**Original Order Homily Points**

***January 10, 2016, Feast for The Baptism of the Lord***

Dear Clergy,

With today’s celebration of *The Baptism of the Lord*, Bishop Larry Silva has issued a “Decree of Promulgation.” This decree explains that as our shepherd he is restoring the order of the Sacraments of Initiation to their original, historical order: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Please find below a homily example you can use for the Masses of January 10, 2016, as you introduce the Original Order to your congregations.

Note that, if necessary, a viable alternative for preaching on these themes is on January 24, the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time.

**Homily Example**

A young child is so proud when he learns to say and write his family name.

An immigrant is so proud when after a long and arduous process she can raise her hand, swear her allegiance, and receive her country’s greatest title, “citizen.”

The Queen of England proclaimed that her first grandchild will be given the royal title of “Prince.”

Even in the Church, the Pope can, and does, confer great titles upon people, such as Cardinal, Bishop, Monsignor, Knights and Ladies.

The Pope’s own title is quite impressive: Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the Vatican City State, Servant of the Servants of God.

As impressive as all these honors and titles are, this feast today, the Baptism of the Lord, reminds us that our highest honor and our greatest title is that of “Christian.”

At Jesus’ baptism, and while he was praying, a voice was heard from heaven saying “You are my beloved Son.” God the Father confirmed that the eternal, pre-existing Word had indeed become flesh in Jesus.

When we were baptized, God spoke those same words to us, “You are my beloved Son.” “You are my beloved daughter.”

After a person is signed with the cross, baptized with water, and anointed with oil, they are a child of God and they receive the name and title of Christian for the first time.

The word “Christian” means “a little Christ” and it is both who we are and what we must constantly strive to be.

It is who we are and we should never forget that. To identify as a Christian should be a source of pride. It should make us confident and unafraid of any challenge before us. We should hold our heads up high and walk taller because we are part of God’s family.

Some here today may be anxious about the coming year and have concerns about their job security, their health, their finances, or their family. If that is you, you should remember that you are a child of God and an heir of the Kingdom. You already possess wealth greater than anything money can buy, and a dignity that isn’t undone by sin, sickness, or even death.

Every time you dip your hand in the font and trace the sign of the cross you recall your baptism and that you have access to a power greater than any power in the world, a power to bring healing and reconciliation, to speak the truth, to work for justice, and to be faithful to the mission God has given to you.

But being a Christian is also what we must strive to be and we must recommit ourselves to that identity every day.

For a Christian, every word we speak and every deed we do, will be measured against who we say we are.

A recent study confirmed the trend that 70% of those who identified themselves as Catholic are proud to be Catholic. But of those surveyed only 25% go to Mass regularly.

We apparently have plenty of Catholics who are so in name only. In the Prayer After Communion today, we will pray that we may always be God’s children “in name and in fact.”

Our Christian identity is truly something that we must grow into. We don’t understand it or live it all at once like a flash in the pan. The faith that begins in Baptism grows, deepens, and bears fruit over a lifetime.

And God helps us with his sanctifying grace.

The Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist especially help us to grow as Christians.

Today, Bishop Silva is promulgating that our diocese will soon celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation in their original order which is Baptism, then Confirmation, and then First Holy Communion.

Practically, this means that children at the age of reason (7 years old) will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation at the same time they receive their First Holy Communion.

This will be new for our diocese and it will be implemented over a period of years. Other dioceses have already begun to move in this direction. Our priests, deacons, catechists, and youth ministers have already started to prepare for the transition.

It’s important to remember that, like Baptism, Confirmation celebrates God’s choice of us, not our choosing God. What is “confirmed” is God’s action in baptism whereby he made us his beloved sons and daughters.

And think about this: If the Sacrament of Confirmation gives us an increase of the Spirit we received in Baptism, and if it seals and strengthens us to grow in holiness, wouldn’t it be helpful to receive this sacrament sooner rather than later in life?

Likewise, the Eucharist is both the culmination of our initiation as Christians and the weekly nourishment we need to grow into our identity as God’s children.

Celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation earlier in life and in this order – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – makes God’s grace available just as children are beginning to question, wonder, and explore their relationship with God that began in Baptism. The Church has long believed that children at the age of reason are truly open to the spiritual life and in need of the grace, power, and protection these sacraments provide.

This transition is a wonderful opportunity for us to renew our understanding of the Sacraments of Initiation and how they form and sustain us as Christians.

But if Confirmation and First Holy Communion are received in 2nd Grade, some may wonder what will we do for our youth. Our parishes will continue to have comprehensive and dynamic youth ministries, in ways unique to their age and situation in life, to help them understand more deeply and appreciate more fully the mystery of their lives “hidden in Christ.”

Being a Christian is both who we are what we must strive to be no matter our age. Growing into our baptismal identity means continually trying to be more like Jesus and so we must look to how he lived, how he prayed, how he made important decisions, how he related to others, and how he loved.

All the sacraments help us along the way. What God makes his own, he also keeps his own, by grace.

On your way out of church today, visit the baptismal font, bless yourself with the baptismal waters, and remember what the priest or deacon said of you when you were baptized: You have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ.

It is true. You are a Christian and that is the greatest title and the highest honor.