

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski 6th Sunday of Easter - May 9, 2026

Early in the twentieth century, Elias and Flora gave birth to their fourth son in Chicago. Within a year, the family moved to a farm in Marceline, Missouri, where the young boy developed a skill for drawing with crayons and watercolors. When he was about ten years old, his family again moved to Kansas City where he attended classes at the Kansas City Art Institute. Then, the young man moved to the west coast to make his mark in the cartoon industry. Later, as a young father in the second half of the 1940s, he found himself spending many a Saturday afternoon at Griffith Park in Los Angeles with his two young daughters. He'd spend a couple hours on a park bench, reading the paper or watching the skies for signs of rain, but he was mostly feeling bored. He'd looked around and saw dozens of other parents doing the exact same thing, while their children rode the carousel. Then, he thought: Wouldn't it be great if there was a clean, unspoiled park where **parents and children** could go on the rides **together**, and **everyone** would have a good time?

Well, that father, **Walt Disney**, followed through on his idea. The amusement park empire he created now stretches around the world with countless millions attending over the last 71 years. Disney theme parks are first and foremost, for families. Everybody does everything together:

- Fathers push strollers
- Mothers drag toddlers, and
- Kids want a hot dog or cry over an outrageously expensive souvenir.

Having been there when our kids were young, I speak from experience. Emotional meltdowns are not uncommon. It can be frantic and hectic and exhausting for everyone in the family.

In Disney World, you see up close what it means to be a parent, but also what it means to be a child — to be overwhelmed by crowds and confusion, terrified by characters with big rubber heads. **But for a child, there is also the security of realizing you aren't alone.** One of the most common refrains you hear throughout the park is "Please take small children by the hand." **For a child, there is the sure knowledge that there is always a hand to hold; that someone is looking out for you.**

That's the kind of comfort that Jesus offers us in this Sunday's gospel. Jesus assures us, who might be afraid or overwhelmed by things we can't understand, that if we love him and keep his commandments, he "will give [us] another Advocate to be with [us] always...He will not leave [us] orphans." He was speaking, of course, of the Holy Spirit, and Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, that we will celebrate in a couple of weeks.

Earlier this week, this Cathedral witnessed the confirmation of 102 adults from throughout our diocese who "completed the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit:" Wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord. "Confirmation seals those previously baptized... and equips them for active participation in the worship and apostolic life of the Church." (CCC glossary). This, and every, Confirmation is exactly what happened in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles when "Peter and John...prayed for [the Samaritans], that they might receive the Holy Spirit," after they had been baptized by the deacon, Philip.

Jesus's promise not to leave us orphans is fulfilled not only in the gifts of the Holy Spirit but, also with the gift of his mother, Mary, as our Mother. From the cross, Jesus said to his beloved disciple, "Behold, your mother," (John 19:27) entrusting Mary to all who belong to him. In moments of loneliness or abandonment, we can turn to Mary, the exemplar of motherhood, with confidence, and know her maternal intercession and care.

On this Mother's Day weekend, all of us—sons and daughters—should pause and reflect on the profound gift of motherhood. In the life of the Church, we recognize that mothers—and those who have played a motherly role—are often the first icons of God's unconditional love that we encounter.

Through their quiet sacrifices, tireless labor, as the foundation of families, they build up the domestic church. It is often through a mother's voice that we first learn our prayers and through her example that we see the beauty of a life lived in faith.

Jesus fulfills his promise, **every day**: Whenever we're overwhelmed or terrified, we just need to remember Jesus' promise to us: "I will not leave you orphans."