

## **SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 2**

### **Sacraments of Initiation: Confirmation**

**The Mystery of God Within Us:** All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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 judgment 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 (Rite of Confirmation, 25).

This is the prayer that the bishop says as he extends his hands to those he is to confirm. This is also the prayer that is answered when a person is confirmed. Through the sacrament of Confirmation, the confirmand (the person to be confirmed) does receive these particular gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and wonder and awe in God's presence. These gifts become part of the identity of the confirmed.

The gifts of the Spirit help the confirmed to live more like Jesus. Unfortunately, although the majority of people who practice religion in North America are Christians, our society for the most part does not think that Jesus' way of doing things can "really work." We are constantly bombarded with the message that joy requires wealth, love requires beauty, and peace requires coercion. We are taught to doubt the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, and to rely on force, money, or connections to bring about change.

The power of the Holy Spirit to give us strength, and to keep us close to God even in the midst of hardship, is not something we can explain to those without faith. The power of the Spirit to Change the world through poverty, humility, trust, and gentle love is indeed part of the mystery of God. One way we can grasp that mystery is by sharing stories of the Spirit's power within the Church. As a starting point, reflect on the gift of courage as lived out in the following story of one teenage boy.

**Play Like A Champion Today"** In January of 2000 Scott Delgadillo was your average eighth grader living in San Diego. He was beginning to like girls, enjoyed

hanging out with his friends, loved playing sports, and had a deep passion for his favorite team, the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. Scott was raised in a Catholic family, and grew to love Notre Dame at a very young age. He was rarely caught without wearing his Notre Dame hat or Notre Dame sweatshirt.

The winter flu that month seemed to take on a life of its own for Scott. He just couldn't shake it. Then one day the school nurse sent Scott home when she noticed he had swollen lymph nodes. Within a couple of days, the diagnosis was in: Scott had leukemia, a deadly form of blood cancer. The doctors started chemotherapy at once.

The local chapter of the Make-A-Wish Foundation (an organization that grants wishes to children with life-threatening illnesses) heard about Scott's situation and came to his home in February. "What can we do for you?" their representative asked. Scott had his answer ready. "I want to go to Notre Dame," he said. "Can you guarantee my admission?" Scott's request was met with silence. Then he laughed. He told them that he was just kidding and that what he really wanted was to spend a weekend at Notre Dame when the football team played a home game.

The game that was arranged was a September 16 contest with rival Purdue. When Scott and his family arrived on campus the Friday before the game, he was given first class treatment. He met with the University president and with the Notre Dame coach. The men wondered what Scott had planned for that night. "Nothing, really," Scott answered. "Good," said the Notre Dame coach. "I'd like you to speak at our pep rally."

Scott didn't hesitate. He said he would even though it meant getting up before a full arena of 12,000 fans. Scott cracked some tears during his talk. But the people watching, including the Notre Dame team, shed even more. With the arena completely hushed, Scott told everyone "as long as you have a positive attitude, you can do anything you want."

Then Scott made a promise. He said, "Someday I'm going to come back here and go to school." The arena erupted in cheers. Notre Dame won the game against Purdue 23-21 on a last second field goal. Scott went into the locker room after the game and the team gave him plenty of gifts - their sweat bands, shorts, and caps. The gifts were fitting for another reason: the next day, September 17, was Scott's

fourteenth birthday. At the time of the game, Scott's cancer was in remission. Just two weeks later, in October, doctors discovered a relapse of the leukemia. Scott had to return to the hospital.

Meanwhile, the Notre Dame team didn't forget Scott. One of the players, 5'7" wide receiver Joey Getherall, sent Scott a photo of a winning touchdown he scored against Air Force. A letter Getherall wrote said, "I just wanted to let you know that I was playing for you on Saturday. I prayed to God and asked him for a little of your strength. Notre Dame players have a tradition of touching a sign that is at the doorway leading from their locker room to the stadium tunnel as they head to the field. It reads: "Play Like A Champion Today." Someone gave Scott a replica of the sign and he put it over his bed. In January 2001, when Scott was too weak for much of anything, he still mustered enough strength to slap his "Play Like A Champion Today" sign before he went to sleep at night.

