

TALK ON CONFIRMATION (19/6/12) (From the Catechism)

Baptism Confirmation and the Eucharist constitute sacraments of Christian initiation. Confirmation is necessary for completion of baptismal grace and makes us more perfectly bound to the Church by being enriched with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. Those confirmed are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the Catholic faith by word and deed even as children.

Isaiah in the **Old Testament** talks about the Spirit coming down on the hoped-for Messiah. That's precisely what happened to **Jesus**, the longed-for Messiah on the occasion of his baptism. He was already conceived in the **womb of Mary** by the power of the Holy Spirit and his whole mission was carried out in union with the Holy Spirit, whom, according to St John 3:4 the Father in Heaven gave Him **without measure**.

But even in the O.T. (Ezekiel) the Spirit was to be given to the **whole messianic people** and not just prophets and kings.

Christ fulfilled his promise to send the Holy Spirit on **Easter Sunday evening and more strikingly at Pentecost**. The apostles at **Pentecost** were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the mighty works of God. Those who believed were baptised and received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.

The apostles imparted to the newly baptised the gift of the Spirit by '**the laying on of hands**' – it was seen as completing the grace of baptism. '**Laying on of hands**' is seen by the Catholic Church as the **origin of the Sacrament of Confirmation** and a perpetuation of Pentecost within the church community throughout the ages.

Very early on, added to the imposition of hands, was **anointing with a perfumed oil (Chrism)** – hence the name Christian and Christ, which means 'the anointed one'. Confirmation suggests

the ratification of baptism and the strengthening of baptismal grace.

Signs of the Rite of Confirmation

Anointing imprints **a spiritual seal** on the soul of the person
Anointing is rich in biblical symbolism
In the psalm 104 it signifies **abundance and joy**.
It is a sign of healing in the gospel (Lk 3:4)
A baby is anointed with the oil of baptism (catechumens) on the breast as a sign of cleansing from original Sin and strengthening. The sick are anointed as a sign of healing and comfort. Anointing in Confirmation and Ordination is a sign of consecration. Those confirmed share more fully in the mission of Jesus Christ. Those confirmed, as it were, 'give off the aroma of Christ'. (2 Corinthians 2:15)

The confirmed also receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. Soldiers were marked with their leader's seal and slaves with their masters in ancient times. In John's gospel it says that Jesus was marked with his Father's seal. This confirmation seal marks our total belonging to Christ and our enrolment in His service as well as a promise of divine protection.

Celebration of Confirmation

The Liturgy of Confirmation begins with the renewal of baptismal promises and profession of faith by the *confirmands* – this shows the connection with baptism. The bishop extends his hands over the whole group which is a sign of them receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. While doing this the Bishop says a standard prayer. (give people the prayer)

The essential Rite follows i.e. the anointing with chrism on the forehead done by the 'laying on of hands' accompanied by the words "be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit". The sign of peace given by the bishop demonstrated ecclesial union with

the bishop and the rest of the faithful.

Effects of Confirmation

1. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit as at Pentecost
2. The Spirit makes us more conscious that God is our loving (Abba) Father
3. Increase of the gifts of the spirit in us
4. Renders the bond with the Church more perfect
5. Gives us strength to spread and defend the faith as true witnesses of Christ and profess our faith more publicly
6. Encourages us never to be ashamed of the cross of Christ.

Confirmation is only conferred once and imprints of the soul and indelible spiritual mark.

Who can receive the Sacrament

Every baptised person with which Christian initiation remains incomplete

Sometimes it is called the sacrament of Christian maturity. However we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth. Baptismal grace is a grace of free unmerited election and does not need 'ratification' to become effective. St Thomas Aquinas has to say: *Age of Body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood many 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"* (St Thomas Aquinas).

In our preparation the aim is to lead you to a more intimate union with Christ and the Holy Spirit and a deeper sense of belonging to the church, particularly the parish community and also a deeper awareness of the Universal Church.

To receive confirmation one must be in a state of grace. One should receive the Sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed of sin. There should also be an extra commitment of prayer in the candidate's life. The sponsor at baptism is best for confirmation to show more clearly the connection between the two sacraments.

The Minister of Confirmation

The Bishop if the ordinary minister of confirmation. Bishops are successors of the apostles. They unite the *confirmands* more closely with the Church and her apostolic origins. Someone in danger of death, even new-born babies should be confirmed after they are baptised.

The prayer which the bishop says with his hands imposed over the confirmands:

*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.
All: Amen.*