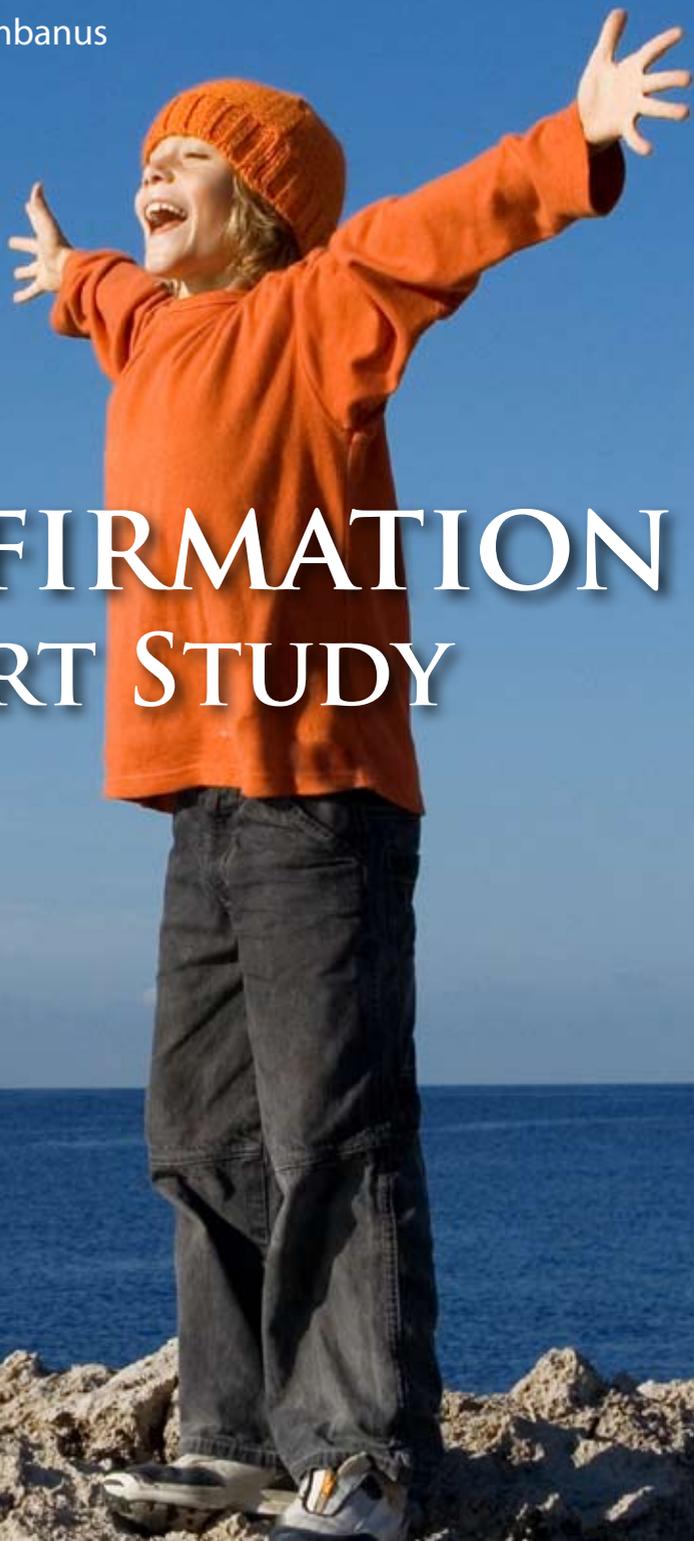


Knights of St. Columbanus



CONFIRMATION A SHORT STUDY



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FOREWORD

We have been reflecting on the Sacrament of Baptism, Eucharist and Penance and Reconciliation and now we turn our attention to the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Basically, Confirmation is a confirming of our Baptism. Confirmation complements Baptism by conferring the Holy Spirit and it is closely linked with the Eucharist. Confirmation confers the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit on Christians to enable them fulfil their mission as members of the Church. It is a sacrament that requires more attention today as many parents of candidates are at a loss to explain to their children what Confirmation is exactly.

I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to Brothers Brendan McCann, Supreme Chancellor and Hugo Tumulty CK12 for their dedicated work in compiling this booklet. We trust this presentation on the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit will be studied in conjunction with the previous booklets on the sacraments throughout the Order as we prepare to enter the 'Year of Faith' being inaugurated by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict in October 2012.

Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
15 August 2012

Gerard Dolan
Supreme Chaplain



CONFIRMATION: A SHORT STUDY

INTRODUCTION

There are three sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist and these lay the foundations of every Christian life.

Baptism is very important because without it no one can receive any of the other sacraments. Only a baptised person can be confirmed. Only a baptised person can receive absolution in the sacrament of Reconciliation; only a baptised person can receive the sacrament of Matrimony and only a baptised man can be ordained a priest.