Scott Delgadillo died on January 29, 2001. Exactly one week later his family had Scott's body flown to South Bend, Indiana, for a memorial service at Notre Dame. His mother explained, "Scott always said he was going back to Notre Dame. We wanted to grant him that wish."

Just before the bishop anoints the Confirmation candidate with chrism, the bishop and all of the assembled priests stand facing the candidate, extending their hands while the bishop prays the solemn prayer for the gifts of the spirit. How did these gifts apply to the life of Scott Delgadillo (who was confirmed shortly before he died)? Three of the gifts - wisdom, understanding, and knowledge - are different ways the Spirit helps us to see and know beyond the superficial layer of life down to its deeper meaning.

Imagine how Scott and his family's perspective of life changed on the day he found out he had cancer. Imagine how it changed again when he knew that he was going to die. Scott's positive thinking and attitude through it all allows us a glimpse of how the Holy Spirit was at work.

Two of the gifts - right judgment and courage - not only help a person to persevere through difficult times, but also to -do what is good and right. Scott's courage through his illness was not only an inner courage, but also helped others. His mother's words - "he was an inspiration to many" - are proof of this.

The last two gifts - the gifts of reverence and wonder and awe - help us to relate intimately with God and his creation. The life of a single teenage boy helped wake many people up to the gift of life and the need to appreciate and thank God for each and every day.

**Anointing and Other Symbols of Confirmation:** It is nearly impossible to understand the sacrament of Confirmation without examining the rich symbolism oil has both in the Bible and in sacramental life. Anointing with chrism - a mixture of olive oil and perfume - is part of the essential rite of Confirmation.

In the Bible, oil is a sign of abundance and joy. For example, the Promised Land, unlike Egypt, overflowed with grain, wine, and oil due to the rains that began in autumn, continued through the winter, and became the showers of early spring (see Dt 11:14). The famous Psalm 23 likewise connects oil with God's goodness: You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life-, And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come (23:5-6).

The Bible also describes oil as a sign of healing; it offers soothing to bruises and wounds. In describing the sins of the nation Israel, the prophet Isaiah says the people's "wound, welt, and gaping gash" had not yet been "eased with salve" (Is 1:6). The Samaritan in Jesus' parable uses oil to heal the injured victim's wounds (see Lk 10:34). According to other ancient symbolism, oil « also signifies cleansing (oil is applied both before and after a bath), limbering of athletes prior to competition, as well as beauty, health, and strength.

Oil is associated with all of these meanings in sacramental life as well. For example:

- the pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of catechumens signifies cleansing and strengthening;
- the anointing of the sick is for healing and comfort;
- the post-baptismal anointing with the sacred chrism and the anointing with chrism in Confirmation and Holy Orders are signs of holiness and consecration.

With the anointing of Confirmation the confirmand receives the "mark" or "seal" of the Holy Spirit. A seal in this sense is much like the seal that masters marked their slaves with or the seal that leaders gave their soldiers prior to battle. The seal of the Holy Spirit received at Confirmation marks our total being to Christ as he belongs to the Father, our pledge to serve him, as well as his protection of us from now until the end of time. Given this seal, the person exudes the "aroma of Christ" in everything he or she says and does.

The sacred chrism is so important to the sacrament of Confirmation that the blessing of the chrism takes place apart from the celebration of the sacrament, yet is in a certain way still part of it. On Holy Thursday each year, the bishop consecrates the sacred chrism for his entire diocese at the cathedral. The chrism is then distributed to the local churches in the diocese and used throughout the entire year for both post-baptismal anointings, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

**The Celebration of Confirmation:** Confirmation, with Baptism and Eucharist, is one of the sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation bounds the Christian "more intimately" with the Church (see *Lumen Gentium*, 11). For Catholics, Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. As Pope Paul VI wrote: "In baptism the newly baptized receive forgiveness of sins, adoption as children of God, and the character of Christ. [In this way they are] made members of the Church and become sharers in the priesthood of [Christ]. . . . Through the sacrament of Confirmation those who have been born anew in Baptism receive the inexpressible Gift, the Holy Spirit himself by whom "they are endowed... with special strength...." Finally, Confirmation is so closely linked with the holy Eucharist that the faithful, after being signed by Baptism and Confirmation, are incorporated fully into the Body of Christ by participation in the Eucharist (*Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation*).

