



### Sacraments 9/35: Introduction to the Sacrament of Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation is given as the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation, along with Baptism and the Eucharist. It “confirms” the initiation into the Church begun with Baptism. The natural meaning of Confirmation can be seen in the Anointing with Oil and the Laying on of Hands. Anointings show a special purpose, such as oiling up an athlete before a competition. Laying Hands always show something being set aside for a special, sacred purpose. These together are then raised up to a supernatural meaning in the Sacrament. The very word for Christ in Hebrew, *Messiah*, means “the anointed one.” As we are anointed, we too become an anointed one. We are now anointed for the challenges and battles of life in the world.

Confirmation should always be understood in terms of its necessary connection with Baptism. Baptism is the “passive” stage of Initiation; Confirmation is the “active.” These two Sacraments were originally united in one long ritual. This can still be seen at the Easter Vigil, where adults are Baptized and then brought immediately to Confirmation. Why were they separated? St. Augustine, in his teachings on the necessity of Baptism for salvation, caused an increase in the focus on infant Baptism. Confirmation, in the West, as the completion of Initiation into the Church, was still seen as the proper ritual belonging to the bishop. Yet bishops could not travel around to all the babies being Baptized, so the two rituals were separated. Baptism was given as soon after birth as possible. Confirmation was reserved for groups in a village waiting for the bishop to ride through. There are interesting medieval stories of bishops riding into a village, and parents stopping them and holding up their children to the bishop for Confirmation while he was still seated on his horse.

What exactly is Confirmation? It makes the most sense when we keep it united with Baptism. Baptism is my passive initiation into the life of Grace of the Church. I receive Baptism so that I may begin a life of holiness. I receive Confirmation, in addition, so that I may be used as an instrument of God to bring holiness to other people. Baptism is about me, Confirmation is about others. Confirmation is NOT when a teen gets to decide if they want to stay Catholic. “When I was a baby, my parents decided for me. Now I am almost an adult, so I get to decide for myself.” NO! At Baptism, we are united with Christ and His Church in a permanent, eternal relationship. We can never stop being Catholic. We can become inactive Catholics, but our relationship with the Church is never completely broken. So Confirmation should not be seen as an optional decision for kids. Of course they should be Confirmed! We don’t want to stay passive recipients of grace; we want to be active members reaching out to others.

This active aspect of Confirmation is also seen in its special connection with the Holy Spirit. We of course already received the Holy Spirit in our Baptism, but now in Confirmation we are given a special mission to be used by the Holy Spirit for others. Confirmation’s foundations in Scripture can be seen in Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit onto the disciples after the Resurrection (John 20:21-23) and at the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit found in Isaiah 11:2-4 (Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord), are not given to be used for myself to be more holy, but that I can use them as gifts to other people.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Essentials of the Rite of Confirmation