The sacrament of the Eucharist completes Christian initiation. It is the source of life, unity, nourishment and dynamism for the church. Jesus instituted the Eucharist in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again

All those who have been baptised should share in the fullness of grace of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent down upon his church on the first Pentecost Sunday. It is for this purpose that Christ has instituted the sacrament of Confirmation. There is a close relationship between the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. While Confirmation is a distinct and complete sacrament in its own right, its purpose is to perfect in us that which was begun in Baptism. So, we can say that we were baptised in order to be confirmed. It is the sacrament that completes Baptism and gives the grace to live as strong and perfect Christians. Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual birth; Confirmation, as its name suggests (con-firm), is the sacrament of spiritual strength. In the Eastern Churches it is called “Chrismation” (anointing with chrism) or “Myron”, which means chrism.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Holy Spirit does not appear for the first time in the New Testament. He was very much at work in the Old Testament and his work was mainly in these three areas –

- a. Inspiring the prophets;
- b. Giving strength to people to do God's work; and
- c. The work of Creation.

There are so many examples of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament that we can only scratch the surface but here are a few examples:

Inspiring the prophets - Some prophets recognised that they spoke as inspired by the Spirit of God:

- (a) "When they saw the band of prophets prophesying with Samuel leading them, the spirit of Yahweh came upon them and made them prophesy." (1 Sam. 19:20).
- (b) "From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it happened I have been there. Know then, that Yahweh the Lord, with his Spirit has sent me." (Isaiah.48:16)
- (c) "The Spirit of Yahweh seized me and said, Speak! This is the word of Yahweh. I know what you have said, Israel!" (Ezekiel. 11:5)

Giving ability to people to do God's work – The Spirit inspired some men in the Old Testament so that they could do special work to serve God:

- (a) "Then the spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon with strength; he blew his trumpet and summoned the men of Abiezer." (Judges. 6:34)
- (b) "The spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah. He went through Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and then another territory of the Ammonites." (Judges. 11. 29:30)
- (c) "The spirit of Yahweh then seized Samson. With bare hands he tore the lion to pieces as he would have done with a young goat." (Judges. 14:6)
- (d) "Samuel then took the horn of oil and anointed him in his brothers' presence. From that day onwards, Yahweh's spirit took hold of David." (1 Samuel. 16:13)

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in the very first words of the Bible.

- (a) "In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth had no form and was void; darkness was over the deep and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters." (Genesis. 1:2)
- (b) "Then Yahweh God formed man, dust drawn from the soil, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and man became alive with breath. (Genesis. 2:7). Note: Breath and spirit are words very close in meaning. The Spirit of God sustains humanity and should the Holy Spirit abandon the human race, Adam would return to dust: Adam, that is you and me and everyone on the face of the earth."
- (c) "When you hide your face, they become afraid; you take away their breath and they return to dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and the face of the earth is renewed." (Psalm. 104. 29:30)

When it comes to the frequency of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament there is no shortage of material.

You may want to examine the following:

(Numbers.11:17; 11:25; 11:29.(Judges. 3:10; 15:14.) (Gideon 6:34.) (Jephthah 11:29,) (1 Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 19:23.) (Psalms 51:11, 139:7, 143:10.) (Isaiah 59:21,) (Ezekiel. 11:19, 36:26, 39:29.)

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Confirmation goes back 2000 years to the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down on the Apostles in the Upper Room. This was shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection. Pentecost means 'the fiftieth day' after the Passover, so it was a very important Jewish feast and there would have been large crowds of Jews in Jerusalem at that time as pilgrims. The disciples had been sent by Christ to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Matthias, a replacement for Judas was with them when the event took place;

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. And suddenly out of the sky came a sound like a strong rushing wind and

it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared tongues as if of fire which parted and came to rest upon each one of them.” (Acts. 2. 1:4).

The effect on the apostles was profound. Up until now it had been easy when they were with Jesus. But Jesus knew they would be weak and afraid when he was not there. So he instructed them, ‘Wait here and I will bestow on you the power of the Spirit.’ When the Holy Spirit came upon them they were empowered to go out and preach and proclaim Christ.

“Staying in Jerusalem were religious Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered, all excited because each heard them (the apostles) speaking in his own language. Beside themselves with amazement and wonder they said, “How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Here are Parthians, Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and foreigners who accept Jewish beliefs, Cretans and Arabians; and all of hear them proclaiming in our own language what God, the Saviour, does.” (Acts 2. 5:11).