In the Roman Rite, Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism. Even so, the Church aims to make their unity with each other and with the Eucharist clear. When infants are baptized but not confirmed, they are anointed with chrism as a sign of the anointing by the bishop which is still to come. Then, in order to show the connection of Baptism with Eucharist they are brought to the altar for the praying of the Our Father. When Confirmation is separate from Baptism, the liturgy of Confirmation begins with a renewal of baptismal promises.

**The Rite of Confirmation** : In the Latin rite, the sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done through the laying on of the hand, and through the words: "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." In the Eastern Churches of Byzantine rite, more parts of the body are anointed: forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet.

The bishop is the ordinary minister of Confirmation in the Latin Rite. He is also the "original minister" (Lumen Gentium, 26). Ordinarily, Confirmation takes place within Mass in order to express its connection with the other two sacraments of Christian initiation. A person's initiation into the Church is culminated in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. When Confirmation takes place within Eucharist, the following elements are included:

- Liturgy of the Word. The readings are taken either from the Mass of the day or from texts especially for Confirmation that have to do with the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and of individual Christians.
- Presentation of the Candidates. After the gospel, the pastor, another priest, deacon, or the catechist responsible for the instruction of the Confirmation candidates presents the candidates. This is usually done by calling their names and having them stand in place or come to the sanctuary. t Homily or Instruction. The bishop gives the homily, explaining the readings, and leading the candidates, sponsors, and assembly to a greater understanding of the mystery of Confirmation.
- Renewal of Baptismal Promises. The candidates only stand and renew their baptismal promises in question and answer form (e.g., "Do you reject Satan and all his works and all his empty promise?" "Do you believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?" etc. with the answer: "I do").
- The Laying on of Hands. The pastor and other priests are encouraged to celebrate the Eucharist with the bishop. The priests stand near the bishop as he lays a hand upon all the candidates. The bishop then sings or says the prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- The Anointing with Chrism. (With the laying on of the hand, the anointing with chrism forms the essential rite of the sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed. The dialogue which includes the sign of peace accompanies the

anointing. Bishop: Name, be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Newly Confirmed: Amen. Bishop: Peace be with you. Newly Confirmed: And with your spirit.

- Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Mass continues in the normal order. Sometimes the newly confirmed may join in bringing the gifts to the altar. The praying of the Our Father is especially meaningful because the Holy Spirit is the one who prays in us and allows us to address God as "Abba, Father."
- Blessing. A special blessing or prayer over the people is used at Confirmation. The bishop extends his hands over the people and sings or says words like these: God our Father, complete the work you have begun and keep the gifts of your Holy Spirit active in the hearts of your people. Make them ready to live his Gospel and eager to do his will. May they never be ashamed to proclaim to all the world Christ crucified living and reigning forever and ever.

The bishop is the "original minister" of Confirmation. Bishops are the successors of the apostles. They have received the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. By administering Confirmation themselves, it is clearly demonstrated that the effect of the sacrament is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to the apostles, and to the mission of bearing witness to Christ.

There are some situations when a priest may confer Confirmation. For example, when an adult is confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church (usually at the Easter vigil), a priest may confer Confirmation (using sacred chrism that was consecrated by the bishop). Also, if a person is in danger of death, any priest can give him or her Confirmation.

In situations where the needs of the Church require it, the bishop may appoint priests to administer the sacrament, and can also associate priests with himself to administer Confirmation (for example, if the number to be confirmed is quite large).

**Confirmation in the Sacramental Economy:** Confirmation is prefigured in the Old Testament, given its role in the economy of salvation. Many of the examples of this have to do with the coming of the Spirit to God's chosen ones. The

prophets of the Old Testament announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the Messiah. Isaiah 11:1-2 says, A shoot shall sprout from the stump of 'Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. Also, the prophet Ezekiel declared that in the days of the Messiah God would send his Spirit upon all of the people: I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you ... I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees (Ez 36:26-27).

