

Jesus, Confirmation and Us

19/11/17

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Once I had graduated from university with my initial divinity degree, I was required to submit to the conscription law of the previous regime in this country. (Read my sermon on the website entitled “Jesus, me and the SADF” if you would like some deeper insight into that experience)

I was called up to a base in Kimberly, named Diskobolos, 1st Maintenance Unit. Traditionally, once the medicals and issuing of kit was completed during the first few days, all roofies (Afrikaans nickname for whippersnappers) commenced on a six week basic training course. This procedure was the same for all army bases around the country with every new six month intake. The main aim of basic training was to move you out of your “civvie” mindset and to start immersing you in the ethos of military discipline and skills.

Basic training focused on fitness levels, learning to drill in squads, understanding military commands, rank structure and learning to use a rifle, amongst other skills the military deemed essential (including learning to survive on food that was always less than desirable!) If you managed to survive the six weeks training course, you suddenly found yourself a lot leaner, fitter and now used to working as a team in all conditions. Your civilian life seemed to be a thing of the past...

As the six weeks drew to a close and the promise of your first weekend home, you were prepared for your passing out parade. This was a very special event, because for the first time, your parents, friends and girlfriends were allowed entry onto the military base. The passing out parade, in front of your guests and family, involved a complicated set of drilling, squad marching and manoeuvres on the parade ground. The “ou manne” (or those troops who were already in their second year of service) were allowed to display their driving and shooting skills, as well. So, the passing out parade, from a military point of view, was a special event that marked a “moving on”, promotion,

recognition of training and advancement and finally permission to specialise in a particular field of expertise that followed the six weeks of basic training.

Many of you may be wondering this morning why I am sharing stories about my passing out parade...

Well, this morning is very special, for in a way it is also a passing out parade. This morning, at our 09:30 service, Bishop Christopher will be confirming three very blessed people, namely: Celine Bailey, Ryan Heber and Nsika Madonsela. You see, whilst they are being confirmed this morning, it could be likened to a passing out parade BUT I would prefer to call it a passing IN parade! You see, confirmation marks the day when these young people make it official that they want to be Christians and members of the Church of God.

What we need to understand and appreciate is that confirmation is not a celebration of what we do and God responds and it is not an event at which we confirm anything to God; **it is about what God does and how we RESPOND to God!**

From an ecclesiastical point of view, confirmation was once part of the baptismal ritual that took place directly after baptism, sealing in the Holy Spirit with the special anointing of blessed oil called chrism. Confirmation can be seen as an anointing for ministry, for work to build the kingdom of God, not a graduation or “passing out” parade from church. We want to see Celine, Ryan and Nsika back here, involved in the daily spiritual life of St Pauls, or wherever they may find themselves in life.

Eventually, over time, baptism was separated from confirmation as the bishop was not always able to preside over every baptism as the Christian Church grew in size.

So here we find ourselves this morning praying for the confirmation of these three brothers and sisters who wish to confirm their faith as adults in the church of God.

In confirmation, according the 1989 Anglican Prayer Book, we come to be filled, through the laying on of hands, with the power of the spirit for worship, witness and service. Our candidates will be required to renew their baptismal

vows and to declare publically before God and the church that they will accept the Christian faith and continue to grow in it.

This is no light commitment. It requires understanding, discipline, integrity and maturity. This is why Brother Michael Bester spent so much time preparing our candidates in such a thorough manner.

What does this mean for you and me?

As parishioners, we also have a responsibility to nurture and assist with the formation of these newly committed souls. We cannot merely sit back in our pews and go about our daily lives once the liturgy is over. No! It is our duty, both to the church and to God to ensure that we assist, help and guide these newly committed folk in their daily walk with God, for we all know how life is full of ups and downs for all of us. Celine, Ryan and Nsika need to be given the opportunity within the Church of God to grow and explore the gifts that God has given them, and He has blessed them all with specific gifts, in the same way that you and I are blessed with our individual ministries, whatever they may be. By walking alongside these newly confirmed candidates we are able to lift them up in prayer, support and facilitate a space for themselves to find an even deeper meaning in the life of Christ and what this means for the world they find themselves part of.

So, in conclusion this morning, let us be reminded of a few important ideas:

- 1) Confirmation is a very important sacrament.
- 2) Confirmation should be seen as a “passing in” parade as opposed to a “passing out” parade from the church.
- 3) Confirmation should not be seen as an end to religious education and commitment, but rather the beginning of a new life in service to God.
- 4) We as parishioners have a responsibility to guide, nurture, support and assist with the continued formation of those who have been recently confirmed. We are just as much part of the liturgy and vows as those who are being confirmed are.
- 5) Confirmation, whilst a very serious sacrament that involves serious vows and commitment, is also a time of joyous celebration for all those who are part of the Church of God. The angels in Heaven dance with joy and I

do believe that God is genuinely pleased every time one of His people commits their lives to Him.

I would like to close this morning with a special prayer for Celine, Ryan and Nsika:

Let us pray:

Spirit of God, grant Celine, Ryan and Nsika:

The gift of wisdom

To see the world through your eyes,

The gift of counsel

To make difficult decisions,

The gifts of knowledge and understanding

To use their minds to know you and to love you,

The gift of fortitude

To have the courage to live in the faith

Despite the difficulties and disappointments,

The gift of piety

To be able to express their special love

And commitment to you,

And the right kind of awesome fear

That makes them pause to wonder and revere God's love.

Amen.