

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Confirmation and Licensing of Lay Ministers**  
**St Mary's, Gugulethu – Trinity Sunday**  
**7 June 2009**

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Trinity Sunday  
Is 6:1-8  
Rom 8:12-17  
Jn 3:1-17

May I speak in the name of the Holy Trinity: the one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and who calls us to share in the joyful life of worship, witness and service.

With today being Trinity Sunday, and with the Confederations Cup almost here, and the World Cup only a year away, I was thinking about how many parallels there are between football and the Christian life.

Let me explain!

First of all, God the Father, the perfect Father, picks us for his team.

Then Jesus is our captain. He is our star player. And he is our example, our role model, leading us in how we play the game, showing us how human life can best be lived.

And then the Holy Spirit is with us, like the very best coach: encouraging us, helping us to get it right, and cheering us all the way.

And the service of Confirmation is a wonderful occasion for saying 'yes' to all this.

Yes, we say to God. Yes, I hear your call. Yes, I choose to respond. Yes, I will play on your team, I will follow Jesus my captain, I will play the game of life as the Holy Spirit teaches me!

But, rather more important, God says yes to us.

He says, Yes, it is you I love. Yes, it is you I invite to be my child. Yes, I want you to live so I can be with you; and help you; and direct and guide you; and support you, in all that life will bring you.

And, says God – and this is the best bit of all – I am going to send my Holy Spirit upon you, to be there for you, to be like the coach, encouraging you and helping you to get it right.

This is what we will be praying, when I shall lay hands on the Confirmation candidates in a few minutes – that you will be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is God's 'once for all' promise, to make a difference in our lives, for ever! The Holy Spirit will never leave you – perhaps you might choose to ignore him sometimes, even for years, but actually, he will stay with you, and endlessly try to let you know how much God loves and cares for you.

But the 'once for all' promises of God are often true 'again and again' as well as 'more and more'.

So we can ask for a fresh coming of the Spirit, 'again and again' whenever we start something new in our lives. This is what we are doing as we pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon the new Lay Ministers being licensed for the first time today. We ask God for his Spirit to help them as they take on these new responsibilities.

It is not only in church that God wants to help and guide us, to strengthen and equip us, to live in his way. We may also ask God for a fresh blessing of his Spirit whenever we begin a new chapter in our lives, or face a new challenge:

- the start of a new school year, or sitting exams
- on getting a new job, or taking on new responsibilities – or on being retrenched
- on illness or before an operation
- on marriage – even on divorce and the new start we then need
- after bereavement
- on moving house

and all manner of other changes in our circumstances.

The list is endless – but God's promise is always the same. Whenever something new comes along, the best thing to do is to ask for God's Holy

Spirit to guide you, and to transform and strengthen and equip you with every gift you will need for all that lies ahead.

And it is not just that the Holy Spirit comes on us again and again, the Holy Spirit also comes upon us more and more.

Throughout the whole of our lives, God our loving heavenly Father is, by his Spirit at work within us, steadily changing and shaping us to be more like Jesus, more like the people he created us to be.

Sometimes those changes are very gradual, and it is only as we look back that we see how much we have grown in faith.

Sometimes those changes are more sudden – or more clear to us. Perhaps God challenges us

- to change some aspect of our behaviour,
- to give up a bad habit,
- to mend a broken relationship,
- to offer, or accept, forgiveness.
- to put right a wrong
- to take on a new direction.

In all of these, God's Holy Spirit is there to help us have the courage, the strength, to do what he calls us to do.

In the Greek of the New Testament, the word for the Holy Spirit is 'Paraclete', which means 'the One who comes alongside'. He really is like a football coach, always on the sidelines, always ready to advise and encourage us, wherever we are in life!

And when life is tough, and we mess up, he's still there. If we let him, he'll pick us up when we fall on our faces; and point us in the right direction when we lose our way, and give us the fresh start we need. But he'll never abandon us, even if at times we turn our back on him.