When Peter spoke to the crowd he enlightened them about the Spirit as prophesied in the Old Testament;

“Indeed what the prophet Joel spoke about has happened: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on every mortal. Your sons and daughters will speak through the Holy Spirit; your young men will see visions and your old men will have dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants, both men and women, and they will be prophets... and then, whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2. 16:21).” Of course, the authorities, the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, whom the apostles had feared before receiving the Holy Spirit, now wanted to silence them. We are told:

“They called in the apostles and had them whipped, and ordered them not to speak again of Jesus Saviour. Then they set them free.” (Acts 6:40)

This did not deter the apostles. Filled with the Holy Spirit we are told:
“The apostles went out from the Council rejoicing that they were considered

worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the Name. Day after day, both in the Temple and in people's homes, they continued to teach and to proclaim that Jesus was the Messiah." (Acts 6. 41:42).

The apostles themselves then began to confirm or perform 'the laying of hands on people' A good example can be found in the Acts of the Apostles where Philip the deacon had been preaching and conferring Baptism on new converts and needed apostles to 'confirm'.

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to visit the Samaritans. So these two came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit who had not, as yet, come down on any of them; they had received nothing so far except Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then the apostles began to lay their hands on them, so that the Holy Spirit was given to them." (Acts. 8. 14:17).

CONFIRMATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Evidence of Confirmation from the early days of the church is very limited. We look to the New Testament to see how the first Christians celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, despite various hints about the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians, the New Testament gives us no real evidence for any rite that we would recognise as Confirmation In the early centuries. Christians in those days would have been puzzled if they had been asked about the sacrament of Confirmation. What we have come to know as a separate sacrament was for them simply a part of the rite of Baptism, the celebration of initiation by which a person became a Christian. Sometimes these people also received the 'laying on of hands' from leaders of the Christian community, or they were anointed with oil, that is, they were marked with consecrated oil as Christians.

Although there is no clear evidence of Confirmation as a separate sacrament until after the third century, we can recognise the elements of the sacrament of Confirmation in the sacrament of Baptism in the early Church.

The celebration of initiation varied from place to place and from time to time. We can examine a typical outline of elements that can give a sense of the experience. Such a rite, normally celebrated at the Easter Vigil for candidates who had long prepared for initiation (perhaps over a period of three years), would begin with the candidates leaving the assembly to go to the baptistery which could be a separate building near the entrance to the church. In the baptistery they would renounce Satan, perhaps facing the west and spitting at him; then they would turn round and face the east and commit themselves to Christ. To symbolise that they were leaving their old life behind them, they would strip completely and leave their old clothes behind. They would then be anointed with oil over their whole bodies, preparing for the contest against evil which was ahead of them, just as athletes in those days were rubbed down with oil before a challenge. The font would then be blessed and if it were big enough the candidates would be completely immersed in it three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Coming out of the water they would be clothed in white garments.

The candidates would then return to the assembly where the faithful and the bishop would be waiting. They would be warmly greeted and the bishop would anoint them with the oil called chrism, lay his hands on them and give them the kiss of peace. They were now members of the faithful and could join in the celebration of the Easter Eucharist with the rest of the assembly and share in Communion for the first time. The anointing by the bishop after the baptismal bath is the ancient root of what we know as confirmation.

So, as you can see, this anointing with oil and laying on of hands was a brief part of a much larger rite. It was unique, however, in that it was done by the bishop, while the earlier parts of the rite were the responsibility of the presbyter (priest) or deacon. After a time, because the number of those wanting to become Christians grew very quickly, the bishop was unable to be present at every ceremony of initiation. The Eastern Church resolved this problem by allowing priests to administer the whole ceremony of initiation. To this day, in many Eastern Churches the ceremony of initiation remains a single ceremony. This means that a person can be baptised, confirmed and share in the Eucharist in the course of one ceremony, even if that person is an infant.

However, in the Roman Church, the problem was resolved in a completely different way. Pope Innocent 1 insisted in the year 412 that the anointing had to be done by a bishop. The ceremony of initiation was therefore divided into three separate ceremonies that took place at different times. Priests were allowed to baptise and it would seem that they often gave Communion at that ceremony too. However, a bishop was the only one who could lay on hands and anoint, so he completed the initiation ceremony at a time when he could be present which at first would be shortly after the Easter Vigil, during Easter week or at least in the Easter season but gradually it began to be pushed back further and further. Also the normal age for the completion of initiation got older and older, until it was generally celebrated at age fourteen. As this happened, First Communion was often also delayed, since it was properly received only after Confirmation. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Pope Pius X lowered the age for First Communion to seven to encourage more frequent communion. In most people's minds, Confirmation was now fully removed from the initiation celebration and was regarded as a separate sacrament.

We can now look at the development of the sacrament over the centuries.

From about **30AD – 100 AD** the apostles began to initiate new members into the Christian community. Procedures differed from place to place but generally there would be a period of preparation, comprising instruction and repentance. This would be followed by reception into the community through immersion in water and perhaps a laying on of hands.

