

Fear can keep you from a lot. It can keep you from flying in a plane, swimming in a pool, meeting new people, or seeing your dentist. Fear can isolate you, or it can connect you with others who have the same fear. Where you live can make you afraid of people who live somewhere else. In school, your own classmates can make you afraid to live by your standards or aspire to certain goals. We feel closer to people who share the same fears.

Fear gathered the disciples together on the first Pentecost. After Jesus died, they rejoiced to see him alive, but now he had ascended into heaven, so they were afraid. At the Last Supper, Jesus had promised that he would send them help, another Advocate. Jesus said, "He will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. . . . The Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth." The disciples remembered these words, but after Jesus left they didn't feel much like testifying, and they didn't have much guidance. All that changed when the Holy Spirit filled their hearts with a longing to proclaim the gospel. From that upper room the church and its mission were born.

If you have been confirmed, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have the consolation that the Spirit is always with you. You only get confirmed once because the effects of the sacrament last a lifetime. No matter how long ago it was, the Holy Spirit is still with you to guide you to all truth. Whenever you stick up for what is right, overcome your prejudices, keep your composure, or give advice that is so wise it even surprises you, you can be assured that the Holy Spirit is still with you, acting in you, helping you to testify to Jesus Christ.

If you have not been confirmed, you can still receive this sacrament. Many Catholics somehow missed the sacrament of confirmation along the way. Our diocese offers it to adults once a year at the cathedral, and in other circumstances the bishop can delegate a priest to confirm for him. I've done this for the bishop a couple of times at Western Missouri Correctional Center, but you don't have to go to prison if you want to be confirmed. Confirmation is a gift you can receive with proper preparation and the right motive.

Our diocese has just revised its confirmation policy for teens. The age of confirmation fluctuates in the United States and around the world. In the US some dioceses confirm children around age 7; others wait until the kids are about 16. In our diocese we will still confirm around early high school, but with this twist. The bishop is asking parishes to expand their total youth ministry and make confirmation preparation a shorter part of it. Confirmation preparation need not take longer than first communion preparation or marriage preparation, but we want our kids to know that this church is a place where they can meet Christ, serve their neighbor and enjoy the company of their friends every day.

Confirmation is our own personal Pentecost. It helps us overcome our fears. We will still have fears, but we can face them throughout our lives with the confidence that the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, will give us strength and be our guide.