

CHAPTER 19

The Sacrament of Confirmation

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 the Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:14–17

During the Last Supper the Apostles knew that Jesus was saying farewell to them. He was talking about going to someplace where they could not yet follow (Jn 13:36). Jesus knew that this saddened them, but he promised to send Someone who would give them comfort and strengthen their faith:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you (Jn 14:16–17).

The word **Paraclete** means counselor, someone who helps and guides others, an advocate. The “Spirit of Truth,” who is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, was to come to the followers of Jesus as a counselor to give inner strength and help their friendship with Jesus to remain

alive and active. He would give them all the spiritual help they needed in order to spread the Faith among others.

The Promise Fulfilled

After Jesus returned to the Father, the Apostles and other disciples of Jesus spent nine days with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in prayer, asking God to send the gift of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost Sunday the promise was fulfilled as Saint Luke tells us:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other

tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).

The symbols of wind and fire reveal the powers which the Spirit gives us. Wind is an invisible but very real force: it can even lift houses and cars off the ground! Fire is something that cleanses things; for example, sometimes fire is used to clear a piece of land of shrubs and other rubbish so that new trees can be planted. So the Spirit is like an invisible

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

(John 14:26)



power within us that cleanses our hearts of sin and selfish desires. In other words, he makes us strong and mature Christians.

We Receive the Fullness of the Spirit

While it is Baptism that first gives us the Holy Spirit, *Confirmation* increases his power within us. This Sacrament strengthens the new life we have received as infants. It helps us to **witness** or stand up for Jesus among our friends and classmates.

The New Testament does not tell us just when our Lord gave this Sacrament to the Church, but the day of Pentecost is usually seen as the first “Confirmation,” and throughout the Acts of the Apostles we see many instances of the Apostles confirming new believers. When the followers of Jesus baptized people, they would send for one of the Apostles to come and give Confirmation to the new Christians. Usually the bishop is the minister of this Sacrament, although he may delegate this faculty to priests.

The **sign of Confirmation** is the laying on of the hand and the anointing with sacred chrism. The laying on of hands shows us that a spiritual gift is being handed on to the Christian; the chrism reminds us of our share in Jesus’ triple office and connects this Sacrament with Baptism. The words which the bishop says (“... be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”) tell us what gift is being handed on.

The Effects of Confirmation

Like Baptism, Confirmation gives us a seal, or spiritual mark, that shows we are Christians. It deepens the life of sanctifying grace and increases it within us. While at Baptism we were spiritual infants, now we are made spiritual adults who are given the responsibility of spreading the Faith to others. This is the special meaning and commitment of Confirmation.

In order to spread the Faith the Spirit gives us special gifts that we will learn about in the next chapter. Like the twelve Apostles we can be truly transformed into courageous followers of the Lord, who are willing to lay down our lives for the love of God and the truths of the Faith.

The Rite of Confirmation

This beautiful Sacrament usually takes place during a special “Mass of the Holy Spirit” that is celebrated by a bishop. It is like other Masses except that the prayers and readings are all about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Catholic Christian. The administration of the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place after the homily.

First, since Confirmation is a strengthening of Baptism, the bishop leads everyone in the renewal of the baptismal vows. Once again we reject sin and Satan; we profess the Creed and profess our loyalty to Jesus. Then the bishop stretches out his hands over the group to be confirmed while praying:

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. *Amen* (Rite of Confirmation).

After this comes the actual administration of the Sacrament through the anointing with sacred chrism and the laying on of hands. Each candidate, together with his sponsor, comes before the bishop. The bishop dips his right

thumb into the chrism and places his hand on the head of the person being confirmed, making the Sign of the Cross with the chrism on the forehead of the candidate, while saying:

(Confirmation name), be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The newly confirmed answers, “Amen.” The bishop then says, “Peace be with you,” and the newly confirmed answers, “And with your spirit.” Through this sacred rite the person has been sealed with the Spirit and has received the outpouring of his powerful gifts, which he received at Baptism. (Of course, to receive this gift most fruitfully, we must come to our Confirmation in the state of grace and with a spirit of faith in God.) The Mass then continues as usual, and at the end a special blessing is given to the newly confirmed Catholics.

Living as Mature Christians

The closing prayer for the Mass of the Holy Spirit reveals how we are to live as mature followers of Jesus:

God our Father, complete the work you have begun and keep the gifts of your Holy Spirit active in the hearts of your people. Make them ready to *live his gospel* and eager to *do his will*. May they *never be ashamed to proclaim to all the world Christ crucified*, living and reigning for ever and ever. *Amen* (Rite of Confirmation).

This is a very big mission for the new adult Christians! But the Holy Spirit helps us to carry it out. We can see how the Holy Spirit strengthens Christians by considering the lives of the saints. They show us that everyone, no matter what age or situation in life, can live the gospel, do God’s will, and proclaim Jesus to others. This is the main reason why we receive

baptismal, and sometimes confirmation, names. We are placed under the spiritual protection of one of God's saints to whom we pray and who prays for us and inspires us by the example of his or her life. This holy person becomes our **patron saint**.

Words to Know:

Paraclete witness
sign of Confirmation patron saints

Q. 148 *What is the Sacrament of Confirmation?*

The Sacrament of Confirmation makes us more perfect Christians and soldiers of Christ by means of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the strengthening of his gifts which we first received at Baptism (CCC 1285, 1316).

