

Pastor Writes

Greetings to you! Today is Confirmation Sunday and we continue on in the Spirit of the Resurrection as we are about to witness the confirmation of sixteen students. Today they will make their public promises that they will be witnesses to the Resurrection as they go out into the world. In the Old Testament reading we heard from the prophet Ezekiel that God will give his people a new heart and a new Spirit. He will remove a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. He promises to put his Spirit within us to empower us and to walk in his ways. All of us need this new heart which is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to keep God's commands.

In the Epistle reading Paul writing to the Romans says that, 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.' We are fortunate to have the presence and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit so that we can overcome all the wiles and attacks of the evil one and stand firm when we are tempted. Because of the indwelling Spirit, Paul challenges all the believers not to live according to the flesh and gratify its desires because if we do live according to the flesh then we will surely die. However, if by the help of the Holy Spirit we put to death the deeds of the flesh then we will live. Our sinful selves do not die so easily as we want them to. Even though in baptism we symbolically die to our sinful self and rise with Christ, and in Confirmation we publicly state that we will follow him, the reality is that our sinful self keeps coming back to life ever so often. We are called to put to death our sinful self and this is something we need to do daily. We are called to practice this mortification on a minute by minute basis so that we can be led by the Spirit. We are called to make use of the power of the resurrection that is available within us. The Holy Spirit strengthens us in our moments of weakness

Paul further reminds us that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. We are given the right to call God as 'Abba' or 'Father'. We can go to him for help at any time. We also become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. However, Paul reminds us that we are also called to suffer with him. Following Christ is the way of the cross, it is the narrow way and very few follow that. The Holy Spirit comforts and encourages us when we face suffering.

In the Gospel reading the Holy Spirit is said to be the Advocate who will be with us forever. As an advocate he pleads our case before the Father. He presents us as faultless because of the righteousness of Jesus. He is also the Spirit of truth and will always lead us in paths that are true and right. The world cannot receive this Spirit of truth because it neither sees him nor knows him. But as believers we know him and experience him in our lives.

Today as we see sixteen of our young people who are to be confirmed, we praise God for these candidates who have decided to follow Jesus no matter what the cost may be. Confirmation is in many ways the beginning of this journey of faith with God. As they begin this journey may we as members of the community of faith support them by our prayers and by our encouragement. May we also truly bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ by our words and our works.

Shalom

Dr. Paul Swarup