Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism and Confirmation

Opening Prayer/Scripture Reading:
Matthew 3: 13-17
John 3: 5
Romans 6: 1-11

Catholic Update:
Baptism-Our Life Long Call
The Sacrament of Baptism-Celebrating The Embrace Of God
Confirmation-A Deepening of Our Christian Identity

Summary:
From the first moments of Christianity new members were received into the Christian community through sacramental rites of initiation. The catechumenate, developed by early Christians during the first four centuries of the Church's existence, was an extensive educational, spiritual and liturgical journey of initiation. The RCIA is a recent recovery of the ancient catechumenate that culminates in the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were the sacramental rites through which new members - infants, children and adults - were initiated into a new life of faith, hope and love of Christ as members of His body, the Church. Continuing the ancient tradition of initiation today new members are welcomed into the Catholic Church through the sacraments of Christian initiation.

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist - are the foundations of every Christian life. Through the sacraments of initiation the faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

By means of the sacraments of Christian initiation, we receive the unique graces that come with being in communion with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The sacraments of initiation fully incorporate us into the Body of Christ, the Church.

a. From the time of the apostles, initiation into the Christian community took place through a journey of conversion in several stages. The catechumenate that was developed to initiate new members into the Church culminated at the Easter Vigil when the catechumens received the sacraments of initiation. (CCC 1229-1233)

b. Baptism as the sacrament of faith is the basis of the whole Christian life. Through baptism we are freed from the effects of Original Sin and reborn as children of God through water and the Spirit; we become members of Christ's Body, the Church. (CCC 1262-1271)

c. Baptism is necessary for salvation as affirmed by Jesus, 'no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being begotten of water and the Spirit'. (John 3: 5) Jesus also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28: 19-20)

d. The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To baptize means to 'immerse' or 'plunge' into the water symbolizing the catechumens' burial into Christ's death, from which he
rises up by resurrection with him, as a 'new creature'. (CCC, 1214). The sign of the cross, the baptismal water, the anointing with sacred chrism, the white garment and candle all signify the baptismal graces. (CCC 1234-1245)

e. 'Incorporated into Christ by Baptism we are configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with an indelible spiritual mark of his belonging to Christ...Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.' (CCC 1272-1274)

f. The sacrament of Confirmation is a spiritual seal of the Holy Spirit that completes the sacramental graces received in Baptism. The effect of Confirmation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as it was given to the apostles at Pentecost. (CCC 1302-1305)

g. Confirmation gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ. (CCC 1303)

h. The essential rite of Confirmation consists of anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of hands, and through the words, 'Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.' The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. (CCC 1299-1300; 1312-1314)

Discussion Questions:
1. How can you prepare spiritually for the sacraments of initiation?
2. What role does faith play in baptism? (CCC 1253-1255)
3. Discuss the meaning of the sacramental symbols and rites of Baptism and Confirmation. (CCC 1234-1245; CCC 1297-1301)

Scripture References/Quotations:
Matthew 3:13; 28: 19-20
John 3:5; 20: 22-23
Acts 2: 1-12; 38
Romans 6: 3-4
Galatians 6:15; 3: 27
2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 2:12

'It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe...the catechumen or godparent is asked: 'What do you ask of God's Church?' The response is 'Faith!' (CCC 1253)

'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.' (Romans 6:3-4)

'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 judgment 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.'

Rite of Confirmation, 25

Suggestions For Further Reading:
Universal Catechism, 'The Sacraments of Initiation' Articles 1212 - 1321
Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 64-65

Closing Prayer
Acts 2: 32-38