Around **200 AD** a longer period of preparation was required. This included instruction, prayer, fasting, repentance and good works. The candidate also needed a sponsor to present him to become a Catechumen. The Sponsor had to witness to the suitability of the candidate and to the moral quality of his life. This preparation period could last up to three years. At Baptism, each Catechumen entered the water and was asked to declare their belief in Jesus Christ. Up to three immersions then took place. After Baptism, the bishop anointed each person on the forehead to signify being joined with Jesus Christ and then greeted each one with the kiss of peace.

Later, about **300 AD** more rituals were added to the ceremony. For

example, breathing on the candidate to blow away evil spirits and blow in the Holy Spirit were added. Special places were built (Baptisteries) which were apart from the church where these ceremonies took place. As the numbers of Christians increased and the number of Baptisms grew, it became impossible for a bishop to be in attendance at every ceremony for the laying on of hands. Therefore, Baptism and Confirmation began to emerge as separate ceremonies. Confirmation could only take place when the bishop was available.

About **500 AD** as Christianity became more widespread, infant Baptism became common practice. In some places, however, Confirmation continued immediately after Baptism and as stated earlier, this practice still continues in the Eastern Churches. During the middle ages, fifteen years was the usual age for Confirmation but this too varied from place to place.

1565 AD was an important date because the Council of Trent stated that the age of reason for a child was between the ages of seven and eleven.

In **1789 AD**, after the French Revolution, twelve was considered the more appropriate age for Confirmation. At this time the bishop's kiss of peace became a token blow on the cheek to signify that one must be prepared to suffer for Christ.

In **1962 AD** the Second Vatican Council prepared new guidelines for the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Confirmation is now seen in terms of initiation and usually takes place within the Eucharist. Before being confirmed, candidates renew their baptismal promises, are next confirmed and then celebrate and receive the Eucharist. Thereby they enact the traditional initiation sequence of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The new rites of Confirmation were introduced in **1971**.

SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFIRMATION

Confirmation has always been focused on the gift of the Holy Spirit, yet the Church has also always associated the gift of the Spirit with Baptism. This raises many questions – ‘In Confirmation do we get another outpouring of the Spirit?’ ‘Wasn’t the Holy Spirit we received at Baptism effective?’ ‘Why do we need Confirmation at all?’ As long as the anointing and laying on of hands were part of the same ceremony with Baptism there was no problem. These were seen as the focus for the community’s celebration of the gift of the Spirit and the immersion as the focus of incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ. Problems arose when they were separated.

Other questions arise regarding the meaning of Confirmation. Is it the sacrament of Christian witness? The answer is yes, because the Spirit we receive is the power that enables us to witness. The questions then arise – Doesn’t Baptism already commit us and empower us to witness and does Confirmation make us soldiers of Christ, able to suffer for him if necessary? Again the answer is yes. The Spirit gives us courage to profess our faith even under persecution. The question then follows - Isn’t this also true of Baptism?

“One answer to all these questions over the centuries is to see Baptism as the sacrament of Christian infancy and Confirmation as the sacrament of ‘Christian maturity.’ A problem with this approach is the definition of ‘Christian maturity.’ Christian maturity refers to maturity in faith. But maturity is a relative term. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us:

“Although Confirmation is sometimes called the ‘sacrament of Christian maturity’, we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need ‘ratification’ to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this;

Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the Book of Wisdom says: ‘For old age is not honoured for length of time, or measured by number of years.’ Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.” (CCC 1308).

The Church's tradition of celebrating initiation in its fullness with both adults and children points out the flaw in this approach of Christian maturity. If Baptism can be celebrated with infants, so can Confirmation.

It can be confusing when we speak of receiving the Holy Spirit in Confirmation when the Holy Spirit has been given in Baptism. When Confirmation is celebrated immediately after Baptism, we recognise the giving of the Holy Spirit in that full initiation liturgy. When it is celebrated years after Baptism, the real issue is whether that gift, already given in Baptism, has been fully received so that it bears fruit in the life of the candidate. Those who were baptised as infants often need to become more aware of the gift they have received. They need to learn to listen to the Holy Spirit and follow the Spirit's guidance. The preparation for and celebration of Confirmation can be the occasion for growing into life in the Spirit in a more conscious and complete way. The function of Confirmation is to focus our attention on the gift of the Spirit, whether the sacrament is celebrated at the same time as Baptism or years later.

Confirmation is perhaps one of the most poorly understood and underrated of the seven sacraments. Yet the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. 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." (CCC 1285)

So we can see that Confirmation "completes" the grace which was initially given when we were baptised. Although it is not essential in achieving everlasting life, nevertheless, it is necessary so that we may obtain the perfection of salvation. It has been said that Baptism gives us a treasure and Confirmation is the key that unlocks it. Through Baptism we enter into the family of God. We become alive in God and it is through Confirmation that we are life-giving. Baptism makes us children of God. Confirmation makes us witnesses of this new life in Christ Jesus. Baptism clothes us in Christ that he might live in us. In Confirmation we are made capable of spreading the message of Christ. In Baptism we become disciples. Through

Confirmation we become witnesses and prophets by putting the message into word and deed.

