

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
FOR THE CONFERRAL OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION FOR  
SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA PARISH  
CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF SAINT PETER IN CHAINS, CINCINNATI, OHIO  
NOVEMBER 5, 2020**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy's Father's personal representative to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, and I express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection to the confirmandi, their sponsors, parents, catechists, and to your family and friends, including those joining by live-streaming.

To my young friends, I want to tell you how close you are to the heart of Pope Francis. Most of you were baptized as infants and brought to the church by your parents and godparents. This evening, you will have the opportunity to renew your commitment to what was promised on your behalf. You will have the chance to say your personal "yes" to God, a free and informed "yes".

The sacrament of Confirmation strengthens Baptism and pours out the Holy Spirit upon you in abundance. The Holy Spirit was poured into your hearts at baptism, but now we seal you with the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that strengthened for your mission you may give witness to Christ, who desires to deepen His friendship with you, and renew your love for His Church.

Filled with gratitude, you can now accept the important gifts of the Spirit that help you on your way through life to become faithful and courageous witnesses of Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit are stupendous realities that enable you to be formed as Christians, to live out the Gospel and to be active members of the community.

I will name each of the gifts in a prayer before I anoint you with oil, but I would like to reflect briefly on each of these gifts, which first appear in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

— The first gift is *wisdom*, which enables you to see how good and great the Lord is. Wisdom fills your life with flavor, so that you may be "salt of the earth", adding flavor to our world, helping others to be preserved from the corruption of sin, and instructing others in the ways of faith through the wisdom of the Church;

— A second gift is the gift of *understanding*, given to you so that you may understand in depth the word of God and the truth of the faith. Our world is filled with the superficial and ephemeral. God calls you to be a person of substance and integrity.

— The Spirit bestows the gift of *counsel*, which will guide you to the discovery of God's plan for your life, the life of each one of you. God has made each of you for some definite purpose. He has a personal plan for your salvation, He gives you a unique vocation, but each of you must listen to the voice of God to discern it carefully.

— The Spirit offers you the gift of *fortitude* or courage in order to overcome the temptations of evil and to do good always, even at the cost of making a sacrifice. I will return to this gift later.

— Next comes the gift of *knowledge*, not knowledge in the technical sense, as is taught at so well at your school and by your teachers, but knowledge in the deepest sense which teaches you to find in creation the signs and impressions of God, to understand how God speaks in every age and speaks to you personally, and to inspire your daily work with the values of the Gospel.

— Another gift is that of *piety*, which keeps alive in the heart the flame of love for our Father who is in heaven, so as to pray to him every day with the trust and tenderness of beloved children. When you were baptized, your parents and godparents were given a candle and asked to keep the flame of faith burning brightly within you. The gift of piety helps us to not forget the fundamental reality of the world and of life: that God exists and that God knows you and expects a response to his invitation and plan;

— and finally, the seventh and last gift is *fear of the Lord*. We should not be afraid of God but have a profound respect for Him, His will, and of all those made in His image and likeness. Today too with all the crises that there are in the world, we see how important it is that each person may respect the will of God impressed in our hearts and by which we must live. This fear of the Lord is a desire to do good, to do what is true, to do God's will, and I would add, to be in awe of His marvelous Presence and of His immense love.

I said that I wanted to return to the gift of fortitude. My young friends, you are under tremendous pressures these days. There is the pressure to perform to gain entrance into a good school. There is the pressure to have what everyone else has to be popular or to do well in sports or have the latest fashions. There will be coming pressures with respect to dating and human sexuality, drugs, and alcohol, in addition to the peer pressure.

Additionally, you will be pressured to believe that these gifts of the Lord and faith is all make believe, a pious myth for simple and unscientific people. You will experience the pressure to renounce Christ and the gifts of the Spirit. We are in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, which was founded 175 years ago amid great anti-Catholicism.

Simon Peter, when Jesus was arrested, gave into the pressure. He tried to save himself, and he denied the Lord three times. The Lord Jesus, however, did not give up on him. He looked at Peter, and Peter wept bitterly, but Jesus returned to him, and asked him three times, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?"

This is what Jesus wants to know. Do you love Him? After Pentecost, and the great outpouring of the Spirit, Peter boldly proclaimed the Risen Lord. He willingly underwent suffering for the sake of the Name of Jesus. He did not cease speaking of Him, even when it landed him in prison, where he was subsequently rescued by an angel. Finally, Peter courageously witnessed to the Lord, glorifying him at Rome.

This night, just as at Pentecost, we pray for a new outpouring of the Spirit. We pray that God would give you a new heart and place his spirit within you! We pray that along life's journey you may be transformed by the power and gifts of the Spirit.

My Dear Young People, the whole of Christian life is a journey, it is like following a path that winds up a mountain, which is not always easy. However, climbing a mountain and seeing the view – in the company of Jesus and by the strength of the Spirit – is something beautiful. With these precious gifts your friendship with Him will become even truer and closer as you continue your pilgrimage on earth.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis:

“Pilgrimage is a symbol of life. It makes us think of life as walking, as a path. If a person does not walk, but instead stays still, this is not useful; it accomplishes nothing. Think of water: when water is not in the river, it does not course, but instead it remains still and stagnates. A soul that does not walk in life doing good, doing many things that one must do for society, to assist others, or who does not walk through life seeking God and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, is a soul that finishes in mediocrity and in spiritual poverty. Please: do not stand still in life!” (Pope Francis, 6 June 2015, Message to Macerata-Loreto Pilgrimage Group)