

The sacrament of confirmation

THE WORKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the most underrated, underappreciated person of the Holy Trinity. He is rarely mentioned, is often forgotten, and is almost always referred to as a thing rather than a person. This is a tragedy that must be corrected because a relationship with the Holy Spirit is crucial to the Christian life. Without Him, we would certainly be lost. Jesus told the apostles that, with the power of the Holy Spirit, they would do greater things than He Himself did, and Jesus did some pretty amazing things. He healed the blind, cured the lame, and even raised the dead.

But look at the work of St. Peter after he received the Holy Spirit. He converted 3,000 people with just one speech. Scripture does

not record Jesus converting that many people at one time. Peter went on to heal many people, but the most surprising healings happened while he was still in Jerusalem: people laid their sick friends in the streets so that Peter's shadow could touch and heal them. Jesus healed people with words, spit, even His own hands, but we do not ever read about Jesus healing with merely His shadow. This is the Holy Spirit active in St. Peter's life, and this is the same Holy Spirit offered to all of us today.

RECEIVING THE SPIRIT

We first receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism. He comes into our lives, inspires our faith, and gives us strength. The spiritual gifts we receive at our baptism are renewed, strengthened, and completed in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In fact, Baptism and Confirmation are so closely linked that they used to be celebrated together as a "double sacrament."

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The water of Baptism literally washes away all of our sin, especially our original sin – that mark left on our souls, inherited from our first parents when they decided to turn their hearts away from God’s will. Through the power and grace of the Sacrament of Baptism, we are united with Christ’s actions on the cross. His death on the cross is our death to sin. His Resurrection is our resurrection, our new life in Christ.

Baptism leaves an “indelible mark” on the soul. This means that through Baptism, a permanent change of the very essence of the individual takes place. Forever, in this life and in the next, the baptized soul is sealed with the mark of belonging to Christ. Sin cannot erase this mark, even if sin prevents the soul’s salvation.

The gifts received at our Baptism are strengthened in the reception of the Holy Spirit at Confirmation. Receiving the Holy Spirit has always been a sign that one is embarking on a mission. Isaiah prophesied that when the Messiah came to deliver God’s people, the Spirit of the Lord would rest upon Him. Jesus began His public ministry by being baptized in Galilee, during which the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and rested upon Him. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles at Pentecost, they finally embarked on their mission to evangelize the whole world.

Ever since Pentecost, Catholics have been passing down the grace of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. This tradition continues today in the Sacrament of Confirmation. The bishop, or a priest whom he delegates, lays hands on the one who is to be confirmed, anoints them with sacred chrism oil, and prays, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The words used in this sacrament are very important. The word “sealed” can have different meanings. For example, you might think of sealing a Ziploc bag, or scoring the touchdown that seals your team’s victory. But this is not how the Holy Spirit seals us in Confirmation. It is not a closing or an ending. Instead, think of it more as seal a king would use to show that a decree really came from him. By placing his seal on it, he lets everyone know that this document comes from him and, more importantly, that this decree has authority. This is the gift of Confirmation. God, the king of kings, places His seal upon us. We receive the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to go out and preach the Gospel with authority, just as Peter did at Pentecost.

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES UPON YOU, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, THROUGHOUT JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. (ACTS 1:8)

discussion questions

The Sacrament of Confirmation enables you to do great things in the world. For example, Jesus healed people, but Peter's shadow also healed people. What is something you want the Holy Spirit to do in and through you that is "greater" than Jesus?

Read Acts 8:14-17. What elements of modern-day Confirmation are similar to those found in this Scripture passage?

OUR IDENTITY

The Holy Spirit is not the only gift God gives us in Confirmation. God's generosity knows no limits and He pours out grace superabundantly in this sacrament, as in all of the other sacraments. When you are anointed in Confirmation, you become more and more like Jesus, whose titles "Christ" and "Messiah" both mean "anointed one." Since you will become more like Jesus, you can more and more call God your Father.

We live in a time when our identity is often called into question, most often by ourselves. At the end of your high school career, you have to make choices that will affect the rest of your life. Perhaps people are already asking you what you want to do after high school, or what you want to do with the rest of your life. While these are important questions, they can be intimidating because we must figure out who we are before we can answer them. Sometimes we rush the answer and begin to define ourselves by the sports we play, the clubs we are in, or the grades we receive.

