

**“I Have Overcome the World”**

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).*

On my side of the family I have four nephews and one niece. My niece Audley is the oldest of the cousins and I'll never forget the day she was born. My brother Danny and his wife Lindsey were living in St. Louis at the time and, just a few days after Audley was born, they sent out a birth announcement that doubled as a Baptism invitation. I'm sure you've received or seen one of these before. It typically features a picture of the newborn baby and also includes essential information about the event being announced and, especially when a baptism is involved, the card usually includes a Bible verse fitting for the occasion. It might be a verse like Isaiah 43:1 which says, “I have called you by name, you are mine” or the words of Jesus from Mark's Gospel when He says, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). There are many Bible verses that are commonly used for the announcement of a Baptism...but these weren't the words printed on Audley's announcement. Instead, just above the picture of my beautiful, newborn baby niece were the words of Jesus from today's Gospel reading: “In this world you will have trouble.”

I remember reading those words and being utterly shocked and almost offended. Here was a touching picture of new life in an announcement marking the beginning of a story yet to be written and *the first words you saw at the top of the card spoke of trouble!* This verse seemed completely inappropriate and misplaced and even today, on a Sunday when we are celebrating the Rite of Confirmation and listening to the public confession of faith from 19 young adults, this Gospel lesson seems out of place...but if you really think about – if you separate the sentimental and emotional connotations surrounding events like Baptism and Confirmation – if you truly think about what's happening on a day like this, then there could be no more important and appropriate words for this occasion because what Jesus says is absolutely true: “In this world you will have trouble.”

This week, as I worked to get everything ready for confirmation, this statement from Jesus seemed to become more and more meaningful. Over the last several days I have personally interviewed each of our candidates for confirmation and, as I met with them to talk about their faith and the vows they will speak today, it was clear to me that these young people are already dealing with many of the same practical worries and spiritual concerns that plague us all. Even as they stand ready to make a public confession of the faith into which they were baptized, their lives are anything but victorious. They have doubts. They have fears. They are dealing with failures and sins and – just like the rest of us – they already have a profound understanding of what Jesus meant when He said, “In this world you will have trouble.”

This was very evident to me in my personal conversation with the kids, but you can also see it for yourselves in the confirmation verses chosen by the class. Eight of our confirmands selected Joshua 1:9 to be read as they receive their blessing today. Joshua 1:9 was spoken at a very frightening and uncertain time for Joshua as he took over for Moses as the leader God's people and, in this moment of great anxiety and fear, God says to him, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord you God will be with you wherever you go.” Two other students chose similar words from Psalm 27 where David writes, “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid. In another selection from John we hear Jesus telling His disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Here's the bottom line: Even in the verses that don't specifically speak of fear, every one of the young people being confirmed today chose God's words of assurance in the face of trouble...and this is no coincidence!

Each and every one of us has experienced and can attest to the truth of our text, “In this world you will have trouble.” Jesus spoke these words on the night before His crucifixion to a group of disciples who had seen Jesus do amazing miracles; to a group who had followed Jesus and listened to Him teach; who had witnessed His compassion and been awed by His power and if any group of people should have been strong in their faith

and confident in their security it was these twelve disciples. And yet Jesus knew them, *just as He knows us*, and He knew that soon they would be scattered and that He would be betrayed; that soon He would be arrested and tried and beaten and crucified and that these men, so bold in their commitments to Him, would soon leave Him in His greatest hour of need.

They were about to see grave trouble in the world. Their faith was about to undergo a vicious attack from Satan and all of their best efforts and good intentions were going fail them. On the edge of such intense temptation and immense uncertainty, Jesus spoke to them with honesty and with words of assurance. He promised them that no matter what trouble the world would throw at them and no matter how dark the path would become for them, and no matter how desperate things would appear to them...they could “take heart” because He had “overcome the world.” And, my friends, this is the same promise that Jesus is making to you today!

This weekend in (your confirmation) the confirmation of our young people, it is not their (your) vows that we celebrate as much as it is God’s promise to them (you) in Jesus. And that is true for all of us and it is borne out in the confirmation verses chosen for this day! In Christ, God has promised you that nothing can snatch you out of His hand. In Christ, who is the light of the world, God has promised you that He is the way and the truth and the life. In Christ, God has promised you that He will be with you always, that you need not be afraid and that, in Christ, you can do everything through Him who gives you strength. Today, in Christ, these promises that God has made to you are confirmed!

These were the promises that God made to you in your Baptism (and it is these promises that God will renew today as you receive his Body and Blood). My friends, God has overcome the trouble of this world and the promise made to us in our Baptism is not a one-time occurrence but an ongoing and continual promise for our journey. That’s why confirmation is not graduation. It is not the completion of anything. Instead, it simply begins another part of the journey that the Lord has set before us (you) and for that journey you will need help, you will need strength, you will need the assurance of God *and that’s what this day is all about.*

When you go on a serious hike, you might walk ten miles on the first day, but unless you receive the food and drink you need, on the second day you might only make it five or six miles and each day that you go without receiving the nourishment you need, the journey becomes longer and harder.

Our life in Christ is a journey. It is a pilgrimage toward eternity and we need to be fed and nourished and strengthened for the trip. Each of our journeys will look a little different and yet we know that “in this world we will have trouble.” About this we have no choice and, as we hear in today’s Gospel reading, God never promised to take the trouble away...but, in Christ, He did promise to give us strength for the journey; strength to stand firm and to persevere and, in Christ, we can see the trouble of this world through the lens of His cross.

There is not one of us here today who can make this journey on our own. Today, in the vows you take before God, you will do nothing more than to simply acknowledge your need for nourishment and, my brothers and sisters, the strength for this journey is yours in the gifts that God has given to you. It began at your Baptism, as He cleansed you of your sin and the faith of your Baptism is strengthened each time you hear His Word of promise and each time you receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sin and in these means of grace He will be with you always. That is God’s promise to you!

When I received the birth announcement for my niece and read, “In this world you will have trouble...” I was shocked and a little offended...until I turned it over and saw this incredible promise of Jesus, “But take heart! I have overcome the world.” And when I read that, I cried.

On the cross, Jesus made this statement a reality and in Baptism, His victory is yours and today – for all of us – His promise is confirmed in these words: “I have overcome the world.” Take heart! Amen.

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