

RCIA: SESSION FOURTEEN

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Week: 16/01/23 - 22/01/23

I. The Holy Spirit

Catechism References: #688/ 692-701/ 737-739/ 767-768/1831/1832

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The third article of the Apostles' Creed says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Most Holy Trinity. Other names for the Holy Spirit are: Holy Ghost, and Paraclete, which means "Comforter," "Advocate," or "Counsellor." The Holy Spirit is depicted in Scripture as a wind (Acts 2:2; Ez. 37:9-14; John 3:8; John 20:22), a flame (Is. 4:4; Mt. 3:11-12; Lk. 3:16-17, 1 Thess 5:19) or a dove (Mt. 3:6; Mark 1:10; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:32).

Water and oil are used in liturgies, such as Baptism and Confirmation, to symbolize the Holy Spirit coming down on a person.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is truly and fully God, equal in power and majesty to the Father and the Son. It is through the Holy Spirit that God dwells within us here on earth. At Baptism, the Holy Spirit works through the preaching, teaching, and Sacraments of the Church, for the sake of making people holy. We can say that God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is with us and active among us through the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for us to believe in Jesus as our Saviour, or to live a Christian life of faith, hope, and love.

The Holy Spirit gives every Christian the gift of faith, but He also gives certain gifts to certain people to use for the good of the whole Church. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are called "charisms," from which comes the word "charismatic."

2. Confirmation – the origin of Confirmation and Biblical Reference

Catechism References: #1285, 1287, 1290-1292, 1297, 1299, 1300, 1302-1304, 1306-1311, 1315-1321

Code of Canon Law References: #879-881; The Minister of Confirmation - #882-888; The Persons to be Confirmed - #889-891; Sponsors - #892-893;

The origin of Confirmation and the "Biblical basis" for the sacrament is the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles at Pentecost—the first Confirmation. Acts 2:1-31

The Acts of the Apostles mentions the apostles imparting the Holy Spirit to believers by the laying on of hands as seen in Acts 8:14-17:

"Now, when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For he was not as yet come upon any of them: but they were only baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Then they **laid their hands upon them**: and they received the Holy Spirit."

Historical Development

In the early Church, adults who desired to become members of the Christian community participated in a three-year process called the Catechumenate. This was a time of intense study and preparation, which often took place in secret because Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire and Christians feared persecution from Roman authorities. At this time, the three Sacraments of initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist — were celebrated in the same ceremony by adult catechumens at the Easter Vigil.

A sponsor guided the Catechumen through the process and then presented him/her to the community and the bishop for initiation. The sponsor guaranteed the sincerity of the person who was asking for baptism, vouching for his/her complete and total dedication to the work of Christ.

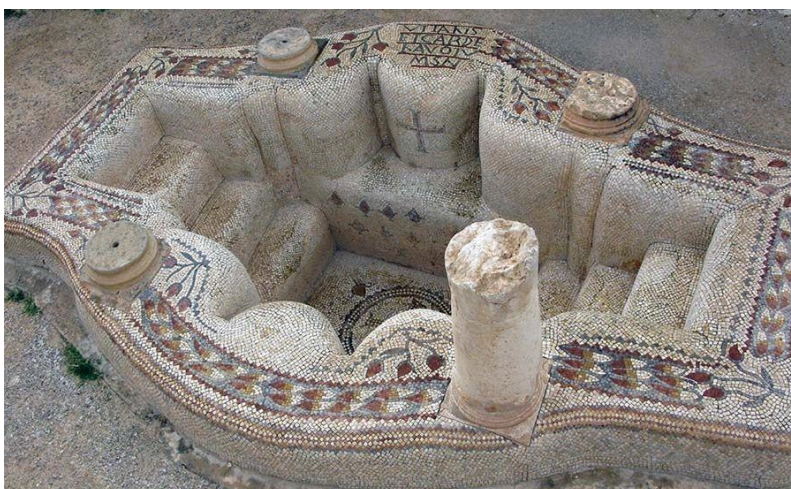
It was a process that involved both an individual decision (“I decide to join Christianity”) and a communal decision (“We accept you into our community”). In this way, the roles of the Christian community and the individual sponsor were vital in the initial and ongoing evangelization of new members.

