

Confirmation

“For ‘by the Sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.’ [LG 11; cf. OC, Introduction 2]”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1285

Introduction

The Sacrament of Confirmation celebrates an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and increases his gifts in us. These gifts give us the opportunity to be strong in the profession of our faith. Confirmation completes baptismal grace. The Spirit has already been active in the sacrament of Baptism, bringing to birth a “new creature.” Confirmation strengthens our bonds with the Church and empowers us to witness. Just as the Apostles went forth fearlessly to proclaim the Good News after Pentecost, so those who receive the Holy Spirit’s outpouring in Confirmation become the bearers of glad tidings in word and deed. Pope Paul VI, in his *Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation*, said that this sacrament “in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.” (*The Rites*, p. 474).

Symbolism and History

The Sacrament of Confirmation was originally a rite that involved the laying on of hands and anointing with fragrant oil, which immediately followed Baptism and “confirmed” it. This anointing was carried out by the bishop. As the young Church grew and communities of Christians became more numerous and far-flung, the bishop was unable to be present at every Baptism. Two responses to this situation developed. In the Roman Rite, the hand-laying and anointing were delayed until a later time when the bishop could carry it out in person. This was the origin of Confirmation as a separate sacramental celebration. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, on the other hand, the priest who baptized would anoint the newly baptized immediately. Because the fragrant oil used for this anointing is consecrated by the bishop, the bishop’s presence is considered implicit in the rite itself.

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In the Roman Rite today, the priest who baptizes adults and older children also confirms them immediately after Baptism. Children who are baptized as infants in the Roman Rite, however, are confirmed at a later date, usually by the bishop. The unity of the three Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) is a key element of our Catholic understanding. When Confirmation is celebrated apart from Baptism, therefore, it normally includes both a renewal of baptismal promises and a celebration of the Eucharist.

The essential Rite of Confirmation is the anointing with sacred chrism on the forehead. This gesture is accompanied by the laying on of hands and words that invoke the Holy Spirit. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, the oil is called *myron*, and the sacrament is called *Chrismation*.

Anointed for Mission

Like Baptism, the Sacrament of Confirmation configures us to Christ. It therefore leaves an indelible mark upon the soul and can never be repeated. The title *Christ* (*Christos* in Greek) means “the Anointed One.” Anyone who is baptized and confirmed is anointed, as Jesus was, for the mission of sharing the Gospel in word and action. The ancient gesture of anointing with oil calls to mind all of the great figures of Scripture who were anointed for the special work they were given to do. Every Christian stands in the tradition Jesus himself claimed when he read from the book of the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me...” (*Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1*).

For Reflection

- How does seeing yourself as “anointed” by God help you to understand the Christian life?