Most of all, as the words of the Confirmation Service say, 'we come to be filled, through the laying on of hands, with the power of the Spirit for worship, witness and service'.

Ultimately it is in these three areas that the Holy Spirit wants to train and direct us, more and more, throughout our lives – worship, witness and service.

Let me say a little more about them.

Worship is about growing in closeness to God. In the second lesson, we heard how St Paul writes to the Christians in Rome that the Holy Spirit teaches us to call God 'Abba'. The word means Father – or more accurately, Daddy. God is the best possible, the loveliest, the most wonderful Daddy that there could ever be – and he wants us to get to know him better and better.

We do this in the same way that we'd get to know a person – we spend quality time in his company.

This is what we do in Church, in reading the Bible, in our prayers – where we need to learn to listen, as well as to speak! God can speak to us in all sorts of different ways. Sometimes even the words of a hymn that we sing seem to have a special message from God to our hearts.

Witness means communicating the truth about God to others. A witness in court has to tell the truth about a person or an event. We tell the truth that Jesus is our Lord, and that living his way is the best possible way to live.

In other words, as Jesus himself said, we let them know that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.' And as we look at society around, our lives should proclaim that 'God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'

Service means demonstrating, often in very practical actions, what God's love for the world, and God's desire to save it, really means. Jesus tells us it this includes feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty a drink, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, tending the sick, visiting those in prison – and in every way, helping those in need.

And because God wants all of us to grow in worship, witness and service, throughout our lives, his call to each of us this morning is the same as the call to the prophet Isaiah in our first reading.

God still says to each of us 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'

Are we ready, like Isaiah, to give the answer, 'Here I am, send me'

So let us pause for a moment this morning, and think about God's call, not only to the Confirmation candidates, not only to the new Lay Ministers, but to all of you.

What is he saying to you today?

How does he want you to grow more and more, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in worship and witness and loving service in Gugulethu?

What might it mean for the Holy Spirit to come on you today in a new way, so that God can dream his dreams in you, for your life, and for the life of Gugulethu?

Let us dare to pause and reflect on this.

Just close your eyes, and relax, where you are sitting.

Remember how much God loves you. You are his precious and beloved child, in whom he delights.

Now, ask your loving God to bring to your mind some part of your life where he is inviting you to go forward, led by the Holy Spirit, in some new and different way, in your own life, and in this community.

[Pause]

Let him show you the place where he wants to bring you a fresh vision.

Let him reassure you and excite you with his promise that he will transform you, and give you the power to live out this vision, filled with his love.

[Pause]

Now, in the silence of your heart, invite the Holy Spirit to come to you in a new and fresh way, and make these promises real.

[Pause]

And now say thank you, for, even if you feel no different at this precise moment, I am sure you will soon experience the wonderful gifts of the Spirit's presence in whatever God is calling you to do and be.

[Pause]

And now turn, and share a smile with your neighbour.

Smile, because you know God loves each of you, God is with each of you, his Spirit lives inside each of you, and he delights to do more than you can hope or ask or imagine!

[Pause]

Isn't God wonderful!

My prayer for you all today is that through this service, and in the weeks ahead, you may find the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and upon this parish, in new and fresh ways.

As we say the words and pray the prayers of Confirmation, don't just think about what God's promises to you, and yours to him, perhaps many years ago, when you were confirmed.

Open your hearts to receive the Holy Spirit once again, and more than ever before.

And may God set your hearts on fire with love for him, and inspire you with a vision to grow in the life of worship, witness and service, as an individual, and as a parish, here in Gugulethu.

And may God the Father fill you with his power, his confidence, his conviction, and transform you to as he sends you out, as a member of his team, following Jesus as your captain, and encouraged every step of the way by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so may God, the Holy Trinity, bless you beyond your greatest hopes and dreams – and may he make you a blessing to everyone in Gugulethu.

Amen.