

The Scent of Holy Chrism is Permeating the Air!

People of God, May 2015

Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan

We are in the middle of the confirmation season (April 11 – May 24) and although it is quite demanding personally, it gives me great joy to be out in the parishes meeting the young people and confirming them. This year we will have about 71 confirmations this Spring. I personally do about half of them and delegate several others to assist since I can't do them all myself. I'm grateful to Most Rev. Arthur Tafoya, Bishop Emeritus of Pueblo; our Chancellor/Moderator of the Curia Very Rev. John Cannon; and our Vicar General Msgr. Lambert Joseph Luna for their assistance. For the vast majority of the confirmations I have a seminarian candidate or seminarian who serves as my driver and also serves the Mass.

On Tuesday, April 14, I confirmed 102 at San Clemente Parish in Los Lunas which included many from its mission church of Meadowlake. By the time we finish with all the confirmations, we will have confirmed about 3,500 mostly teenagers. It is very uplifting for me personally to see the goodness of the teenagers and to experience the joy in the parish having confirmation. There is never anything gloomy or negative at a confirmation.

I ask that each teenager being confirmed send me a letter asking for confirmation and answering two questions – Which saint did they chose for their confirmation name and why; and secondly What do they like about being Catholic? I receive some very interesting responses and I quote from about half dozen of the letters during my homily at their confirmation Mass.

In some other dioceses, confirmation takes place in the third grade along with first Holy Communion, but I think this is a terrible idea. It strips away the opportunity for teenagers to have a deeply pastoral experience during their high school years. They are able to be renewed in their knowledge of the Catholic faith through their classes, they see a love and devotion for the church by their fellow teenagers and they are recognized as older members of the faith rather than just third graders. I tried doing confirmation for the third graders in Lubbock one time and they were to receive both confirmation and first Holy Communion. In the homily, they had vacant looks on their faces and they were more interested in a roach that was running down the main aisle of the cathedral than they were in either Jesus in Holy Communion or the Holy Spirit in confirmation! I think pastorally it is absolutely the best thing to have confirmation in the high school years. They will be impacted a lot more by the sacrament when they are older than when they are in the third grade.

When the new archbishop comes, I will be happy to continue to assist with confirmation if he so desires. In the meantime, let us all draw upon the strength of the Holy Spirit that we received in confirmation to make good judgments and proper decisions with the help of the Holy Spirit in order to have a level of happiness in this life and eternal happiness in the life to come. The air is permeated with the scent of the holy chrism as I place the oil on the foreheads of those being

confirmed. Let us pray for them that they will continue to be strong in their Catholic faith and not consider confirmation a “graduation time” from the church.

On Saturday, May 23, at 10:00 a.m. at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, I will again use the holy chrism during the priesthood ordination of seven men – Valentine Phu Ngoc Au; Michael Garcia; Joseph Van Tao Nguyen; Edgar Sanchez; Benoit Treu Van Vu; William Woytavich; and Rob Yaksich.

Annual adult confirmations are scheduled for Monday, November 30 and Tuesday, December 1 – both at 6:00 p.m. One will be in the Albuquerque area and the other one of the Santa Fe parishes. Once the locations are determined the Office of Worship will notify all the parishes with the details.