In a similar way God spoke through the prophet Joel, announcing: "I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind" (Jl 3:1). The Isaiah prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was baptized. As he came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord descended upon him in a visible manner as the sign that he was the Messiah. Jesus then assured his followers that just as the prophecy which said that the Spirit would rest on the Messiah had been fulfilled, so too the prophecy which said that the Spirit would be given to all the people would be fulfilled. When his disciples were worried about the fact that he was going to leave them and they would no longer experience God's presence so clearly, Jesus told them, "It is much better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7). On another occasion he reassured his followers, "When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will \* teach you at that moment what you should say" (Lk 12:11-12).

Following his resurrection Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon his apostles and gave them the power to forgive sins. At Pentecost he sent the Spirit in an even more striking manner (see Acts 2:1-41). The apostles who had been hiding in fear were suddenly filled with a new strength and courage. They began to proclaim all of the marvelous things that God had done culminating in the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit. Peter assured the crowd who had gathered in the streets that the wonders they were witnessing were the sign that the messianic age had begun. He wanted the people to know that the coming of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the period when the world would be put to the test. The time had come for people to make one of two choices: Would they align themselves with God and share eternal life? Or, would they align themselves with all those things which would soon pass away?

**Confirmation in the New Testament:** Those who heard Peter's words on Pentecost understood the importance of the choice that was before them. "They were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do?'" (Acts 2:37). Peter explained that they must reform their lives and be baptized so that their sins would be forgiven. Then they would be given the gift of the Spirit so that they would be able to align themselves with the things of God.

From that day on the apostles baptized people and then laid hands upon them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. There are three things which should be noted about the New Testament process of making new Christians: First, the outpouring of the Spirit was an essential element of Christian Baptism from the beginning. Philip baptized many people in Samaria but Peter and John still went from Jerusalem to Samaria to lay hands on the new converts so that they would receive the Spirit (see Acts 8:14-17). This laying on of hands is recognized by the Church as the origins of the sacrament of Confirmation/It was the gift of the Spirit which made a person a Christian - that is, an "anointed one."

Second, a Baptism of water for forgiveness and not just a Baptism in the Holy Spirit was necessary if one was to become a Christian. Paul received a direct revelation from the Risen Christ. This was enough to make him an eyewitness to the resurrection. Nevertheless he still needed to be baptized by Ananias before he could carry out God's work. It seems that the water Baptism was necessary to unite Paul with the rest of the Church and allow him to live as a member of the Body of Christ.

Finally, the account of the first baptisms in Acts stresses the fact that after they had been baptized and had received the Spirit, the people devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, prayers, and the breaking of the bread. In other words, the significant result of Baptism and the reception of the Spirit was that a person became part of the Church. Praying and sharing with one another was far more important than any of the signs and wonders that the Holy Spirit made possible. To put it another way: unity, and not any special ability, was the most important gift of the Spirit.

From the New Testament accounts we can see that from the earliest time there have been three distinct acts which were necessary for a person to be fully

incorporated into the Church: a Baptism of water for the forgiveness of sins and for uniting one to the larger community of faith, a laying on of hands for the reception of the Spirit, and a sharing in the life of the Church, in particular a sharing in the prayers and the "breaking of the bread."

**Confirmation Tradition and Practices Emerge:** In the first centuries Confirmation generally was part of one single celebration with Baptism. St. Cyprian called it a "double sacrament." When Christianity was legalized in the fourth century in the Roman Empire, the number of Baptisms—including infant Baptisms—increased. Also, more and more rural parishes were founded and the number of dioceses increased. The sheer volume of persons (mostly infants) entering the Church prevented the bishop from being present at all Baptisms in order to complete Baptism with the anointing of Confirmation. At this time, two traditions for celebrating the sacrament of Confirmation emerged.

In the West (Roman Church), there was a desire to maintain the bishop's role in the sacrament. The bishop sustains and serves the Church's unity, catholicity, and its connection with the apostles. His presence at Confirmation expresses the unity of the new Christian with the bishop and these elements.