Baptism and Confirmation are not one time or once off spiritual events. They have lasting effects. They establish the person in a committed relationship with God and the Church and place a responsibility on the candidate to live this new life to the full.

A very good summary of the effects of Confirmation can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This summary is as follows:

“It is evident from its celebrations that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. (CCC 1302)

From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- *Its roots are more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry ‘Abba! Father!’;*
- *It unites us more 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:”*

Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the ‘character’ which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness. (CCC 1304).

This ‘character’ perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and ‘the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (quasi ex officio). (CCC 1305).

The above is very neatly summed up in question 268 from the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church – What is the effect of Confirmation?

“The effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit like that of Pentecost. This outpouring impresses on the soul an indelible character and produces a growth in the grace of Baptism. It roots the recipient more deeply in divine sonship, binds him more firmly to Christ and to the Church and reinvigorates the gifts of the Holy Spirit in his soul. It gives a special strength to witness to the Christian faith.”

Like Baptism and Holy Orders, Confirmation imprints an indelible mark on the soul, and, therefore, cannot be repeated. Confirmation is a spiritual coming of age and as we come of age physically only once, so we can come of age only once in the spiritual sense. The Baptismal Character marks us as a Disciple (follower) of Christ, while the Character given in Confirmation enrolls us as an Apostle (missionary) of Christ, fully equipping us for the apostolate. This Character has been called the ‘seal of the Holy Spirit’ and means that the recipients *“share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off, the aroma of Christ.”*(2Cor.2:15).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

“This seal of the Holy Spirit marks out our total belonging to Christ, our enrolment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.” (CCC 1296)

(Note: Eschatology - 1. A branch of theology or religious belief concerned with the ultimate destiny of the universe or of mankind. 2. The Christian doctrine concerning death, judgement, heaven and hell. [Longman New Universal Dictionary])

In the Roman Church a bishop is usually the minister of Confirmation. This was the tradition from the very earliest days of the Church. This is illustrated clearly in the passage quoted earlier from the Acts of the Apostles:

“Now when the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John. On their arrival they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for as yet He had not come upon any of 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. But when Simon (the magician) saw that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, he offered them money, saying, “Give me also this power,

so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8. 14:19).

The real importance of this passage is that while it tells us that Confirmation is a completion of what was begun in Baptism, it is a sacrament distinct from Baptism and it requires a bishop to administer the ‘laying on’ of hands. The Samaritans had already been baptised, yet it still was necessary for them to receive the ‘laying on of hands’ The passage also tells us of the way Confirmation was to be given: by the placing of the hand of the one who confirms upon the head of the one to be confirmed, with a prayer that he may receive the Holy Spirit.

It is very plain from the passage that it was the Apostles – that is, the bishops – who confirmed. Whoever baptised the Samaritans did not have the power to ‘lay hands’ upon them. Two of the Apostles, Peter and John, had to travel all the way from Jerusalem to Samaria to do this. This tradition of a bishop confirming has continued down to the present day.

Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us:

“In the Latin Rite, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. Although the bishop may for grave reasons concede to priests the faculty of administering Confirmation, it is appropriate from the very meaning of the sacrament that he should confer it himself, mindful that the celebration of Confirmation has been temporally separated from Baptism for this reason. Bishops are the successors of the apostles. They have received the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The administration of this sacrament by them demonstrates clearly that its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ.” (CCC 1313).

In the Eastern Church, where Confirmation immediately follows Baptism, it is the priest who performs both ceremonies. However, he does so with sacred chrism which has been consecrated by the patriarch or bishop, thus expressing the apostolic unity of the Church whose bonds are strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. (CCC1312).

If a person is in danger of death, any priest can celebrate Confirmation. The Church does not want any Christian to die without having been perfected by the Holy Spirit with the gift of Christ’s fullness.

CONFIRMATION FOR CHILDREN AND CATECHUMENS

INTRODUCTION

When children were baptised, the parents and godparents represented them and promised to be their first and best teachers. Over the next twelve years they took on the responsibility of teaching them their prayers, bringing them to Mass, encouraging them to receive the sacraments, teaching them about right and wrong. The family has often been described as the 'domestic church' where children receive their 'first Christian experience' and this experience stays with them and influences them throughout their whole life.

On the day of Confirmation, it is time for the children to take on the responsibility for their own faith. Normally before Confirmation a child will have taken part in a 'Ceremony of Light'. During this ritual, parents again light the candle that was first lit on their child's Baptism and they then hand this candle over to their son or daughter, thus symbolising the handing on of the responsibility for their faith to their child. However, for parents this is not the end of their responsibilities, they should still have a great deal to do with the religious upbringing of their children and these responsibilities very often remain with them for life. Parents should pray for their children, should give them good example by living a good Christian life and provide them with good advice and encouragement.

