knows lots. She's learned all those quirks, all those eccentricities, everything.

Now the tougher question-Do you love your wife more today than you did sixty years ago on the day of your wedding? (*Husband responds – "Yes"*) And do you love your husband more? (*Wife responds– "Yes"*) So that knowledge and that love within marriage continues to grow.

What happens in human relationships if knowledge and love does not grow, in any human relationship, what happens? What happens to that, whether it's a brother or sister, friends-if knowledge and love do not grow what happens to that relationship? (*Student responds– "It dies."*) It disappears, it breaks apart. The same is true in our relationship with God. The reason that at times we are lukewarm with God is because we do not know Him and we do not love Him. God gives us the gift of knowledge. We have to ask God to help us to receive that gift, help us to be receptive to that gift of knowledge and of love. From the youngest of us here to the oldest, our knowledge and our love for God can grow each and every day.

Another gift of the Holy Spirit – (*Student responds – "Counsel"*)

Counsel is an important gift. Counsel helps us to know the right decisions to make in our life – to choose the good and avoid the evil. God has a plan for each and every one of us. God has plans for some of you to be married, plans for some of you young women to be religious, plans for some of you young men to be priests. It is important to seek the counsel of God because the only way that you will ever be happy is if you follow God's counsel.

For myself this was very important. I grew up in Los Angeles and I went to college at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I was a pre-med student. I wanted to be a doctor. My dad was a physician and he taught me a love for medicine. When I was a junior and senior in high school my dad used to take me into surgery. I saw heart surgeries, I saw lung surgeries, abdominal surgeries, and I loved it! It always amazed me how they could open someone up and the person could walk out of the hospital a few days later, doing much better. For four years in college I worked in the emergency room. I loved the emergency room. The busier we were the better it was.

But in the back of my head, there would be a voice that would come in every now and then and say, "Priesthood, priesthood, priesthood." And I'd respond back, "doctor, doctor, doctor." My plan was, I wanted to be a doctor. My plan was, I wanted to be married. My plan was, I wanted lots of children. But that voice would come back, "Priesthood, priesthood, priesthood" and I'd say "No, no, no!" because my plan was doctor, marriage, and children. That was what I wanted. But I also knew well enough that I had to go and try the seminary during my senior year. I thought I'll go for six months, I'll get it out of my system, and then it's back to my plan. After I was in the seminary six months seeking God's counsel, I knew exactly what God wanted for my life. He wanted me to be His priest. I wanted to be a doctor, to be married, and to have children. The decision was mine. I knew what God's will was for my life. I knew to be happy, I had to choose God's plan and not my plan.

Now in 1976 when I was ordained a priest, I did not know the fullness of God's plan. I did not know that on this June evening in 2003 I would be standing here as your bishop preaching to you and preparing to confirm you. I had no idea even at that point in my life where Fargo was. I knew where North Dakota was and I knew Bismarck was the capital, but I had never even been to North Dakota. Within God's providence, in God's way, in God's plan, He has been more faithful to me than I could ever have imagined. He has given me more joy, even in the ups and downs, in the bumps that all of us have. He has given me more children than I could ever have imagined, and friends. Our God is faithful! We must seek His counsel so that we may follow His plan to happiness.

Another Gift of the Holy Spirit? (*Student responds – "fortitude"*)

Fortitude – Fortitude is one of the most important gifts you are going to receive tonight. Fortitude is the courage to live our faith, to live as Jesus calls us to live, to live in obedience to His commandments. Let's look at several examples of this.

You have a test to take and you have studied for the test. You have studied really hard for it. Now you go in to take the test in the morning and you are writing down all your answers and someone behind you takes the pencil and nudges you. He says, "Hey, let me

see your answers.” That person hasn’t studied. They were watching T.V., playing on the computer, talking on the telephone. They just blew off the exam and they want your answers. Well, it takes fortitude or courage to say, “No.” The seventh commandment is “Thou shalt not steal.” You can’t steal my answers. I’m an honest person and I don’t do that.

