

CONFIRMATION HOMILY  
2017-2018

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Chester Bennington was the lead singer of a band called “Linkin Park,” not “Lincoln” as in President Abraham Lincoln, but “Linkin” as in L-I-N-K-I-N. When producer Don Gilmore first met Linkin Park in 1999, he had no idea how big the band would become. But he did know they had something special with singer Chester Bennington.

Speaking of their first meeting, Gilmore said, “I’d never really heard somebody sing that incredibly just in a little ... rehearsal room.” Together, Gilmore and the band would record Linkin Park’s debut album, *Hybrid Theory*, in the year 2000 and its follow-up in 2003, *Meteora* -- two albums that have sold a respective 10.5 million and 6.2 million copies in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the external appearances of artistic success, fame and fortune, in many ways Chester Bennington had a very tragic life. His parents’ divorce when he was 11 led him to smoking marijuana, which led to drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>2</sup> On July 20, 2017, Bennington was found dead in his home in California, from suicide by hanging.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years I have used a number of Linkin Park songs in my Confirmation homilies, including “Breaking the Habit,” “What I’ve Done,” “From the Inside” and “Somewhere I Belong,” because I thought they effectively captured and expressed the pain experienced by so many people, especially teenagers and young adults. But it wasn’t until after I heard about the suicide death of Chester Bennington last summer that I realized how deep the pain was that he apparently was feeling and, unfortunately, that he never found the healing he sought or that place where he felt he could belong. The refrain of that song goes like this:

**Somewhere I Belong - Linkin Park**

*I wanna heal, I wanna feel, what I thought was never real*

*I wanna let go of the pain I’ve felt so long.*

*I wanna heal, I wanna feel, like I’m close to something real.*

*I wanna find something I’ve wanted all along*

*Somewhere I belong.*

I am telling you the story of Chester Bennington today and singing this song because we all want to be healed of our pains and find that somewhere we belong. Well, today at your Confirmation, we are

celebrating the fact that you have responded to the invitation to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who will heal you of all your pains and welcome you to a place where you definitely belong, if you put your faith and trust in Him and make yourself part of His loving community that we call the Catholic Church.

In the Creed, we say that Jesus is “God from God, light from light, true God from true God.” We also say that he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man” and that he “suffered death” - “was crucified, died, and was buried.” Jesus knew incredible pain and suffering beyond our imagining, but He endured His passion and death because He loves us and gave His life for us so that we could be freed from suffering and death to live with Him forever in heaven.

Real love is unselfish. That’s the kind of love that God offers to us. God’s love is selfless and unconditional. He wants to give His love to us and asks only that we give Him our love in return.

That’s what it means to be holy. God is holy because His love is selfless, and He invites you to be holy as well. That means that we are called to love as God loves: unselfishly. The oil that I will anoint you

candidates with in the Sacrament of Confirmation is like a sealant symbolizing that the Holy Spirit will seal in your holiness and help you to live in such a way that will not allow selfishness to seep through the cracks and take hold of you. It will mark you as an authentic follower of Jesus. It will facilitate your path to holiness.

Being an authentic follower of Jesus nowadays is not easy because so much of our world is not authentic. It's easier to be phony or fake. Knowing this, I would like to share with you some advice for how to be holy—how to be an authentic follower of Jesus. In fact, we can find holiness through 3 simple steps:

1. going to Mass on Sunday.
2. beginning and ending the day in contact with God.
3. making decisions according to the Ten Commandments.

Let's take a look at these 3 steps to see how they can help us to be holy - to be authentic followers of Jesus.

First, going to Mass on Sunday. Simply going to church every Sunday will not automatically make us holy. Going to Mass is a key to holiness only if you allow Jesus to get inside of you and fix what is broken.

And the fact is: all of us, in a sense, are broken. That's why we start the Mass by admitting that we have greatly sinned, in our thoughts and in our words, in what we have done and in what we have failed to do. Admitting our brokenness is a sign of being authentic and that's the first step to holiness, opening ourselves up to receiving Jesus in the Eucharist so that we can become more like Him.

Second, beginning and ending our day in contact with God. St. Paul taught us to pray always. To pray always means to be in contact with God at all times ... simply aware of His presence and from time to time throughout the day, conversing with Him. The best way to do that is to begin your day by offering your whole day and everything you do that day to God. And when we end our day, we look back on all that we did and all that happened during the day, asking forgiveness for the ways that we hurt others and even ourselves by the sins we have committed, but also thanking God for all the blessings that we received throughout the day.

Third, making decisions according to the Ten Commandments. Most people don't like to be told what to do or what not to do, but we all know that we have to treat people a certain way if we really love them. God gives

us the commandments as a way of showing authentic love for Him (the first 3 commandments) and for others (the last 7 commandments). Making decisions based on the 10 commandments is a powerful way of showing authentic love - love that is selfless and interested in the good of others.

So, in a few moments, I'm going to invite you to stand and I'll be asking you questions about what you truly believe. In essence, I'll be asking you to promise to be holy - to be authentic. Each time you respond, I DO to my questions, it's your way of saying, "Yes, I want to be holy...I want to be an authentic follower of Jesus."

Then, I will raise my hands over you and pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you with the gifts you need to be holy. You can tell who authentic followers of Jesus are because you can see the Holy Spirit's gifts working in them: wisdom, understanding, piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel and fear of the Lord. As we pray that prayer, you'll bow your heads, because authentic followers of Jesus are humble, not proud.

Finally, you will be coming forward as your way of saying that you believe Jesus is the real thing and that you want to live as his authentic follower. I will anoint you with sacred chrism saying, "Be sealed with the

gift of the Holy Spirit” – an action that truly seals you from the selfishness that Satan plans to tempt you with throughout life. You’ll respond AMEN as your way of saying, “Yes, I want the real thing – JESUS – not that phony stuff that Satan has to offer.” “Yes, I will strive to be holy by going to Mass on Sunday, beginning and ending my day in contact with God, and making decisions based on the Ten Commandments.”

[Read from questionnaires.]

As the Linkin Park song says, “I wanna feel like I’m close to something real. I wanna find something I’ve wanted all along: somewhere I belong.” Well, there IS somewhere you belong and you’ve found it. Today, you’re choosing the real thing – Jesus Christ and His Church. May you always be His authentic follower and may all of us work together to be holy because our God is holy.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

---

<sup>1</sup> Colin Stutz, "Linkin Park's 'Hybrid Theory' Producer Calls Working With Chester Bennington a 'Dream Come True,'" *Billboard*, July 24, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/rock/7874220/linkin-park-hybrid-theory-producer-don-gilmore-chester-bennington>.

<sup>2</sup> Dave Simpson, "Linkin Park: 'We're famous, but we're not celebrities,'" *The Guardian*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jul/07/linkin-park-moscow-interview>.

<sup>3</sup> "Chester Bennington: Linkin Park vocalist 'took his own life,'" *BBC News*, July 20, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40676530>.