Q. 149 *What is the matter of Confirmation?*

The matter of Confirmation is the laying on of the hand and anointing with sacred chrism (CCC 1293, 1300).

Q. 150 *What is the form of Confirmation?*

The form of Confirmation is the following words: "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1300).

Q. 151 *Who is the minister of Confirmation?*

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop, although a priest may receive the special faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation (CCC 1313).

Q. 152 *How does the bishop administer Confirmation?*

The bishop administers Confirmation to the one being confirmed by anointing him with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1300).

Q. 153 *How does Confirmation make us more perfect Christians?*

Confirmation makes us more perfect Christians and witnesses of Jesus Christ by giving us an abundance of the Holy Spirit, his grace and his gifts, which confirm and strengthen us in faith and in the other virtues (CCC 1303).

Q. 154 *What does the anointing on the forehead in the form of a cross signify?*

The anointing on the forehead in the form of a cross signifies that the confirmed person, as a brave witness of Jesus Christ, should not be ashamed of the Cross nor fear enemies of the Faith (CCC 1295–96).

Q. 155 *Who are the sponsors in Confirmation?*

The sponsors should be good Christians in order to give good example and spiritual assistance to those who are confirmed (CCC 1311).

Q. 156 *What are the duties of one who is confirmed?*

One who is confirmed has the duties of witnessing to and defending the Faith, and continuing to live his baptismal promises (CCC 900, 1303).



CHAPTER 20

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?

Matthew 7:16

At the Last Supper Jesus spoke about a very special gift that he was going to give his followers: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

Jesus tells us that God will actually come to live within those who love him and obey his commands! And where the Father and Son are, of course, the Spirit will be there also. This gift of God-within-us is called the **indwelling** of the Holy Trinity. As long as we are in the state of sanctifying grace, God will live in our souls. Saint Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor 3:16–17).

The mystery of God-within-us is often mentioned in the New Testament by Saint Paul. He reminds us that this presence makes us more than God’s creatures—it makes us his children: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6).

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Along with this holy presence of God, the Spirit brings *seven gifts* to our souls at Baptism. We receive an outpouring of these **seven gifts of the Holy Spirit** at Confirmation. They are the same spiritual powers that were poured out upon Jesus as he began his mission of preaching the Good News of salvation. The prophet Isaiah foretold these gifts eight hundred years before Jesus was born:

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD (Is 11:2–3).

Let us look carefully at each of these important gifts, to learn what they are meant to do for our lives:

WISDOM: Helps us to see that the world is only a temporary place for us, that heaven is our true home. It helps us to set our hearts on heaven and to order our lives according to



God's will. It helps us to see things as God sees them.

UNDERSTANDING: Gives us an insight into the mysteries of faith and helps us to explain the Faith to others.

KNOWLEDGE: Helps us to see everything in life in relation to God and eternity, to know him, the world he created, and his plan for men.

COUNSEL: Helps us to make correct decisions about God's will for our lives.

FORTITUDE: Gives us the strength to be faithful to Christ even when it is difficult to do so.

PIETY: Inspires us to worship God and to love him as our Father and to love our neighbor as ourself.

FEAR OF THE LORD: Shows us the evil of sin and helps us to desire to live in God's grace. It is also called "wonder and awe" in God's presence because it reminds us that he is great and all powerful.

Many people wonder if they really have these gifts; they don't seem to be present in their lives. Perhaps these Christians have looked upon the gifts as some kind of magic—they expect them to "pop up" when needed. But this

is not how the gifts work in us. Like faith, hope, and charity, we have to exercise our spiritual muscles in order to use these wonderful gifts. We must pray to the Holy Spirit asking him to show us how to use them. Try to memorize these gifts and then ask God to help you use them when a need arises. For example, if you are strongly tempted to go to a party where drugs or alcohol will be used, ask for the gift of fortitude to help you overcome the temptation. The Holy Spirit *will* answer your prayer and show you what to do.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit

As we grow in prayer and in the use of these seven gifts, we will see certain effects taking place in our lives. These are called the **twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit**. When we see a tree that is blossoming and producing delicious fruit, we know that it is a healthy plant. It is the same with the Christian life. We will know that our spiritual life is healthy if we see these fruits in our relationships with God and others.

The twelve fruits of the Spirit are:

1. CHARITY: Love for God and for others.
2. JOY: Happiness in living the Christian life.
3. PEACE: Inner calmness, even in difficulties.
4. PATIENCE: Bearing the difficulties of life with resignation to God's will.
5. KINDNESS: Sympathy and concern for the needs of others that move us to help them.
6. GOODNESS: Giving good example in all that we do.
7. GENEROSITY: Willingness to share our time and possessions with those in need.
8. GENTLENESS: Being gentle in our words and deeds toward others.
9. FAITHFULNESS: Loyalty to God and the people we are committed to, such as one's parents, spouse, and good friends.

10. MODESTY: Respecting ourselves and others in conversations, dress, etc.

11. SELF-CONTROL: Proper balance in our desire for pleasure.

12. CHASTITY: Proper attitude toward others and control over our sexual desires.

Jesus told us that we will produce these fruits of the Spirit only if we are united with him through prayer and the Sacraments. He compared himself to a vine which carries sap to its branches; the "sap" is a symbol for his grace and power: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

Words to Know:

indwelling seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit

Q. 157 *What are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?*

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (CCC 1831).

Q. 158 *What are the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit?*

The twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (CCC 1832).