

[Spirituality](#)



(Unsplash/James Wainscoat)



by Thomas Gumbleton

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

December 13, 2018

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

[Soundcloud](#)

Before we celebrate the sacrament, it's important for us to reflect for a few moments on the Scriptures and what this sacrament really commits us to do. That's important for these candidates, of course, but also for the rest of us who are baptized and most of whom are confirmed, to renew our own commitment. I remind us that in that opening prayer, what did we pray for? "Loving God, send your Holy Spirit upon us to make us witnesses before the world to the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ."

Second Sunday in Advent

[December 9, 2018](#)

Baruch 5:1-9

Psalm 126

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Luke 3:1-6

That's what we're committing ourselves to when we are confirmed. We declare we're ready to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus, which is what? To proclaim the reign of God. The first thing he did when he started his public life, he announced, "The reign of God is at hand. Change your lives." He was talking to his first disciples. The reign of God is where God's love oversees everything and changes everything into a fullness of life for every person. The reign of God is at hand, but we must change our lives.

Today these young people are committing themselves to be witnesses to this good news of Jesus, the good news that calls us to transform our world into as close an image of that reign of God as possible. It doesn't take very long for us to begin to realize the kinds of things that need to be changed in order for the reign of God to break forth. St. Luke, in the gospel lesson today, puts it in the historical context, which makes very clear what Jesus was going to have to do to make the reign of God happen.

He mentions the historical context. Pontius Pilate was the Roman representative for all of the Holy Land. King Herod he mentions, and he mentions Lysanias and Philip —

other rulers at the time. Pontius Pilate represented the Roman authority. Do you remember at that point, under Pontius Pilate, the Holy Land was occupied by the Roman army and they were treated with cruelty, injustice? How did Jesus respond to that? One of the things according to the Roman Empire, the laws, women and children had no rights — no rights whatsoever. Jesus began to change that, especially in regard to women. He made women his disciples.

Do you remember the first one who proclaimed the good news of the resurrection? It was Mary Magdalene, a woman called "the apostle to the apostles" because she proclaimed that great news that Jesus had destroyed death and is risen from the dead. Women were given a role among the disciples of Jesus contrary to the laws of the Roman Empire. Another thing: Do you remember under King Herod at the very beginning of his life, Jesus had to flee? He had to leave his country with his parents, go to Egypt. What if there was a wall there that kept them out? What would have happened?

But Jesus defied King Herod, managed to get to Egypt, and after a couple of years was able to come back. Jesus was changing things. Also if you think about what Jesus did in relationship to the planet, he loved this Earth, this planet on which we live, upon which we depend for a living. "The birds of the air, the flowers of the field," Jesus says, "God takes care of them because God cherishes this planet." So Jesus there too was showing how he had to enter into the life of the people at that time, bring about change so that the reign of God could break forth.

Of course it's not hard to think about our own day and time. If we're going to be witnesses to Jesus, don't we have to try to continue to work for the rights — full equality of women in our society and in our church? At that recent synod of Bishops in Rome, it was a synod about youth. There were representatives from every diocese in the world. Most of them were bishops, but there were some religious men and women, nuns and brothers.

Do you know that the only ones that could vote were the men — the bishops and the religious priests and religious brothers? No women, even though they were there, would have a vote. That's wrong. Jesus wouldn't have stood for that. He made women equal in his community of disciples. The same thing goes for welcoming people who are fleeing torture, violence, poverty, who are struggling to save their lives by leaving and going where they can have a life. We push them away. That's not the way of Jesus.

Advertisement

We have to think about this and see what we can do to try to follow the example of Jesus, be a witness to this Jesus who shows us how to make the reign of God happen. We have to love our planet, cherish it. Pope Francis has written a beautiful encyclical letter about our planet and what needs to be done to bring about the changes that will stop the destruction of the planet. Imagine if we don't change, two or three decades, it will be irreversible. The chance to do something is before us now. We'd be following the example of Jesus who, as I said, loved the birds of the air and the flowers of the field — all of human creation. He cherished it, nurtured it. That's what we must do.

So it isn't an easy thing to be a witness to the good news of Jesus because all of these issues are challenging. We may find it difficult, but in some way, if we are really going to live out this sacrament of confirmation where we receive the Holy Spirit to become witnesses before the world to the good news of Jesus, we have to begin to work on the kinds of things that Jesus did to change our world, to transform it into as close an image of the word [reign] of God as possible.

As I confirm you young people today, I hope you will take seriously your call to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus and in your own lives begin to find the ways to change the things that need to be changed so that every person can begin to live — cherishing, enjoying the goods of the Earth that were given for all and not for a few. We must become those witnesses who by our deeds and actions proclaim the good news of Jesus.

I invite everyone here this afternoon, as we celebrate the sacrament, to pray very seriously and profoundly for these young people, that they can be the witnesses God calls them to be, and that together with others throughout our land and throughout our world — all of us can do the work of Jesus transforming our world into as close an image of the word of God, the reign of God, as possible. That's our challenge. We pray that you will help us make it happen.

[Homily given Dec. 9 at SS. John and Paul Parish, Washington, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]