In recent years there have been great efforts made to involve parents and parish in the preparation for the sacraments of Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation.

The home and the parish community are expected to co-operate with the school in the preparation of the children for these sacraments. The commitment and generosity of our teachers in the preparation programme along with the welcoming visits of the local clergy is greatly appreciated. In relation to the preparation for confirmation, Enrolment Ceremonies, meetings with parents and Faith Friends and Special Masses in which the candidates play a more active role are widely held.

CONFIRMATION DAY

The day of Confirmation is a big parish event. The school is present with the parents, the teachers, the choir, the servers, the sponsors, the parishioners, the bishop and the clergy..

Normally the school has a huge responsibility in preparing children for Confirmation. It is there that the children have nurtured their faith over the years. Not only are the teachers present who have prepared the children over the past year but the teachers who have helped the children develop and grow in their faith since they began school should also be present.

On the day of Confirmation it is important that the parish community also be present. The parish community plays its part in the journey of faith of the young people about to be confirmed. The parish is the most important place in which the Christian community is formed and in it faith is born and grows.

A candidate for Confirmation will have a sponsor to help him/her to live as a true witness to Christ. Canon Law states:

“As far as possible the person to be confirmed is to have a sponsor. The sponsor’s function is to take care that the person confirmed behaves as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfils the duties inherent in the sacrament.” (Canon 892).

The requirements for a sponsor are the same as for Baptism and it is desirable that it be one of the godparents again. (*“It is desirable that the sponsor chosen be the one who undertook this role at Baptism.”* (Canon 893, 2). This person will play an important role in the child’s life and should be chosen carefully. A sponsor has to be a Catholic and have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. He or she should be prepared to share faith and time with the child. A sponsor can be male or female. A sponsor should be involved in the child’s preparation for Confirmation and should be invited to the talks and ceremonies (e.g. Ceremony of Light) beforehand.

The bishop and the priests of the parish are also present. The bishop is

the original minister of Confirmation and he is the obvious link with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at the first Pentecost.

THE CEREMONY

Confirmation is normally celebrated during the celebration of the Eucharist. The ceremony itself is in four parts: - Presentation of the candidates; Renewal of Baptismal promises; The Laying on of hands; Anointing with Chrism.

a. Presentation of Candidates

After the Gospel everyone takes their seats. The Parish Priest or his delegate (which is often the class teacher) will present the candidates for Confirmation. The candidate will stand when his or her name is called out. It is interesting to note that the presentation of candidates is also part of the rite of ordination for a priest and bishop. It shows the willingness of the candidates to go forward and receive the sacrament that is about to be conferred on them. On the day they were baptised they were carried into the church, now they are able to stand up by themselves.

b. Renewal of Baptismal Promises

After the bishop's homily, the young people will be asked to stand to renew the promises made for them at Baptism by their parents and godparents. In Baptism we become children of God and members of the Church. In Confirmation we publicly proclaim our faith in God the Father and in Jesus Christ who sent us the Holy Spirit to help us. Special mention is made of the Holy Spirit.

"Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to you sacramentally in Confirmation?" asks the bishop. *"I do,"* answers the candidate.

c. The Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands is the biblical gesture by which the Holy Spirit is invoked. Historically it has been associated with consecration, blessing and investiture. It was continued in the early Church as a symbol of the gift of the Holy Spirit. An example of this can be found in the Acts of the Apostles where the apostles lay their hands on the seven deacons:

“The whole community agreed and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenus and Nicolaus of Antioch who was a proselyte. They presented these men to the apostles who first prayed over them and then laid hands upon them.” (Acts 6. 5:6)

The bishop begins this part of the ceremony by saying:

“My dear friends, in Baptism God, our Father gave the birth of eternal life to his chosen sons and daughters. Let us pray to our Father that he will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen his sons and daughters with this gift and anoint them to be more like Christ, the Son of God.”

The bishop then stretches out his hands to invoke the Holy Spirit upon those to be confirmed saying:

*“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 judgement 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.”*

With these words which have been used in the Church since the fifth century the children are confirmed. They have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

d. Anointing with Chrism

The child then comes forward to the altar with his or her sponsor. The sponsor stands behind the child with their hand on the child's

shoulder. The bishop then traces the sign of the cross on the child's forehead – having first dipped his thumb in the chrism and says the words: "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The word 'Chrism' comes from the Greek word meaning 'anointed.' It is used in the sacraments of Baptism where the head of the infant is anointed with chrism, in Confirmation where the forehead of the candidate is anointed and in Holy Orders where the hands of a priest at his ordination and the head and hands of a bishop at his consecration are anointed. It is also used in the consecration of churches, chalices, patens, altars and altar stones.