The Early Church – the Rite

The catechumens descended into a pool outside the church, where they were baptized by the bishop who gave the initial anointing. They ascended, were clothed with a white robe and received a second anointing with Chrism by the bishop who “confirmed” the baptism and ratified and accepted the conversion of the individual. They then proceeded to a place of honour among the community where they participated in the Eucharist for the first time.



Baptism site at the Jordan



3rd century font



Byzantine Font, 6th Century

The Evolution of the sacrament

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out, "The original minister of Confirmation is the bishop." Each bishop is a successor to the apostles, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost—the first Confirmation.

The separation of the bishop's anointing from the sacrament of Baptism occurred for a number of reasons: In the fourth century, Constantine (306 to 337 AD) made Christianity legal and then Theodosius IX (379 to 395 AD) made it the official religion of the empire - many more people were being baptized. Christianity also spread from the cities into the countryside. It became impossible for bishops, who were now also involved in governing, to preside at every Baptism.

It is at this point that we see a divergence between the Eastern and Western Churches. The border is roughly west of Greece. The bishops of the East solved the problem by delegating the Sacraments of Initiation to the presbyter (elder or priest), reserving for themselves only the blessing of the oil used in the rite. To this day the Eastern churches initiate with all three sacraments at once. The bishops of the West also delegated Baptism to priests, but retained the function of performing the anointing and laying on of hands (Confirmation). This they would do whenever they visited a particular locality.

Thus, in the West the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation was done at a later time than the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism. In the Middle Ages it became the practice to confirm close to adolescence instead of infancy, theologians began to teach that Confirmation was the sacrament of maturity.

Those who received it were regarded as old enough and ready to live active, responsible Christian lives.

The Christian was sealed as a witness for Christ in Confirmation (the Chrism) and fortified by an increase of the Spirit's gifts to fight, suffer, and die for the faith. The notion of the sacrament making a person a soldier of Christ prevailed.

The Theology of Confirmation According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In order to have a balanced theology of Confirmation, five principles must be kept in mind:

- Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation. “Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation”,” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1285).
- It is a distinct sacramental rite. “The sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”. (#1300)
- Confirmation includes a unique giving of the Holy Spirit. The confirmand is “enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit”. (#1285) “It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.” (#1302)
- It is a “ratification of Baptism”, “and the strengthening of baptismal grace”. (#1289) This strengthening and ratifying is understood by a greater unity with the Church. “It renders our bond with the church more perfect.” (#1303)
- Confirmation provides greater power for public witness of faith. “The confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially”. (#1305)

3. The Effect of Confirmation

Baptism is the sacrament of the initial gift of the Spirit - Grace is given. Godparents speak for you. In confirmation you willingly assume an active participation in the Church's apostolate*.

* The work of an apostle – all the faithful to "make disciples of all nations"
The Church and the individual mutually confirm belief in one another.

Confirmation indelibly seals us to the Holy Spirit and because this seal is indelible and leaves a permanent mark on the recipient's soul, like Baptism and Holy Orders, it may be received only once. Through Confirmation Catholics are "more perfectly bound to the Church" and are "as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed." - to live as examples of Christ Imparts to us the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation [becoming adopted sons and daughters of God] which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross. [CCC, no. 1303]

The Sacrament may only be received by one who is baptized, preferably while he/she is in a state of grace (i.e., not in a state of mortal sin). The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the Bishop; priests are extraordinary ministers of the Sacrament and may offer the Sacrament if the Bishop authorizes them to. The 'matter' is the laying on of hands, the chrism and the anointing. As in Baptism, a sponsor is chosen to stand for the confirmand. Just as Abram became Abraham, as Jacob became Israel, as Simon became Peter, and as Saul became Paul, the confirmand takes on the name of a Saint or biblical figure when they are sealed to the Holy Spirit.

4. The role of the Sponsor

"It is the role of the sponsor to represent the faith community." (Canon 893)

The confirmation sponsor is to guide the one confirmed to act as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfil the duties of the sacrament. It is preferable for the godparent from baptism to serve as sponsor. However, another person may serve as sponsor.