We find our identity most perfectly in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In Confirmation, God affirms that we are His beloved son or daughter; nothing will ever change that. In Confirmation, God deepens our relationship with His family, the Church, so we never have to be alone – no matter where we go, we will have brothers and sisters in Christ to support us.

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From the beginning, our baptism unites us with the Father as His adopted children. Just after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, we hear of the Father's voice from heaven proclaiming, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." So too are we the Father's beloved. So too are we pleasing in the eyes of our heavenly Father in our union with Christ beginning at our baptism and strengthened at our confirmation.

discussion questions

*How do you identify who you are?
How does your identity in God
change your life?*

*What in your life needs to be
transformed by the Holy Spirit? Do
you believe He is capable of this?*

OUR RESPONSIBILITY, DUTY, & PREPARATION

As with all gifts, Confirmation comes with responsibilities and duties. As confirmed members of God's family, conformed more perfectly to Jesus Himself, our prime responsibility is to live out this identity. We must live in a manner worthy of being called God's sons and daughters. Certainly, this means a moral life, but it also means a life dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel, to evangelization. As confirmed members of the Church, it is our solemn duty to continue to grow God's Kingdom on Earth.

In our baptism, we become members of the Church and are therefore, called to live a new life with Christ. This new life means that we no longer live for ourselves, but live for the one who gave us this new life. The Holy Spirit bestows new gifts to us through our baptism, which are later perfected through Confirmation. This grace allows us to follow our Lord more closely in discipleship and to have hope for our resurrection on the last day.

Confirmation not only deepens our relationship with the apostolic Church of Christ, but it also deepens our role in the apostolic mission of evangelization. How appropriate, then, that the bishop – the successor of the apostles – should be the one to administer this sacrament to us. Our preparation is important because of the responsibilities that come with

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living as a confirmed member of the Church.

After our baptism as infants, we must go through catechesis so that we may come to know and believe the faith into which we have been baptized. This is necessary so that the spiritual graces can develop to their full potential within our lives. Through this process of being educated in the faith, we will be able to take complete responsibility and ownership of our beliefs. These duties are not to be taken lightly, so the Western Church has asked us to wait at least until the “age of discretion” to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation.

But preparation is not just about waiting until we are a certain age. One of the best ways we can prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation is to choose a mentor who lives the Catholic way of life. We have mentors for virtually everything else: coaches, music directors, teachers. While we hope that your parents are role models in faith, it is crucial to have a good, Catholic role model other than your parents to help you grow in your faith. For Confirmation, we call this person a sponsor.

The final step before you receive the Sacrament of Confirmation is to partake in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which allows the grace of Confirmation to be as effective in your life as possible. As we get closer to your confirmation

day, you will be asked to confess your sins to a priest so you can be forgiven.

We know that the Confirmation process can feel a little long, but we want to help you see that it is worth it. We want you to know the goodness God has in store for you in this sacrament and we cannot wait until we can more perfectly call you our brother or sister in Christ.

discussion questions

Why do you think preparing for Confirmation is important? How have you prepared so far?

It is advised that you go to confession and increase your time in prayer before being confirmed. Why do you think it is necessary to do both? What keeps you from doing either regularly?

CLOSING PRAYER

receive the Holy Spirit!

Earlier we read that “we receive the Holy Spirit who gives us the ability to go out and preach the Gospel with authority, just as Peter did at Pentecost.” After Peter preached, 3,000 people were baptized! The same Holy Spirit who gave Peter the courage and message to speak is in you and me, so we have the ability – and a duty – to bring people to Christ through our words. At your baptism, your parents and godparents spoke for you, but at your confirmation, you are to speak for yourself. How would you respond if someone asked you, “Why do you want to be confirmed? How does it benefit your life and the lives of those around you?” In sharing your answer, you could help bring people to Jesus.

Spend time to pray and journal about your answers to the following questions. If you are unsure of how to answer, it's okay to be real with God and ask the Holy Spirit for an outpouring of the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge so you can more clearly discern your answer.

Why do you want to be confirmed? How does this sacrament benefit your life and the lives of those around you?