

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Confirmation is the last of the three sacraments of “initiation” to be received in the current form of the Catholic Rite: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Originally the three were celebrated in one ceremony. This is still the case today when an un-baptised adult is received into the Catholic Church.

Confirmation as a distinct sacrament is alluded to in the Acts of the Apostles:

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on them, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

As the name suggests, this sacrament is a “Confirmation” of the grace of Baptism and symbolises the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. From this fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace in the following ways:

- It unites us 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:1303)

As with the apostles at Pentecost, through the gifts of the Spirit, Confirmation is particularly associated with the power to become a courageous and confident witness for Christ in the world. In the religion classes of the 1930s to the 1970s this was captured in the phrase “becoming a soldier of Christ”. From the 1970s up to 2002, this changed to a concept of becoming a “Worker for the Kingdom”. In the most recent version of the national RE programme, this has now changed to “Becoming a Prophet of Christ in the world”, inspired and empowered by the Spirit to challenge and change the world.

The Gestures of Confirmation:

The two gestures most associated with the transmission of the Holy Spirit are the laying on of hands and anointing with oil.

Since the time of the apostles the gesture of laying on hands has signified the communication of the Gift of the Spirit.

From very early on in the Church, an anointing with perfumed oil (Chrism) was added to the laying on of hands to deepen the sense that the Spirit, which permeates, soothes, refreshes, cleanses and heals, like oil, was being received through this gesture. Both

gestures symbolise the fact that Baptism which it completes, Confirmation too imprints an indelible spiritual mark.

We are actually called “Christians” precisely because we have been “anointed”. The word “Christ” means anointed one.

Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are gifts which the Spirit offers us in Confirmation to empower our witness to Christ and to help us to live out our Christian mission. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the consequences of the Gifts of the Spirit bearing fruit in our lives. There are seven gifts and nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Is.11:1-2)

The Seven Gifts of the Spirit are listed as...

Wisdom, Understanding, Right Judgement, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the Lord.

St. Paul in the letter to the Galatians listed nine fruits of the Holy Spirit which should be evident in the life of the believer. These are:

Love, Joy, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control.

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