Or some friends of yours come over and they say “You know, I’ve got some really good beer in my car, or some good meth, or, I’ve got some other drugs, some marijuana or something else that some people gave me. Let’s drive out to the country and try it.” Well, it takes courage and fortitude to say, “No. I have reverence for my body. I do not do drugs. I do not break the law.” That takes real courage and fortitude. “I have reverence for my body, because I am God’s daughter, I am God’s son, and I am faithful to that.”

Or, you young people today are bombarded with all sorts of messages about human sexuality and human sexual intimacy. The voice of God is clear! In the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, our God tells us that man was created for woman and woman for man and He blesses them so that the two may become one and that they may be fruitful. The teaching is clear. Even when Jesus is questioned in the Gospels about divorce, He goes back to Genesis and He says, “From the beginning God made man for woman and woman for man.” God’s teaching is clear that sexual intimacy is reserved for marriage only, but that is not the message communicated today. My dearest young people, it takes fortitude today to say, “I will be a virgin until the day of my marriage, because as a son of God, I will follow His commands. As a daughter of God I will follow His commands.” It takes fortitude to do that, to say “no.”

What happens, what happens in those relationships? Let’s say you have been dating, you are in high school or college and you have been dating for a year, a year and a half, and your boy friend begins to put pressure on you, or your girl friend begins to put pressure on you and says, “Oh, come on. You know, I love you,” and you decide, “Okay, she loves me, he loves me. It’s okay.” Six months later he says, “See you later” or she says, “See you later.” How do people feel when that happens? They feel bad, they feel sad. How else do they feel? (*Student responds – “Used”*) They feel used. And do you like to be used? (*Student responds – “No”*) Do you like to be used? (*Student responds – “No”*) Do you like to be used? (*Student responds – “No”*) Nobody likes to be used. Young men, if you are truly sons of God you will never, ever use a woman and you will never, ever allow a woman to use you. And young women, if you are truly daughters of God, you will never, ever use a man and you will never allow yourselves to be used by a man.

The other pattern that it sets up, not only in using somebody, but if people move in and out of those relationships-all you have to do is look at the Hollywood stars and they move in and out of those relationships. Can that kind of person ever make a permanent commitment? Can they? (*Student responds – “No”*) You shake your heads, “No.” You know they can’t. They end up having two, three, four, five, six, seven marriages. It sets up a pattern for divorce. It sets up a pattern for adultery, both of those. Our God is clear that marriage is for a man and woman for life and it takes fortitude to live that out.

The other area where it takes true fortitude and courage today is on the issue of human life. Once again, our God is clear that human life is a gift. For each and every one of us who is here, human life began for us at the moment of conception in our mother's womb. All of us began in the same way – in the union of a sperm and ovum in our mother's womb. There is tremendous pressure today to be pro-choice. There is tremendous pressure today to be pro-euthanasia. On human life our God is clear. The teaching of the Church is clear. One cannot be Catholic and pro-choice. My sisters and brothers, if any of you are here and think that that is possible, it is not possible when one looks at the commandments of our God, because what is our God going to say? What is our God going to say to those Catholic politicians who have voted for partial birth abortion, and supporting that? It is not a matter of being Republican, Democrat, or Independent. What is God going to say on the Day of Judgment to those Catholics who have affirmed *Roe v. Wade*? What is God going to say to Catholic politicians who support abortion rights on the Day of Judgment? "Which part of My commandment that Thou shalt not kill' did you not understand? You in 2003 had every scientific evidence as to when human life begins. Every person on earth, you know well, began at that moment of conception." Catholic politicians who vote for abortion rights are placing the salvation of their souls in jeopardy.

The reason we are in the situation we are in today is because not enough Catholics are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the leaven in the world. Not enough Catholics are responding to the call to holiness. The gift of fortitude helps you to respond to that call, to stand for human life. My dearest young people, you are called to be that light, you are called to be that salt by Jesus Himself. All we have to do is look at Peter and Jesus' response to Peter. Jesus told His apostles, "I have to go up to Jerusalem. I'm going to be crucified." Peter pulls Jesus aside. He says, "Hey, you know, you really don't want to go up to Jerusalem. You really don't want to die." And what does Jesus say to Peter? "Get behind me Satan, because you are thinking in man's ways and not God's ways." That is the root of the problem today. Too many Catholics, and too many people, are thinking with man's ways and not God's ways. So whether it is in the area of human life, of human sexuality, of honesty, of avoiding drugs - all of those take fortitude - and you are receiving that gift tonight to live that out.