To maintain the connection with the Bishop, the practice of a double anointing with sacred chrism after Baptism arose. The first anointing was done by the priest at Baptism. It signified the participation of the new Christian in the Christ's office of priest, prophet, and king. This first anointing was "completed" by a second anointing by the bishop at Confirmation. This practice still continues today. If an adult is baptized there is only one post-baptismal anointing, that of Confirmation, and it is done by the priest.

In the Eastern Churches, following their ancient practice, Confirmation is conferred by the priest who baptizes. This practice gives greater emphasis to the unity of these sacraments of initiation, rather than separating Baptism and Confirmation by a period of years. The Eastern Churches maintain unity with the bishops' by having the priest anoint only with myron (chrism) consecrated by the bishop.

**Understanding More About the Sacrament:** After the separation of Baptism and Confirmation, because of the difficulty of travel in the early centuries, many

parents did not bring their children to receive Confirmation when the bishop was in the local area. Thus the period of time between Baptism and Confirmation grew longer and some never received the sacrament. By the sixteenth century, some of the Protestant reformers spoke out against the sacramental character of Confirmation. The reformers felt that the importance of Baptism had been weakened by attributing too much to rites such as the laying on of hands and anointing.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) defended the sacramental character of Confirmation while also emphasizing its necessity. The Council taught that all Catholics should be confirmed, and that Confirmation should take place after seven years of age, the age of reason, but no later than age twelve. At this time, First Communion took place at about age fourteen. Thus the traditional order of the sacraments of initiation was preserved: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, though they were now spread out over many years. A Council of Trent canon reads as follows:

If anyone says that the Confirmation of those who have been baptized is an idle ceremony, and not rather a true and proper sacrament; or that of old it was nothing more than a kind of catechism, whereby they who, were near adolescence gave an account of their faith in the face of the Church; let him be anathema (Council of Trent, Decree on the Sacraments, Canon I, Confirmation).

**Confirmation in Today's Church:** In 1910, Pope Pius X permitted children to receive First Communion once they reached the age of reason. Pope Pius's intent was to increase devotion to the Eucharist as well as its frequent reception. He said that all the faithful should receive communion at least on Sundays and feast days, and even daily if possible. It was at this time that it became popular within the Roman rite to celebrate Eucharist, the last of the sacraments of initiation, before Confirmation. Many Eastern churches continued to baptize, confirm, and give First Communion to infants.

Today, the Church teaches that every baptized person not yet confirmed can receive the sacrament of Confirmation. The Church continues to abide the centuries old reference point of "the age of discretion" being the time to receive

Confirmation. The Bishops of the United States have determined that the age of discretion may be any time between the ages of seven and eighteen.

There is diversity in the age for Confirmation from diocese to diocese and parish to parish within this window of age provided by the bishops. Part of this diversity comes from choosing different emphases on the theological understanding of the sacrament. '

Those who place emphasis on the unity and order of the sacraments of initiation tend to support children being confirmed at the same time of First Eucharist to maintain the Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist order. Another understanding connects Confirmation with Christian maturity, stressing the developing faith and chronological age of the person being confirmed.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (see 1309) recognizes that though Confirmation is sometimes called the "sacrament of Christian maturity," adult faith and adult age should not be confused and that baptismal grace is freely given and does not need "ratification" to become effective.

To receive Confirmation, a person must be baptized and in a state of grace. He or she should receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed and prepared for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The person should also pray "intensely" to receive the strength and graces of the Holy Spirit and be prepared to take on the responsibilities of Christian life.

Most teenagers who are confirmed prepare for the sacrament in a parish-sponsored program. The preparation focuses on leading the candidate toward a deeper relationship with Christ as well as a greater familiarity with the Holy Spirit, including his actions, gifts, and callings. This preparation for Confirmation is designed to help the person become more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian Life.

Also helping a person prepare for Confirmation is his or her sponsor. The sponsor brings the candidate to the sacrament, presents him or her to the bishop for anointing, and later helps the person fulfill his or her baptismal promises faithfully under the influence of the Holy Spirit. A Confirmation sponsor is often the godparent from Baptism to help express the relationship between the two

sacraments. The sponsor should also be someone who is spiritually mature, and a practicing Catholic who has received the three sacraments of initiation.

