

Sunday 4 B

On Wednesday 97 enthusiastic young people will receive the sacrament of confirmation. In doing so they make their own the choice of being catholic, the choice made by you parents for them at their baptism. How many of them will still be with us at mass in 10, 20 years' time? Looking at contemporary trends you might suggest: Very few. High flyers in abundance: many will build great careers. But what will be their personal lives, their families, their final end?

I see good reasons for optimism. They lie in you, parents, grandparents and extended family; in our schools and our parish. Though we are still a long way from being the ideal parish preached by Pope Francis, we are on our way to being this.

Go back to the OT passage and gospel you have just heard. Moses was a heroic single-handed leader. The unique channel through which the people heard from God. And they did not like it; they were terrified. Moses' style was already out of date. We heard God promise that he would raise up prophets "from their own brothers". A different style of learning and continuing support. Yet the Moses style persisted even in our church down to our own day. Most of us began in a church where teaching and directives came from Rome to be applied locally by the bishops and priests. "Obey and do not argue". That will not work in today's world.

We have a Pope who is saying: "Don't come to me to answer all your questions. Bishops: listen to your people. Everyone: listen to the young." It does not mean that we agree with everything that is said. But it does mean we are a church struggling to find how to build good lives and the path ahead in puzzling circumstances. It is more important to struggle than to get everything right. Only when we each draw from our varied fields of life-experience and share them shall we move to be the church of Jesus. It is a task involving all without exception. Nobody too young or too ignorant, too poor or too wicked.

So 94 young people have come through an intensive well-planned period of reflection on the choice they are making. Long before that they have been **accompanied** through a long **gradual** process in your families. It has been a process where your good example has helped them to see and accept the wisdom of standards not common in their peer group. You catechists, parents and family have shown them, are showing them, the joy that can come from practicing our faith. Please do not stop now. The need for it continues to the grave.

The two words: **gradual and accompany** are key words for Pope Francis. These form the soil and climate in which solid commitment grows. It has to be maintained. That is why our parish is so important. It is hard to believe in a church if you are isolated. The community carries us along. You married people see the struggles of your peers - at the school gate and elsewhere - and are encouraged to keep going with your difficulties. The Pope has stressed the importance of young couples approaching marriage sharing their social life. Similarly for the years immediately post marriage.

That is why our confirmation candidates are fortunate and give us hope. Now look at how Jesus went about it. He did teach, but principally by parable (this is a truth wrapped up in a story. So he gives you the same truth wrapped up in the story of your life, individual and family). But the core is that Jesus warmed people by his personality. Then he reinforced it by healing. The giving of life and wholeness. We have to keep close to Jesus in prayer - and it will show. In that environment young and not so young will find the resources to stay with what they will undertake on Wednesday.