

Faith Formation: From Womb to Tomb

Tomorrow night on Monday, May 9th, our parish will be celebrating with 69 young men and women from our parish along with several other parishes at the Cathedral of Saint Paul when they celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation.

Looking back on my Confirmation, it was in the winter of 1995. I went through faith formation classes, and at that point remember having a lot of questions. I was a junior in high school, and a part of an ecumenical Bible study club with other kids that met once a week before or after school. It was my first time meeting and talking about matters of faith with people who weren't Catholic. So while I certainly loved my Catholic faith, I also remember wondering, well, what about this or that; such as how do we know the pope should have this authority, and with the Eucharist, how is it that we believe Jesus is fully present when the Last Supper was a long time ago, and did the Catholic Church maybe get this or that wrong?

Sometimes in confession a person will confess "doubt," but I always remind them doubt is the companion of faith. If they truly had serious doubts they would not be sitting or kneeling behind the screen. Asking questions and thinking about the faith is a good thing.

As for me, I did have those questions, but remember kind of "letting go and letting God" too at that moment. I had the chance to meet Archbishop Flynn after the Mass who remarked to my parents "maybe he'll consider becoming a priest." Needless to say I did, though it took me a few years to realize what God was calling me to.

And as for those questions, I did eventually sort them out. It took a bit of time, some prayer, some thinking, and ultimately trust - trusting that God had a plan, that God had created a Church established on Peter to help guide me, and also knowing that I had to keep on seeking.

I suspect many of the confirmation candidates from our parish, and indeed all of us, have questions too and things we are sorting out. Why does the Church say this or that? And this is why what we call "faith formation" really needs to be life long. (Indeed, beyond that too - as after death God helps us take the final steps towards full, complete love and understanding). Sometimes confirmation can seem like this "carrot on a string" kind of thing though; it in a sense can be seen as "graduation." We are confirmed, but at that point there is no longer any "required" faith formation. But hopefully just because it's no longer required, those confirmed next week will continue at various points in their lives to open themselves to the faith, because there is so much to learn.

This goes for us too. As I shared at daily Mass last week on May 2nd, the feast of Saint Athanasius, learning the faith matters so much. Saint Athanasius was an early bishop of the Church who lived just after Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Gone were the persecutions by the state; but that didn't end the problems. Indeed, many in the Church at the time got caught up in a heresy called

“Arianism,” which held Jesus was not fully divine; more like the greatest of all angels. Athanasius knew he had to step up and he did. He got exiled multiple times, but ultimately because he helped people see the truth, the truth prevailed through the Holy Spirit working through him and others.

I can't help but wonder how many people who opposed him thought they were right and convinced they knew the truth. In reality, they needed to be guided by the Church, which then had the Nicene Creed formulated which summarizes our beliefs, and which we say to this very day.

Sometimes it can be so easy to become ignorant of the faith. A person might not learn the faith at home; or get misinformed. Others may just drift from the faith, or never get it refreshed through the years. So how can we make sure we fan the flames of the Holy Spirit that come to bless us in a special way on our confirmation?

For one, we pray. We go to mass and pay attention, and let the words of Scripture inspire us and the Eucharist nourish us as fuel for our journey through life. As I'll often say to youth, no one is going to “force” you to go to Mass when you are on your own, but make it a choice. Jesus loves you, and Mass and prayer are for our benefit so we can come to know God more deeply by letting Him into our life. As we heard last week at Mass, on his own, Peter catches nothing - only with Jesus does he bring in the catch. The same is true for us in life, we need God to help find our way.

Second, we look for opportunities to learn the faith. There is so much good stuff out there. (And, admittedly not so good. The internet was just getting going when I was in high school and I didn't really know what it was or use it until I was in college, but just as in that fellowship group, while I was given some misinformation on the Church by non-Catholics, the internet is full of lies too and people who hate the Church, so be careful). There's Relevant Radio, and two Catholic channels on satellite radio. Our parish also subscribes to the Catholic web site “Formed.” Here you'll find great videos to help you learn more about your faith; there's movies, audio and books at your fingertips. Here's what you do: You simply go to: <https://formed.org/signup>.

Then type in **55068** to quickly find our parish

Then enter your name and email....that's it.

There is a plastic stand on the welcome desk in the Gathering Space that also has business cards on it that have a quick reference to signing up as well.

This is really an amazing site as there's Catholic movies, programs for children, audio dramas and books, and both great, wholesome entertainment but Bible studies, sacramental prep materials, documentaries and books and audio talks. If you haven't checked it out, please do so.

Lastly, it's important we educate one another. All of us are apologists - teachers of the faith. In faith formation, we emphasize to families that the message of the Church is parents are the primary educators of their children's faith, so this is why it starts in the family, helping one another learn the faith. As we honor our mothers today, think for instance how much our moms teach us about living out the faith; I think of how my mom would teach me prayers and sacrifice so much for me growing up and spend time with me and has filled my life with love. I'm a better man, and priest, because of her; through what she has done for me, along with my dad, I know who God is at a deeper level. Let us take an example from our parents too, living the faith through word and example, living out the faith through actions, but also fearlessly talking about the faith and challenging one another to think about it more deeply in terms of how they live it out.

All of us want to get to heaven one day, and grace from God makes that possible, but grace requires a response - to come to know our God more deeply, and to help others do the same. Please pray for our confirmation candidates as they make this big step on their faith journey Monday night, and may all of us never forget faith formation and teaching of the faith is something that is truly life long.

God bless,

Fr. Paul

PS - A heartfelt "thank you" to all of our mothers on this Mother's Day weekend too - thank you for your vocation, your sacrifice, for life, and most of all for your love!