

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 2

Sacraments of Initiation: Confirmation

Confirmation (CCC, 1285,1302, 1311; 1316-1317; 1319): The Sacrament of Confirmation completes the sacramental grace of Baptism. Every Catholic who has been baptized, and yet not confirmed, should receive this sacrament. In the Western Church, once a person has reached "the age of discretion," he or she can be confirmed. However, in danger of death, even children should be confirmed. A candidate for this sacrament must profess the faith, be in the state of grace, intend to receive the sacrament, and be prepared to be a witness for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today the Sacrament of Confirmation is often received in the teen years to help represent a teen's increasing personal commitment to faith. In preparation for the sacrament, teens learn more about the Holy Spirit and how to use the Spirit's many gifts to serve the Church, including their own parish. Prayer and the Sacrament of Penance are also part of the preparation for the sacrament. Those to be confirmed also choose a Confirmation sponsor to accompany them in preparation and at the rite. It is most appropriate that this be one of their baptismal godparents. The effects of the Sacrament of Confirmation include:

- the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which makes it possible for us to cry out, "Abba! Father!";
- binding us more closely to the Church and more firmly to Christ;
- increasing the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us, especially his strength to spread and defend the Christian faith by word and deed.

Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints an indelible spiritual mark on the soul, and so can be received only once. The sacramental character consists of marking Christians with the seal of the Holy Spirit, giving them the power to witness to the Lord. This completes the common priesthood of the faithful received in Baptism.

Biblical Roots and Historical Dimensions (CCC, 1286-1292; 1297; 1312-1314; 1318) Like the other sacraments, Confirmation is rooted in the Bible. For example, the Old Testament prophets promised that the Spirit would rest on the coming Messiah. At Jesus' Baptism, the Spirit did indeed rest on him. The Holy Spirit was present throughout Jesus' life. Examples include his conception by the power of the

Spirit, his public ministry of teaching and healing in union with the Spirit, and his promises to send the Holy Spirit to the Church.

The origin of the Sacrament of Confirmation is found in the apostolic laying on of hands. Acts 19:1-6 tells the story of a group of new disciples who had been baptized by John the Baptist. Paul taught them about Jesus and baptized them in Jesus' name. When he laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. They received special charisms, or gifts of the Spirit, namely the gifts of tongues and prophecy. An anointing with perfumed oil (Chrism) signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit. Chrism is related to the name Christian, meaning "anointed" of Christ, who was himself anointed with the Holy Spirit.

In the early Church, Baptism and Confirmation were part of the adult initiation process that climaxed at the Easter Vigil liturgy, with the bishop presiding. In these early years, children probably joined their parents in the initiation process. Whole households became Christian together. As Christianity grew, infant baptisms multiplied. Because it became increasingly difficult for the bishop to be present at every Baptism, priests were allowed to baptize. However, the bishop wished to retain some role in the initiation process.

In the Western Church the custom grew of the bishop at some later date "confirming" the baptismal commitment of Christians baptized as infants. This practice emphasizes that each Christian is in communion with the bishop who guarantees and serves Church unity, catholicity, and apostolicity. By the thirteenth century, the Church saw the wisdom of teaching youngsters more about their baptismal commitment. Therefore, the time of preparation to receive Confirmation became a good time to give them further instructions in the faith.

Therefore, in the Western Church, the bishop was and is the ordinary minister of Confirmation for those who were baptized as infants. Confirmation takes place sometime after a person reaches the age of reason, generally between seven and sixteen years. For a serious reason, the bishop can delegate priests to confirm. In the case of adult baptism, or Christian converts being accepted into the Catholic Church, the priest who baptizes or receives them also confirms them at the Easter Vigil. And any priest can administer Confirmation when there is danger of death.

Eastern Rite Churches administer all three initiation sacraments at the same time, including for infants. This stresses the unity of Christian initiation. In the Eastern Rites, the priest confirms the new Christian after Baptism and then celebrates the first Eucharist. However, the priest confirms only with myron (or Chrism) that has been blessed by a bishop. This signifies the special bond with the bishop resulting from Confirmation.

The Rite of Confirmation (CCC, 1293-1296, 1298-1301; 1320-1321) Like Baptism, Confirmation usually takes place during Eucharist, thus stressing the unity among the Sacraments of Initiation. The Confirmation liturgy begins with a renewal of baptismal promises and a profession of faith by those to be confirmed (confirmands). The bishop then extends his hands over them and invokes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The essential rite follows: The minister anoints the forehead of the confirmand with sacred Chrism (in the Eastern Churches, the other sense organs as well), lays on his hand, and recites the words: "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." (In the Eastern Churches, the minister says, "The seal of the gift that is the Holy Spirit.") A sign of peace concludes the rite, thus signifying unity with the bishop and the Church.

The anointing with oil in Confirmation represents total consecration to Christ, a sharing in Jesus' mission. The newly confirmed person is charged with bringing forth in word and deed "the aroma of Christ." The Confirmation anointing permanently marks the Christian with the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation, we are sealed totally to Jesus Christ to be servants of his Gospel forever.

Eastern Rite Churches: What do we mean when we refer to Eastern Rite Churches? Eastern Rite Churches are Catholic Churches following one of the six rites derived from the ancient traditions of Christian churches that were centered in Constantinople (modern Greece). Eastern Rite Churches are in communion with the Pope and the Latin or Western Church. The term rite refers to a special way of doing the liturgy, but it also refers to a variety of traditions including a married clergy, special sacramental traditions like confirming baptized infants and giving them the Eucharist, and the use of ancient languages in liturgies. Eastern Rite Churches have their own version of canon law (Church law) and are governed by a patriarch.

The Eastern Rite Churches are also called "Eastern Catholic Churches "or "Uniate Churches"(meaning in union with the Roman Catholic Church).There are more than ten million Eastern Catholics. They belong to one of these six rites: Byzantine, Alexandrian or Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite, and Chaldean. There are subdivisions within each of these rites along national or ethnic lines. Numerically, the largest group of Eastern Catholics belongs to the Byzantine Rite.