

Doctrine Overview: Confirmation

The foundation of the Christian life is formed by the unity of the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist (CCC 1212). Catechists must stress to their students that “Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace” (CCC 1285).

What the Prophets of the Old Testament foretold regarding the Messiah who would be anointed with the Spirit of God, and what Jesus the promised Messiah fulfilled in receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism by John, comes to fruition also in the believer through the Sacrament of Confirmation. This forge of grace in which the work of Baptism is fully sealed by the fire of the Holy Spirit was passed on through the Church by the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, down to the present day. Just as Christ’s life and mission were always fully consecrated to the Holy Spirit, so now in Confirmation is the believer fully consecrated to the Holy Spirit to make him manifest in the Church and in the world. (CCC 1286-1289)

The anointing with sacred chrism which takes place in Confirmation is pregnant with symbolism which reveals the mystery of grace taking place. For millennia, anointing with oil has accomplished and evoked many things: “...oil is a sign of abundance and joy; it cleanses...limbers...is a sign of healing...and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength” (CCC 1293). These are visible in the anointing found in Baptism and Confirmation, highlighting the unity of these two Sacraments.

Just as the Apostles experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so does the confirmand

receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. A deeper unity is established with Christ and his Church, endowing one with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and indelibly marking the soul with the seal of the Holy Spirit. The confirmand is fortified with strength and zeal. In this way, the common priesthood of the faithful in Christ begun in Baptism is brought to completion, thus equipping one to be an authentic witness of Christ in word and action (CCC 1302-1305).

How the Sacrament is Celebrated

In the Latin Church, Confirmation is normally administered by a bishop, and like Baptism it is received only once. When celebrated separately from Baptism as it normally is in the Latin Church, the Confirmation liturgy begins with a renewal of Baptismal promises to stress the unity of Confirmation and Baptism. Later, the bishop anoints each person with sacred chrism on the forehead, saying, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”. (CCC 1300, 1304)

All baptized Catholics should receive Confirmation. The confirmand should first receive the Sacrament of Penance in order to be in the state of grace, and should further prepare by intense prayer. The confirmand also should have a sponsor who will help them spiritually to prepare, and to persevere in the grace of this Sacrament afterwards. A baptismal Godparent is an excellent choice given the connection of Baptism and Confirmation (CCC 130).

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