Chrism is blessed and consecrated by the bishop in a special way at the Chrism Mass. Rather than making the sign of the cross over it, as with other blessings, the bishop breathes on it, signifying the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

As the candidate is anointed during the Confirmation ceremony, the bishop says, *"Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."* This gesture and the words accompanying it express clearly the effects of the giving of the Holy Spirit. Signed with the perfumed oil, the young person receives the seal of the Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit, drawing them closer to Christ and to the ministry for which all, as baptised Christians, are called. Strengthened with this anointing the candidate can now go out and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Second Vatican Council called upon the church to recover the baptismal character of the sacrament of Confirmation. Yet the revised rites continue to support several understandings of confirmation. RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), issued in 1972 makes a case for unifying baptism and confirmation: *"...adults are not to be baptised without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy Spirit come from the Father to those who are baptised"* (no.215). The rite authorises the presider at the initiation of adults to confirm them, whether that is a bishop or a priest. This applies not just to adults but also to children old enough to receive

instruction. Such children go through the same process of preparation as adults and they are baptised, confirmed and are given their First Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil along with the adult candidates. This rule is not optional but required by Canon Law; it is not permitted to delay the confirmation of such children until the “usual age” for confirmation of those baptised in infancy. Since they are old enough for formation, they are considered old enough to receive all three sacraments of initiation.

GIFTS AND FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In Confirmation, the Holy Spirit is given to us for our spiritual strengthening, a strengthening which is effected in a most particular way through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us in Baptism but in Confirmation they are given to us in a fuller or more perfect form.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the Prophet Isaiah foretold were bestowed on our Saviour; they are bestowed on us also:

“The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him – a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and power, a Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord – that he may rule in the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11. 2:3).

The same gifts - the gifts of knowledge, understanding, wisdom, courage, reverence, wonder and right judgment are conferred on us when we receive the sacrament of Confirmation.

- a. **Knowledge:** Knowledge is the gift that helps us to know ourselves and the world around us. It helps us to know where our faith is leading us and what our Church is about. The gift of knowledge helps to see the hand of God in all that happens in the world and to see his likeness in all created things.
- b. **Understanding:** The gift of understanding helps us to untie the knots, to straighten out our lives and to deal with our problems. It helps us to let the Word of God have room in our lives and to be able to grasp and hold in our minds all the great truths presented to us by God’s Holy Church.

- c. **Wisdom:** The gift of wisdom is the gift of the Holy Spirit that helps us to see and understand God in our lives and in the world.
- d. **Courage:** This is the gift from the Holy Spirit that helps us walk out into the world and be prepared to stand up for what we believe in.
- e. **Reverence:** The gift of reverence helps us to see God in everything around us. It teaches us to treat our fragile world gently.
- f. **Wonder:** Wonder is the gift of the Holy Spirit that keeps us awestruck by the power and beauty of God in our lives.
- g. **Right Judgment:** This is the gift of the Holy Spirit that encourages us to talk things over so that we can make the right choices in our lives and enables us to feel comfortable with ourselves afterwards.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the result of the Holy Spirit's presence in the life of a Christian. When the apostles received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they were no longer afraid. They changed dramatically, the Holy Spirit made a difference in their lives. The gifts they received were like seeds that began to grow and bear fruit. The good things that we do under the influence of the Holy Spirit are known as the "fruits of the Spirit."

There are nine biblically-based fruits of the Holy Spirit as given by Saint Paul in his letter to the Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy and peace, patience, understanding of others, kindness and fidelity, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5. 22:23.)

Children are taught that the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit are – Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control.

THE NECESSITY OF CONFIRMATION

Whilst the Church teaches that although Confirmation is not a necessary means for salvation, still:

'Every baptised person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation. Since Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time, for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete.' (CCC 1306).

Therefore, no one should refuse Confirmation or unduly postpone it. So much depends on our receiving the sacrament worthily that we should prepare well for it – by acquiring as much knowledge as possible about it and putting ourselves in the proper disposition to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. When the apostles were awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, for many days we are told: “All of these together gave themselves to constant prayer;” (Acts 1:14). We should also pray that those in our parish, especially the children in our schools will receive the sacrament worthily.

Confirmation is obligatory for anyone being advanced to Holy Orders and highly desirable for a man and a woman getting married.

There has been much discussion in recent times about the right age for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The ordering and timing depends on our theological understanding of this sacrament. Some see Confirmation as the culmination or completion of baptism and so it is quite acceptable to confirm children even before their First Communion.

This places the emphasis on Confirmation as sealing our baptism and on the Eucharist as being what completes the sacrament of initiation.