Any unbaptized person who is over the age of seven normally goes through the catechumenate in order to be baptized and join the Church. He or she then receives all three of the sacraments of initiation at the same time, usually at the Easter vigil. Also, a child who is in danger of death is able to receive Confirmation even if he or she has not reached the age of reason.

**The Effects of Confirmation:** Church father Tertullian who lived in the latter half of the second century wrote, “The body is washed that the soul may be cleansed; the body is anointed that the soul may be consecrated; the body is signed, that the soul too may be fortified; the body is overshadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul may be enlightened by the Spirit; the body is fed on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul may be richly nourished by God (op. cit. Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation).

Each of the symbolic actions which is used during Confirmation signifies God's primary gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who are confirmed today receive the same gift of the Spirit that the apostles received at Pentecost. Through the sacrament of Confirmation we are more deeply rooted in our identity as children of God and we are more firmly united to Christ. This is what Tertullian was referring to when he wrote that our "soul may be consecrated." He also wrote that our souls are fortified (or strengthened) and enlightened. The sacrament of Confirmation strengthens us by increasing the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us beginning with the gifts of love and faith and including the gifts of wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and awe in the presence of the Lord. Confirmation also gives us a special strength to share our faith in the Paschal mystery. Finally Confirmation enlightens us. It makes our bond with the Church more perfect in part by helping us to understand and appreciate what the Church is and what the Church teaches.

Confirmation also "gives us a special strength:

- to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ,
- to confess the name of Christ boldly,
- and to never to be ashamed of the Cross" (CCC, 1303).

When we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit our identity and our relationships are changed forever. Like Baptism, Confirmation imprints an "indelible spiritual mark" on the person who is confirmed. This "character" given at Confirmation perfects the common priesthood of the faithful received in Baptism. Once the Holy Spirit has been given to a person, this gift cannot be taken away, nor will the gift ever go away. A person may choose not to listen to the Spirit dwelling within him or her, but that will not change the fact that the Spirit is there. For this reason Confirmation cannot be repeated. Confirmation has several other effects; the main ones are described in the next sections.

**Confirmation Commits Us to Prayer:** Those who are anointed in the sacrament of Confirmation share more completely in the mission of Jesus. They are permanently enrolled in his service. One of the main thrusts of Jesus' mission was reconciliation. He came to reunite people to one another and to God. We participate in this reconciling work when we pray.

The prayer of the faithful which we pray during the liturgy is a particularly important form of prayer in the Church. In the early Church catechumens were not allowed to participate in this prayer because they were not yet prepared for the serious work which it entailed. After they were baptized, reciting the prayer of the faithful was their first act as members of the Church. It is only after Baptism that the Church believes they are finally ready to respond to the word of God in the prayer of the faithful and to join Christ in strengthening the bond of love among all people and between all people and God. After their Baptism the neophytes - as they are now called - are able to have a share in Christ's work of mediation.

The General Instruction on the Roman Missal says, "In the prayer of the faithful, the people exercise their priestly function by praying for all humanity" (#45). Through their prayers the people commit themselves to those who are in need within their community and throughout the world. Their attitude toward others is reshaped and the human community comes a step closer to full reconciliation. As scholar Lucien Deiss put it, "The prayer of the faithful is" the mystery of love that binds [the praying] community to the universe."

The prayer of the faithful does more than express and strengthen our love for those around us. God responds to prayers prayed in faith. Each time we pray for the

world, God acts to soften heart and to remove some of the barriers which divide people from each other and from him.

Through the prayer of the faithful the people also bring the world for which they pray closer to God. At the heart of the petitions is an attitude of praise. We approach God with knowledge of and confidence in his ability and willingness to give us everything that is good. We accept his lordship over, us and over all creation. We align ourselves with Jesus who surrendered everything, even his life, to God in love. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge in order to avoid total dependence on God. When we pray we express our willingness to be dependent upon God.

