

**HOMILY FOR CONFIRMATION AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION  
2023-2024**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

“It is good that we are here” (Mt 17:1-9). These are the words that Saint Peter exclaimed when he saw Christ transfigured in His glory on the high mountain. We can also say that most fittingly at every Mass and especially this Mass today: It is good that we are here to administer the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion to these young people, by which they will complete their full initiation into the Catholic Church as adopted sons and daughters of God.

Today in this Sacrament of Confirmation we celebrate in a special way the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God has given to us: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist, so that the love He poured out for us when He died on the cross would fill out hearts with His grace. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples and us His Holy Spirit so that He would remain with us always.

I am confident that you believe this. [Read selected questionnaires.]

Thank you for these profound expressions of your faith and commitment. I pray that the Holy Spirit will strengthen you with His gifts and that you will always remain strong in your faith!

Last July I attended the annual summer conference of the Napa Institute in Napa, California. This event was an uplifting experience as over 800 of Christ's faithful gathered in California to grow more deeply in the practice of the Catholic faith and put their trust in the Lord and His Church.

One of these inspiring people that I was with at the Napa Institute that I would like to tell you about was Father Robert Spitzer, a Catholic Priest in the Society of Jesus (commonly known as the Jesuits), who serves as President of the Magis Center for Science, Reason, and Faith, as well as President of the Spitzer Center for Visionary Leadership. Father Spitzer is one of the brightest people I have ever met. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy *Summa cum Laude* from the Catholic University of America in 1988 and served as President of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, from 1998 to 2009.

In 2011, Father Spitzer joined with Tim Busch to co-found the Napa Institute in an effort to empower Catholic leaders to renew the Church and transform the culture of our increasingly secular society.

What makes Father Spitzer's achievements even more remarkable is that his eyesight has deteriorated due to macular degeneration over several years to the point where he is now nearly blind. He sees at about 5% of normal vision and must rely on the help of assistants to read to him and transcribe his dictated thoughts into writing. Despite this disability, Father Spitzer lectures brilliantly from memory, since he cannot read from notes or a prepared text.

Over the years I have been impressed and amused by the way he responds whenever we meet, as we did again a few months ago by chance at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport or when I attended the Napa Institute's conference this past summer. Without identifying myself, I will go up to him and say, "Father Spitzer, how are you?" Without missing a beat, he will respond, "Bishop Paprocki, nice to see you!"

What impresses me is his instantaneous recognition of my voice. What amuses me is his saying, "nice to see you," when I know that he is not literally seeing me at all except perhaps as a blurry shadow.

At first, I thought he was just using a polite greeting so as not to draw attention to his physical blindness, but I have come to understand that Father Spitzer does indeed see me in the image of me that he holds in his mind, even if not in the literal vision of his bodily eyes.

I thought of Father Spitzer's practice of seeing people in his mind even if not with his eyes when I was reading the scripture passage where Our Lord says, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:16). Jesus was not talking literally about physical eyesight or hearing, but about seeing Him with the eyes of faith as Our Savior and hearing Him as the Word of God.

This is what we are called to do every time we come to Mass. We listen to the readings from the Bible not just as wise literature, but as God revealing His Word to us. When the bread and wine are consecrated and elevated before our eyes, many of us respond quietly to ourselves with the traditional affirmation of faith, using the words of Saint Thomas, by exclaiming, "My Lord and my God," even though what we are looking at appears to be simply a piece of bread and a cup of wine. Following the example of Father Spitzer, seeing the image of Christ in our minds with the eyes of faith, we might add, "Jesus, it is good to see you!"

This is what it means to be fully initiated into the Church through these Sacraments of Initiation: to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we may see with the eyes of faith, hear with ears that believe, and love with hearts that are burning with the fire of God's love.

Open my eyes, Lord  
Help me to see Your face  
Open my eyes, Lord  
Help me to see

Open my ears, Lord  
Help me to hear Your voice  
Open my ears, Lord  
Help me to hear

Open my heart, Lord  
Help me to love like You  
Open my heart, Lord  
Help me to love<sup>1</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> "Open My Eyes," composed by Jesse Manibusan, published by Oregon Catholic Press, 1988.