

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (CONFIRMATION)

### 1 John 4:1-11

I think many times today is the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors. No, not necessarily the sixth Sunday of Easter, but confirmation. I think this is many times the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors because for too many parents this is the first day of the rest of their life of laxity, indifference, and apathy toward the Word and the faith of their children. They've done their duty, they think, and so it is an opportunity to reveal how little what was taught their young men or women means to them, that what they were in it for was the ceremony, a rite of passage of sorts, or the party, or to keep Grandma and Grandpa off their back, to put their children through what they went through as a teenager, or whatever shallow reason they might concoct. It is a chance to show what a joke their pledge to raise their children up in the faith was when that child was baptized as they instead teach their kids what is really important to them by their absence at God's service and behavior contrary to His Word. And so today is many times a sad day for pastors.

I think many times today is the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors. No, not necessarily the sixth Sunday of Easter, but confirmation. I think this is many times the saddest of the Church Year for pastors because they know that they may well never see those they are confirming again, or seldom see them again, may be forced to look on as those young men or women's faith he worked so hard to feed and instruct slowly languishes and dies, choked by a lack of care, or the cares of the world, or the lies of the devil and false prophets. They've graduated, many confirmands think, and so it is an opportunity for them to reveal how little they took the Word to heart, how little they valued what was given them, how superficial their commitment was to the promises they were preparing to make. It is a chance for vows before God and men to be unmasked as outright lies, as empty words spoken without thought, for the attention, to keep Mom and Dad happy, or for the presents waiting at the party afterward. And so today is many times a sad day for pastors.

I think many times today is the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors. No, not necessarily the sixth Sunday of Easter, but confirmation, and I think it is not only many times the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors, but for God's people as well, because you see it, don't you? You notice the empty seats, the straying souls. You, I am sure, often pray for them, pine for their return to the fold, and should they return, you rejoice with the angels in heaven. You too are heartbroken when you flip through the pictures in the back and see familiar faces that have become all too unfamiliar with the Lord, His Word, and His Sacraments. Sure, they might say when you see them at Meijer's that they still believe and love God and pray and stuff, but you know how much that often means, and if their vows are any indication, you know how much their word is worth when it comes to the matters of God's revealed Word to us.

St. John is clear today, clear as he speaks to our confirmands and their parents, but clear also to the rest of us as well, for we are no more immune to indifference and apathy, to the wiles of the world and the deceptions of the devil. I've seen many fall from the faith in old age as well as in youth. St. John is clear today and he says:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you*

*is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

Today you are being confirmed in a Faith unwelcome in the world, constantly assailed from every side, from within by your flesh, from without by the devil, the unbelieving, and the false teaching. You are being confirmed in a Faith assailed even by many who claim to hold it, to preach it, to teach it, for not all those who claim to be of Christ are of Christ. You must test the spirits. Not every building with a cross on top preaches the pure Word without poison. Not every sanctuary with a guy in a robe houses the truth of God not watered down or edited by the thoughts of men. You must test the spirits.

We live in a country with the wonderful freedom of religion. But, confirmands, and indeed all of you, those in Christ are not free to err, to embrace diluted Scriptures, to fellowship with those who would explain away part of God's Word and compromise on the other, who would value parts of Holy Writ but dismiss whole chunks, let alone a clear verse. You must test the spirits. You must seek Jesus. For no sermon is a Christian sermon, no matter how many nice things it says, how emphatically it exhorts you to be a better person, how spiritual it sounds or how much Bible it quotes, if it is not centered, rooted, and only possible in Christ. You must test the spirits. *"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."*

This is only my fifth confirmation, but I've already seen too many fall prey to their own indifference, or to the thoughts of men, or to the unchecked passions of the world, or to a family tradition of unfaithfulness handed down to them by their parents who thought dropping them off for class was all God expected of them.

They say fifty percent fall away. Some of that fifty percent is here, having fallen for a time only through God's grace to awaken to the fact that all that glimmers is not gold, but that what we hear and taste and sing here is true treasure. There are three of you. Statisticians would say at least one is a goner. I say it doesn't have to be so and it doesn't have to be you, any more than it had to be any of those wayward students in the pictures in the narthex, any more than it needs to be me or anyone else gathered here today. St. John in his Revelation records Jesus' words to us all, the confirmation verse of at least one dear sister in Christ I've buried here after she fell asleep in her Lord and in the Faith she confessed at her confirmation. Jesus says, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*

Heaven is not yours to gain. Heaven is yours. Like forgiveness, it is Jesus' free gift to you, unearned but received through the hands of faith, won for you on His cross and awaiting you on the day the Lord calls you. Heaven is not yours to gain. Heaven is yours. But heaven is indeed yours to lose should you turn your back on Christ who gives it, whether in a grand moment of denunciation or gradually through apathy and lukewarmness. Don't lose it. Test the spirits. Confess Jesus, even as He will confess you before His heavenly Father on the last day.

I think many times today is the saddest day of the Church Year for pastors. No, not necessarily the sixth Sunday of Easter, but confirmation. That need not, however, be the case today. What you confess today is too important to let go of, and He whose precious blood will be poured into your mouths in a moment endured too much for you not to endure in Him. So this is a happy day today. So I rejoice to see you approach the altar and confess your faith. So rejoice, confirmands, and rejoice all those gathered today, for this is the Faith we all have the joy to confess, not only today, but all our lives and into eternity: *"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."* Amen.

