

Homily for Confirmation Masses at St Cecilia's on 8, 9 and 10 September 2026

Readings:

1. Isaiah 11:1-4a
2. Romans 8:26-27
3. John 16:5-7,12-13a

Girls and boys who will be confirmed this evening, many of you were baptised when you were very young. At your baptism, your parents spoke for you. They said that they wanted you to be a follower of Jesus in the Catholic Church. They also said that they'd do their best to guide and help you to be a follower of Jesus. Today, I speak not to your parents but to *you*. I'll ask *you* to confirm that *you* want to be a follower of Jesus. In a world where many people really don't believe in God, I'll ask *you* to confirm that *you* believe that God is real. I'll ask *you* to confirm that you believe in Jesus. I'll ask *you* to confirm that you want to receive the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and that you'll do your best to live always as a follower of Jesus. Boys and girls, these are important questions. Please answer them seriously and with the commitment of real faith in Jesus. For if you do so, your answers to these questions will profoundly shape the rest of your lives.

We celebrate this Sacrament as you move into a time of significant change in your lives. Some of you will soon move from primary school to secondary school. Some of you will soon change schools. Soon, if not already, your bodies will change in a significant way; you'll experience new and powerful emotions; and you may form new relationships. Now, we call you children. But soon, a new chapter will begin in your lives, and we'll recognise you as adolescents. And because you'll be older and more mature, we'll also expect more responsibility from you. At this age, girls and boys who are Jewish commit to their *Jewish* faith by making a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah. And in the Catholic Church, we ask you to confirm your *Christian* faith as we celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. This time of change from childhood to adolescence is a significant time to affirm our religious faith. And indeed, the affirmation of our religious faith prepares us for what lies ahead.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, you'll receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Did you see those seven gifts listed in tonight's First Reading – that reading from the prophet Isaiah? That book was written about 700 years before the time of Jesus, so this is a very ancient and very important list. There's piety or reverence, and wonder and awe. These are gifts which strengthen our religious faith, and help us to live as people of faith in a culture which all too often forgets about God. There's knowledge and understanding and right judgement and wisdom. These gifts help us to make good and wise decisions in life, and also to learn from life when things don't turn out as we'd hoped. And there's the gift of courage, which helps us to stand up for ourselves and our values, to stand up for others, and to do the right thing even when it's hard. Girls and boys, these gifts aren't magic. If you don't try to live as a follower of Jesus, or you don't try to be brave and make good choices, these gifts won't work despite you. But if you do try to live as a follower of Jesus, and you do try to be brave, and you do try to make good choices, these gifts will help you. They'll help to make hard things a bit easier. They'll help you to find the right way forward. Many grown-up Catholics say that when they were confirmed, they didn't really appreciate how important these gifts are. But when they're older and they look back over their lives and all the decisions and choices that they've made, they often recognise then just how important these gifts of the Holy Spirit have been in their lives. Boys and girls, as your lives unfold, I hope that you too will discover just how important these gifts can be, and how they really can help us to live a truly good life.

Girls and boys, many of you have chosen a Confirmation name. In doing this, you've chosen a special saint to be your role model. I hope that you continue to reflect on your Confirmation saint, and to let their example show you how to live life well. May you be strong like St Sebastian even when it's hard. May you be compassionate and generous like St Mary MacKillop. May you be a woman of faith and courage like St Cecilia. What are the special qualities of your Confirmation saint? And how could you grow to be more like them?

Boys and girls, my deepest hope for you is that you and your families continue to pray. Could you pray Grace Before Meals before the evening meal? Could you bless one another with a Sign of the Cross on your foreheads? Could you join us here more often for Sunday Mass? If our faith is like a plant, prayer is like water for that plant. If you water a plant, it'll continue to grow. But if you don't water a plant, that plant may even die. And so, may you water your faith with prayer so that your faith may continue to grow. And may your prayer and your way of life also help you to grow in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For if you grow in these gifts, you'll be able to achieve the greatest thing which is possible in any human life. For through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you'll be able to become a truly good person. And in this life, nothing else matters as much as being a truly good person.

Fr Kevin McGovern