To become a sponsor, a person: should be sufficiently mature Roman Catholic (at least 16 years old) and should be actively expressing it within the Catholic community; must not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed knows the candidate and is able to help him/her on the spiritual journey, sharing faith and modelling the life of a mature Catholic

To become a sponsor, a person:

- encourages the candidate to grow in a faith relationship with Jesus;
- assists and encourages the candidate with the study and practice of the Catholic faith;
- accompanies the candidate to special liturgies and events in the preparation programme

5. Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Gifts of the Holy Spirit help us to live a holy Christian life. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are:

Wisdom - desire for the things of God – directs our whole life and all our actions to His honour and glory

Understanding - enable us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith

Right judgement or counsel - warns us of the deceits of the devil, the dangers to salvation

Knowledge - enable us to discover the will of God in all things

Courage or fortitude - strengthen us to do the will of God in all things

Reverence or piety - love God as a Father, and obey Him because we love Him

Wonder and awe or Fear of the Lord - have a dread of sin and fear of offending God

6. Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is mentioned by St Paul in his letter to the Galatians 5:22 as the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul sees the fruit of the Holy Spirit as the counterbalance for the various vices. The gifts and fruits of the Spirit are also alluded to in the second letter to the Corinthians 6:6, in the letter to the Colossians 3: 12-15 and in the letter to the Ephesians 4:2, 5:9.

Love – Shown in selfless service to others by words/deeds

Joy – Deep and constant gladness in the Lord – changes in circumstances cannot affect this.

Peace – A disciple faithful to God's will is serene, not overly anxious

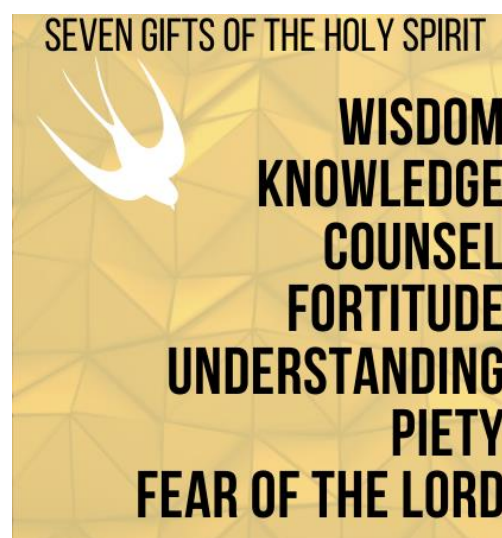
Patience – The love that is willing to endure life's suffering, difficulties and routines

Kindness – Generous acts of service

Goodness – A sign that you love all people without exception and do good to them

Gentleness – Strength tempered by love giving you the power to forgive instead of getting angry

Self-control – Being in charge of your emotions and desires



7. Symbols of Confirmation

The sacrament of confirmation is represented by a rich array of symbols developed over the centuries, and they help to reveal its meaning and add to its beauty.

Oil. Oil is the essential element of the ritual. It is a distinctive kind of oil —



sacred chrism, olive oil lightly perfumed with balsam to give it a sweet-smelling aroma. The oil is blessed by the bishop each year at the chrism Mass. It imparts the gift of the Holy Spirit, seals the recipient in God's grace, and gives a new, indelible character.

The minister dips his right thumb into a small bowl of sacred chrism, raises his oiled thumb, places it on the forehead of the candidate, and with a stroke down and a stroke across, anoints the forehead in the shape of a cross with the words, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The laying on of hands. The laying of hands on the head has represented the



conferral of the Holy Spirit from the first generation of the Church. The apostles laid hands on Stephen and six others (Acts 6:6), Peter and John laid hands upon believers in Samaria (Acts 8:17), Ananias laid hands on Paul in Damascus (Acts 9:17),

Paul laid hands on disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:6), and all received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The ritual no longer has a laying on of hands upon each individual confirmand, but rather the bishop, along with any concelebrating

priests, extends his hands over all those to be confirmed in silence and then offers the following prayer bestowing the Holy Spirit.

“All-powerful God, by water and the Holy Spirit
you freed your sons and daughters from sin,
and gave them new life.

Send your Holy Spirit upon them
to be their helper and guide.

Give them the spirit of **wisdom** and **understanding**,
the spirit of **right judgement** and **courage**,
the spirit of **knowledge** and **reverence**.