Another gift of the Holy Spirit (*Student responds – "Fear of the Lord"*)

Fear of the Lord – Does God want us to be afraid of Him? He doesn't want us to be afraid of Him. Fear of the Lord is having wonder and awe and being aware of how great our God is and how good our God is and having that wonder and that awe for our God. An example of that for myself was when I came here to North Dakota. North Dakota has one of the best kept secrets in the world and that is her sunsets. The sunsets here are some of the best I've ever seen in the world. They are spectacular!

A few months ago, I was out driving in West Fargo and as I was driving it was one of those glorious sunsets. I stopped my car and got out and started watching the sunset and just looking at it. It was spectacular! And as I was watching it, what came to me was, "This is My gift to you." And I thought, "Wow!" Watching the beauty of that sunset put me in touch with the beauty of God and filled me with wonder and awe. Then it came to me - this sunset will never, ever repeat itself. It's history. Again I thought, "Wow!"

That's true - every sunset, every sunrise, like every human person is unique never to be repeated. I was filled with wonder and awe! That is what fear of the Lord is. For those of you who are moms and dads, the parents here - think back to the birth of your children and even maybe after a difficult labor. Think about the first time you held your child in your arms and looked into the eyes of that child, the joy, the gratitude, the wonder that was present. That's what the Fear of the Lord is.

Another gift of the Holy Spirit (*Student responds – “Understanding”*)

Understanding-Understanding of our God, understanding of the teachings of the Church and deepening that understanding. Our God gives us help once again. There are two books that should be in every Catholic home. What are those two books? (*Student responds – “The Bible and the Catechism”*) The Bible and the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** - both of those books help us to understand our God better and all of us, every Catholic home should have a Bible and a Catechism in it. When was the last time you opened your Bible in your home, or your Catechism when you wanted to understand better who God is? You and I will spend hours in front of a television set. I know, I love football, and on Sunday afternoons I could be in front of a T.V. set for four hours watching a football game and not blink an eye at it. But when was the last time we opened the Bible for even fifteen minutes to understand our God better? - or if there was a question on the teaching of the Church, the teachings of Christ, that I do not understand that well, a teaching like the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or the teaching on contraception, or the teaching on the use of money? Have I ever gone to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** to understand that teaching better? Our God gives us the tools, He gives us the graces. They are there for us.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are counsel, understanding, fortitude, fear of the Lord, knowledge, piety, and wisdom. My dearest young people, know that those seven gifts are given to you tonight for all of the days of your life so that you may live as faithful sons and daughters of God.

For all of us who are present here tonight, we need those gifts at different times within our life. I ask you to think about on this June seventh of 2003, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit I need most? Is it counsel, understanding, fortitude? Which one of the gifts do I need the most today? Ask the Lord to grant you that gift. If you are able to come to Holy Communion, as you receive Holy Communion, ask the Lord to pour forth the gift of His Spirit, to grant you that particular gift. Know that you can do that each and every Sunday. The Lord waits here for you each and every Sunday to help you with His gifts, to help you to become the best son of God and the best daughter of God, to help you live in that relationship with Him so that you may reach the final goal.

And what is the final goal of every human person? (*Student responds – “to get to heaven”*) To get to heaven, right. There are only two choices for eternity, and eternity is much longer than any of our time here on earth. Eternity is forever. **Eternity is forever.** The choices are ours to make. God knows what He wants for us. Do we want the same and are we willing to live that out? He gives us the gift of the Spirit so that we may live as His sons and daughters. We may live for 20, 30, 50, maybe 100 years, on the earth if

we are particularly blessed. Some of us will not even have that. There is not one of us who is getting out of here alive. All of us will die.

So if we want to get to heaven, then we will live by God's commandments, we will live as faithful sons and daughters. My prayer for you as your bishop, my dearest young people, is that as you receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit tonight that you will live faithfully those seven gifts and that on the day of your own death, God will welcome you home as His faithful daughter, as His faithful son. May you live in faithfulness and fidelity to our God each and every day until that day when you look upon His face forever.