Others see Confirmation as the Sacrament marking the threshold between childhood and adulthood, as a rite of initiation into adulthood, of acceptance as a full member of the Church. Thus it seems appropriate to administer Confirmation to candidates between fourteen and eighteen years of age.

In the Irish situation some argue that the present system of celebrating Confirmation is failing because for many of those confirmed it effectively ends their church-going on a regular basis. But the reception of Confirmation is not the reason for their failure to practise. There are many reasons for their ending of regular church-going such as family and societal attitudes and practices, peer pressure and the general disconnection of many young people with our Church at this time. It is not due to any defects in the preparation or celebration of this sacrament.

CONCLUSION

There are many implications hidden in the sacrament of Confirmation. We can now look at the effects of Confirmation and our responsibilities to live not only as baptised but also confirmed Christians in the present day.

We are living in a world where we are constantly meeting people who are opposing Christ's way. Look at the corrupting influence of television. We accept today what would have shocked older generations. The media glamorises immoral behaviours. There is corruption in big business and government. Parents are afraid to chastise their children about their lifestyle and their neglect of the sacraments. We are living in an age of greed and materialism.

So what do we do? How do we meet these challenges? Fortunately, we as Christians have the sacrament of Confirmation to help us. Confirmation is the sacrament of spiritual strengthening, in Latin 'roboratio spiritualis'. Confirmation increases sanctifying grace in every way but mainly in deepening our capacity to remain spiritually alive. It gives us the power of resistance, the ability to resist the moral dangers and the strength to become more Christ-like.

The three sacraments which give a person an indelible character are Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. Confirmation confers the character of assimilation to *Jesus Christ, the priest, teacher and king*.

*Confirmation assimilates us to **Jesus Christ the priest***. Confirmation gives us the strength to bear suffering (passively) in union with him and the courage to sacrifice enjoyable things (actively) out of love for Jesus who died out of love for us.

*Confirmation assimilates us to **Christ the teacher***. We acquire a strong will in adhering to the faith in the face of obstacles, a strong mind in not doubting the truths of our faith; a strong humility of spirit in professing the faith and a strong wisdom that knows how to communicate the faith to others.

*Thirdly, Confirmation assimilates us to **Christ the King***. This gives us a quality of leadership that allows us to direct others along the right path to

salvation. It gives us a strong character that can withstand the ravages of bad example and a strong personality that will attract even the enemies of Christ.

The early Christians taught love. They were confirmed by the Holy Spirit to love others with heroic charity. They loved those who hated them. They loved those who persecuted them. Like Jesus, they even loved those who crucified them. There is a message here for us. When we talk about spreading the faith as one of the gifts of Confirmation we are talking especially about our love of others that enables us to communicate our faith to them. Confirmation so deepens the faith of a sincerely believing Catholic that he or she is the conduit for deepening and strengthening the faith of others by his or her good example in the practice of self-sacrificing love. So if we wish to avail of the gift of our Confirmation, to help spread and defend the faith, we must understand our faith, we must be able to prove the truth of our faith but above all we must live a life of loving surrender to the will of God and exercise selfless generosity in our dealings with everyone who enters our lives.

Do we reflect on what Confirmation really means to us and could mean in our lives. How can we live on the basis of our Confirmation in today's world?

Confirmation is a key sacrament in our spiritual formation. It is confirming our baptism and its effectiveness can only be measured in terms of how we live the Christian Life.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What does the Holy Spirit do in one who is confirmed?
Is Confirmation necessary?

If someone fails to receive Confirmation through his own fault, is he guilty of sin?

What has been your image of Confirmation in the past? Can you recall your own Confirmation Day?

What does it mean to say that Confirmation is a sacrament of initiation?

What kind of response would you expect from a seven year old preparing for Confirmation? From a twelve year old? From a twenty year old?

What is the policy of your parish in the preparation and celebration of Confirmation? How could your community's involvement be increased?

What distinguishes Confirmation from Baptism? How would you explain what is unique about Confirmation?

Compare the first Pentecost with your Confirmation day. In which ways are they alike? In which ways are they different?

What should you do and what do you do when your faith is being openly attacked?

What would you do if someone of another religion tells you he is interested in the Catholic faith?

What would you do if you found that someone in your community is leading others to corruption?

Have you been a sponsor for a child at Confirmation? How do you carry out your responsibilities?

Do you agree that showing 'good example' is important in communicating our faith to others? Can you give examples of how you do this?

Why is it desirable for a man and a woman going to be married to be confirmed?

Do you think it is OK for a child to decide if he wants to be confirmed or not?

What do you think is the ideal age for Confirmation?

What are some challenges I have faced in remaining loyal to my faith? How did I handle those challenges and would I handle them differently today?



Knights of St. Columbanus



The Knights of St.Columbanus
Ely House
Ely Place, Dublin 2.

Telephone: 01 6761835

www.knightsofstcolumbanus.ie

Email: koc@iol.ie