Fill them with the spirit of **wonder and awe** in your presence.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.” Amen.

8. Rite of Confirmation

The rite for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation usually takes place at Mass “in order that the fundamental connection of this sacrament with all of Christian initiation may stand out in a clearer light. Christian initiation reaches its culmination in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. The newly confirmed therefore participate in the eucharist, which completes their Christian initiation”.

Presentation of the Candidates

After the Gospel the bishop and the priests who will be ministers of the sacrament with him take their seats. The priest or catechist presents the candidates for confirmation. If possible, each candidate is called by name and comes individually to the sanctuary accompanied by their sponsor and stand before the celebrant.

Homily or Instruction

The bishop then gives a brief homily.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

After the homily the candidates stand and the bishop questions them:

Bishop: Do you reject Satan and all his works and all his empty promises?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to you sacramentally in confirmation?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All present: Amen.

The Laying On of Hands (see above)

“The laying of hands on the candidates by the bishop and the concelebrating priests represents the biblical gesture by which the gift of the Holy Spirit is invoked”.

The Anointing of Chrism



“The anointing with chrism and the accompanying words express clearly the effect of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Signed with the perfumed oil, the baptized receive the indelible character, the seal of the Lord,

together with the gift of the Holy Spirit that conforms them more closely to Christ and gives them the grace of spreading ‘the sweet odour of Christ’”.

The deacon brings the Chrism to the bishop. Each candidate goes to the bishop. The one who presented the candidate places his right hand on the candidate’s shoulder and gives the candidate’s name to the bishop.

Bishop: Dips his right thumb in the Chrism and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed, as he says: “(Name), be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Newly confirmed: Amen.

Bishop: Peace be with you.

Newly confirmed: And with your spirit.

Universal Prayer

The universal prayer, or prayer of the faithful, follows.

9. For Consideration

In order to offer the opportunity for candidates to grow in discipleship, preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation should include doctrine, worship, community and service.

Doctrinal Elements

- Understand the meaning of confirmation as a sacrament of initiation and its relationship to baptism and Eucharist.
- Understanding of the sacramental life of the Church and the importance of the Eucharist as source and summit of the Catholic faith.
- Familiarity with Scripture as the inspired Word of God and to use the Bible for study and prayer.
- Acceptance of the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as foundations of the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Promotion of justice and service as a response to the Scriptural principle of the preferential option for the poor and the tenets of the Beatitudes.
- Understanding the elements of the Creed as the Church's profession of faith.
- Emphasis on the need for faith as a human response to God's free offer of grace.
- Awareness that the response to God's offer of grace is a life expressed through prayer and personal and social moral living.
- Vocation - Discernment of God's call to the ordained or religious life, or the vocation of marriage.

Worship

- Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist.
- At least one retreat or day of recollection per year.
- Participation in various forms of prayer, i.e. Rosary, Adoration, Communal, Lectio Divina, etc.

Community

- Engage candidates in the life and ministries of the parish.
- Participate in Diocesan gatherings and activities.

Service

Service is an essential element of Christian discipleship and should never be reduced to the fulfilment of service hours. The following principles should be incorporated into the service component of the confirmation program:

- **Engage** the candidates in the long tradition of the Catholic Church's charitable outreach and promotion of justice.
- **Expose** candidates to the work of local, national and international Catholic agencies promoting social justice.
- **Teach** them to discern the difference between charity and justice.
- **Provide** time for serious reflection on the service performed.
- **Incorporate** candidates into the charitable outreach of the parish.
- **Include** both group and individual opportunities for service.

Gospel Reflection: Sunday 15/01/23 is the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time and the Gospel reading is John 1:28-35. The text of the reading is below. The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion. The following questions may be helpful: What does this mean to me? How does it make me feel? Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing? What images of God emerge for me? What do I think that God is saying in this text? What impact does this have on my life?

GOSPEL READING

Reader: The Lord be with you.

Response: And with your spirit.

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Response: Glory to you, O Lord.

Seeing Jesus coming towards him, John said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I spoke of when I said: A man is coming after me who ranks before me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptising with water.' John also declared, 'I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit." Yes, I have seen, and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.'