**Confirmation Binds Us to the Church:** Confirmation binds us more completely to the Church. Following Confirmation all of our actions should be actions which are suitable to one who is a member of the body of Christ. The more we respond to the Holy Spirit who is within us the more we will see the importance of consecrating every moment of our lives to God - of doing everything for the glory of God. The Church has established the sacramentals as one means of helping us consecrate various activities to God. A sacramental is a sacred sign that resembles the sacraments and signifies spiritual effects through the Church's intercession.

Blessings are the primary form of sacramental. When we bless events such as meals, people, objects, or places, we offer praise to God and acknowledge our dependence upon him. We then ask God to help us to orient our lives toward him. Those blessings which permanently consecrate people or objects for the service of God are particularly important. Such blessings include the blessing of churches, altars, and holy oils, and the rite of religious profession (when a person becomes a religious brother or sister) (see CCC, 1671).

The rite of religious profession deserves special mention in our discussion of Confirmation. The post-baptismal anointing in Confirmation is the sign of consecration. Those who have been anointed share more completely in the mission of Christ. They are anointed with the Holy Spirit so that their lives may give off "the aroma of Christ" (CCC, 1294). Those who take permanent vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in order to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the mission of Christ, give off this aroma in a very tangible way. They witness to the

love and service which all the faithful are called to practice. The profession of religious vows is not a sacrament because it is not so much a new thing as it is an expression of the totality of the commitment made in Baptism and Confirmation. We refer to the life of religious brothers and sisters as "the consecrated life" because it is a sign of the full acceptance of the grace given in Baptism and Confirmation.

Sacramentals do not have the inherent power to pass on the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do. However, as expressions of the Church's prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and cooperate with it. Sacraments confer\* grace every time they are performed, regardless of the goodness of the person who performs them. In contrast, the benefits which come from sacramentals depend on the inward disposition of the one who performs them.

Catholics also use a variety of prayers and special devotions to support and express their faith. These include the rosary, the stations of the cross, devotions to particular saints, pilgrimages, and fasts. Each helps us carry the liturgy of the Church into our daily lives. They help us to live out our Baptism and Confirmation. These various forms of piety can support the sacramental life of the Church, but they are never to be seen as substitutes for it. The use of sacramentals and other forms of popular piety should always be in harmony with the liturgical seasons and the life of the Church as a whole.

**Confirmation Commits Us to Action:** Besides leading us to prayer, Confirmation also makes it possible for us to serve the world as Jesus did. The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts we need in order to respond to the needs of others; but we must choose to use those gifts.

In the early Church people had to demonstrate that they were prepared to live a life of service before they could even begin to prepare for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Only people who were willing to care for those in need could become Christians. Lent developed as a time of intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The lenten fast was a way of making personal sacrifices in order to meet the needs of others. Even those who were already members of the Church participated in the lenten fast as a means of recalling and strengthening their own commitment to the work of Christ. Today, too, we need to regularly ask ourselves

if we are living out our Baptism and Confirmation by helping others. Each one of us must ask, "What am I doing to carry the love of Christ into the world?"

**Completion of Christian Initiation: The Funeral Liturgy** - For Christians the day of death marks the end of the sacramental life of signs and symbols and the beginning of life lived in the unmediated presence of God. Death is the final fulfillment of the sacraments of initiation. In death we experience the completion of the new birth which was begun in Baptism. In death we are completely united with the Trinity. We live in full communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a communion which was conferred when we were anointed with the Spirit at Confirmation. Finally, in death we participate in the feast of the kingdom which was anticipated in the Eucharist.

Death remains a mystery; but in the face of death there are two affirmations which Christians can make. First, death is a reality. Second, God is trustworthy and whatever lies beyond death was created by God and experienced by Jesus. The funeral liturgy makes these two affirmations clear. The function of a Christian funeral is to acknowledge the reality of death, to show God is love, to support the bereaved, and to commend the person who has died to God's care.

The Christian funeral is a liturgical celebration of the Church. The one who has died has passed beyond the world where God's love and presence are experienced through signs and symbols. The funeral liturgy does express and help us to experience the union of Christians which is not broken by death. It expresses and establishes our continued communion with the one who has died.