

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2020

Beloved young brothers and sisters, parents and godparents, family and friends: A few years ago, I went to a Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The Conference was called the Amazing Parish Conference, and it was about re-evangelizing the Church. One of the constant themes throughout the Conference, was the necessity of meeting Jesus, the Living Lord, in a personal encounter. This is the single most important necessity in today's world and today's Church. One of the alarming statistics they told us, was that after the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation, 77% of young people leave the practice of their Catholic Faith. Surprisingly, very few convert to other Churches, and very few return to their Catholic Faith. It's almost as if Confirmation is like a graduation ceremony, and people say: "Well, that's it! I'm done!" However, all of you know, that there are overwhelming challenges facing you in the world today; besides the pandemic we are now facing, we see a growing lack of faith that is alarming. We also see the result of the vacuum of faith and the darkness that rushes in to fill it!

With Christ, these challenges will still be there, and they will be difficult! Without Christ, they will be impossible! Obviously, we need to take seriously this Sacrament that you are about to receive tonight! And, although the Holy Spirit will fill you with the Divine Power of God to radically change your lives and to radically change your world- this power will only stay in the Background, until you decide to unleash the power of God that He will give you, by allowing Jesus to become your best friend! Tonight, He will ask each one of you, personally: "Are you willing to take up the Cross and follow me?" The way you answer that question now, and every single day for the rest of your lives, will make all of the difference in eternity, and in the way you face your difficulties and problems in life!

Jesus, our God in the Flesh, is already in love with you: indeed, He has chosen you out of the millions and millions of young people in our Country and the World, to receive this gift of His Holy Spirit tonight. He is so in love with you, that every time He thinks about you, He explodes in the joy that He has in your creation.

However, this joy and fulfillment is not the way of the world that promises empty pleasure in the pursuit of things that cannot fulfill our lives!

This is the meaning of the admonition of St. Paul's second reading tonight. It is the call to embrace the way of Jesus which is the way of the Cross; and Jesus tells us that this is the only way into the peace and joy for which He has created us! The world tells us that this is an absurdity. We must make a decision: will we follow the way of Jesus, or the way of the world, that we now see unravelling before our very eyes?

There is nothing, nothing at all in this world which can give you the joy, hope, strength and courage that you will need for this life. Joy is not the absence of suffering; it is the presence of God! This was the strength and joy and hope and courage that gave young men and women your age, the courage to march to their death in the arenas, knowing that they were going to face the most terrible torture and death! This is the strength and hope and joy, and courage that is giving men and women, teens and children the courage to offer their lives in torture and death today, in China, Nigeria, and India, who stand up to the demon and, "Here do I stand", I shall not retreat! Did you know that there have been more martyrs in the last 75 years than in the last two thousand years?

God has created you and me to be a roaring conflagration of the fire of the Divine Love, not smoldering ashes! When the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and the Disciples in the upper room, they were smoldering ashes, terrified that what had happened to Jesus in His cross, was going to happen to them. When the Spirit came to them, He came in the visible symbol of Fire, which alighted each one of them; however, the visible sign of fire, was not nearly as important as what happened to them! Each one of them, filled with the Divine Life, courageously and promptly left that upper room, and went into the crowds and began to proclaim Jesus Christ Risen from the Dead, without fear, with the greatest passion. So much so, that the crowds said: "Are they intoxicated?" Indeed, they were filled to the brim with joy, and that joy burst out of them into the crowds, so that 3000 people that very day were converted and baptized!

My beloved young people, that is exactly what Jesus wants to do with you, but you must be willing to allow it and open your hearts to it! How do you do this: by making Jesus your best friend! By spending substantial time with Him in prayer every day- one of the best prayers you can pray is the Rosary, it has made millions and millions of people throughout the ages, the friends of God. By using the Sacraments faithfully, most especially Sunday Mass and monthly Confession. By studying the Gospel to get to know Jesus better. And by sharing Him with your Catholic and non-Catholic friends! If you do your part, I swear to you, Jesus will do His part, take the chance, you will not be disappointed! I promise, because I have never been disappointed by Him! So I ask you all, do you want what the Holy Spirit wants for you?