Faith's Journey: An Encounter and a Response

This week our parish will be celebrating Confirmation with Masses on Monday and Friday evening, and we welcome Archbishop Hebda for the Monday evening Mass and Auxiliary Bishop Cozzens for our Friday evening Mass. This weekend also will feature a number of our young parishioners making their First Holy Communion.

On the one hand these are wonderful milestones, but not the end of the faith journey. I remember Archbishop Flynn would sometimes say at a confirmation Mass that "this is not just a photo op." And his point is that the moment reminds us that faith is a journey, and one that requires a response.

During the Octave of Easter, (the 8 day celebration of Easter from Easter Sunday to the Second Sunday of Easter) the reading on Easter Wednesday was the story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. They are dejected and Jesus journeys with them but they do not know it is him. Then, in the breaking of the bread, they realize it is Him, and are changed; they tell others. This evangelization is what we've read about much of the Easter Season in Acts of the Apostles.

What First Communion and Confirmation remind us of is that our faith is a journey. But we need to also see Jesus, and bring Him to the world.

"Deism" is a school of thought that there is a God but He's not much involved in the world. He created it like a watchmaker, but that's the extent of His involvement in the world. There are probably a number of Deists in the world, but hopefully we as Catholics understand that Jesus is always with us. Where? The Eucharist, for one.

Our First Communion was the first of many moments where we began receive Jesus at Mass. We find Him by remembering that His love is always with us through so many other ways too, such as when we pray and when we celebrate the sacraments. We will meet Him face to face one day, but until that moment, we do not journey through life alone. Bishop Cozzens, (though he did not share with me his homily ahead of time), used to have favorite Confirmation homily he would tell where he had let his faith become lukewarm a bit in college and then saw a crucifix in a cemetery where he realized God's love in a profound way that caused him to get more serious about his faith. God has all kinds of ways of bursting into our lives. So we need to let Him in by looking for Him and remembering we are never alone. In Acts of the Apostles we read: "As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31). Sometimes sports stadiums shake with excitement. But wouldn't it be a great thing if we got as excited about winning a game as we did about our faith?

With this, there is the connection too we have to one another. How do we talk about the faith to people both in our families and in the larger world? We need to seek creative ways to pass the faith on, but also not give up when people aren't receptive to the faith, doing all we can to help them see that a relationship with Jesus Christ and the loving

God who made them and is involved in their lives is the greatest thing they can receive. Sometimes people need help “fixing the wire” between earth and heaven so to speak which we do through being patient, but also not being afraid to talk about our beliefs.

We then remember too that we are sent. One of the things I try to do as a priest is to remind people of the saying that sometimes we are the only Bible people will ever read. Think for a minute about how people prepare for First Communion and Confirmation; they are helped along that journey by their sponsors and by catechists who reveal the faith to them. By being involved in the lives of others, by talking about our faith in words and actions, and applying what our faith teaches about morals and the dignity of the human person we can do so much to evangelize.

Faith is indeed a journey - it can’t stop with Confirmation. We can’t get sidetracked into thinking our final destination is our career, and sometimes our world revolve around a schedule, our kids sports teams, the busyness of life, when it really needs to revolve around God.

Congrats to our soon to be newly Confirmed and those making their First Communions this week. And a big thank you to the parents, grandparents and sponsors who have journeyed with them - just remember this isn’t the finish line but another mile marker passed on the road to sainthood. And a heartfelt thanks to Kayla Rooney, our Director of Lifelong Faith Formation for all her hard work in building up our program and her dedication to helping the faith grow in our faith formation children and youth. To all those who have been celebrating these sacraments this week, and indeed for all of us, may the Holy Spirit continue to strengthen you on your journey to sainthood!

God bless,

Fr. Paul