The Sacrament of Confirmation

Outline

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Sacraments are...

"Efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament."

- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1131

Sacraments of Christian Initiation

Of the seven sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are referred to as the “sacraments of Christian initiation”

It is by reception of these three sacraments that a person is fully received into communion with the Church and is made a partaker in the divine life of Christ.

Baptism and Confirmation are unrepeatable and give the recipient an indelible mark of faith.
History and Theological Basis

The evolution of Confirmation

The Holy Spirit is present in the Church, moving and breathing where the Spirit wills, but allowing historical events and cultures to shape our practice and understanding of the faith.
The evolution of Confirmation

A striking example of this is the history and the theology of the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Through the centuries the way we have celebrated the sacrament and understood its meaning has undergone many changes.

New Testament Events

*The first Confirmation*

The origin of Confirmation and the "Biblical basis" for the sacrament is the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles at Pentecost—the first Confirmation. *Acts 2:1-31*
New Testament Events

The Acts of the Apostles mentions the apostles imparting the Holy Spirit to believers by the laying on of hands as seen in **Acts 8:14-17**

"Now, when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For he was not as yet come upon any of them: but they were only baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them: and they received the Holy Spirit."

The laying on of hands is important.

The Early Church

In the early Church, adults who desired to become members of the Christian community participated in a three-year process called the *Catechumenate*.

This was a time of intense study and preparation, which often took place in secret because Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire and Christians feared persecution from Roman authorities.
The Early Church

At this time, the three Sacraments of initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist — were celebrated in the same ceremony by adult catechumens at the Easter Vigil.

The Early Church

A sponsor guided the Catechumen through the process and then presented him/her to the community and the bishop for initiation.

The sponsor guaranteed the sincerity of the person who was asking for baptism, vouching for his/her complete and total dedication to the work of Christ.
The Early Church

It was a process that involved both an individual decision (“I decide to join Christianity”) and a communal decision (“We accept you into our community”).

In this way, the roles of the Christian community and the individual sponsor were vital in the initial and ongoing evangelization of new members.

The Early Church – the rite

The catechumens descended into a pool outside the church, where they were baptized by the bishop who gave the initial anointing. They ascended, were clothed with a white robe and received a second anointing with Chrism by the bishop who “confirmed” the baptism and ratified and accepted the conversion of the individual.

They then proceeded to a place of honor among the community where they participated in the Eucharist for the first time.
The Evolution of the sacrament

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out, "The original minister of Confirmation is the bishop."

- Each bishop is a successor to the apostles, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost—the first Confirmation.

The Evolution of the sacrament

As discussed, the separation of the bishop's anointing from the sacrament of Baptism occurred for a number of reasons:

- In the fourth century, Constantine (306 to 337 AD) made Christianity legal and then Theodosius IX (379 to 395 AD) made it the official religion of the empire - many more people were being baptized.

- Christianity also spread from the cities into the countryside. It became impossible for bishops, who were now also involved in governing, to preside at every Baptism.
The Evolution of the sacrament

It is at this point that we see a divergence between the Eastern and Western Churches. The border is roughly west of Greece.

The bishops of the East solved the problem by delegating the Sacraments of Initiation to the presbyter (elder or priest), reserving for themselves only the blessing of the oil used in the rite.

- To this day the Eastern churches initiate with all three sacraments at once.

The bishops of the West also delegated Baptism to priests, but retained the function of performing the anointing and laying on of hands (Confirmation). This they would do whenever they visited a particular locality.

The Evolution of the sacrament

Thus, in the West the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation was done at a later time than the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.
The Evolution of the sacrament

When in the Middle Ages it became the practice to confirm close to adolescence instead of infancy, theologians began to teach that Confirmation was the sacrament of maturity.

- Those who received it were regarded as old enough and ready to live active, responsible Christian lives.

The Evolution of the sacrament

The Christian was sealed as a witness for Christ in Confirmation (the Chrism) and fortified by an increase of the Spirit's gifts to fight, suffer, and die for the faith.

The notion of the sacrament making a person a soldier of Christ prevailed.

- The sign of peace in the rite was even replaced by a gentle slap on the face to indicate readiness for life's battles.
Current thinking

Some people today still look on Confirmation as the sacrament of maturity. But this sacrament does not imply that the candidate is completely mature in the faith. Nor does the signing with chrism instantaneously produce maturity in the candidate.

Conversion to Christ is a gradual process to which Confirmation gives added strength.

The confirmed person is strengthened for this lifelong journey.

Current thinking

Confirmation does not complete Baptism in the sense that Baptism left something incomplete.

Rather, the two sacraments are united in the initiation process.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit.” (1285)
Current practice

When Confirmation preceded First Holy Communion, it was easily seen as a preparation to full celebration with the community.

In 1910, Pope Pius X (1835 – 1914) made it possible for seven year old children to receive Communion. Confirmation then became the last Sacrament of Initiation to be celebrated.

Current practice

Now Confirmation's role of leading to the Eucharist must be emphasized in ways other than chronological - through catechesis*, the words of the rite, and celebrating Confirmation within Mass.

* religious instruction given to a person in preparation for Christian baptism or confirmation, typically using a catechism
Current practice

Current thinking of Confirmation sees it as integrally related to Baptism and Eucharist. Together these sacraments constitute a process by which the Spirit brings the believer to full union with the community.

What does Confirmation do?
The Effect of Confirmation

Baptism is the sacrament of the initial gift of the Spirit - Grace is given. Godparents speak for you.

In confirmation you willingly assumes an active participation in the Church’s apostolate*.

* The work of an apostle – all the faithful to "make disciples of all nations"

The Effect of Confirmation

The Church and the individual are mutually confirming belief in one another.

This “confirmation” assumes a maturity in Christ, not merely passively baptized and attendant at Mass, but actively engaged in doing the work of building the kingdom.
The Effect of Confirmation

Indelibly seals us to the Holy Spirit and because this seal is indelible and leaves a permanent mark on the recipient's soul, like Baptism and Holy Orders, it may be received only once.

The Effect of Confirmation

Through Confirmation Catholics are “more perfectly bound to the Church” and are “as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed.” - to live as examples of Christ

Imparts to us the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit
The Effect of Confirmation

The Sacrament may only be received by one who is baptized, preferrably while he is in a state of grace (i.e., not in a state of mortal sin).

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the Bishop; priests are extraordinary ministers of the Sacrament and may offer the Sacrament if the Bishop authorizes them to.

The matter is the laying on of hands, the chrism and the anointing.

As in Baptism, a sponsor is chosen to stand for the confirmand.

Just as Abram became Abraham,
   as Jacob became Israel,
   as Simon became Peter,
   and as Saul became Paul,
the confirmand takes on the name of a Saint when they are sealed to the Holy Spirit.

The age of Confirmation varies. It can be as young as seven.
The role of the Sponsor

"It is the role of the sponsor to represent the faith community."
(Canon 893)

The confirmation sponsor is to guide the one confirmed to act as a true witness to Christ and faithfully fulfill the duties of the sacrament.

It is preferable for the godparent from baptism to serve as sponsor. However, another person may serve as sponsor.

To become a sponsor, a person:

should be sufficiently mature Roman Catholic (at least 16 years old) and should be actively expressing it within the Catholic community;
must not be the father or mother of the one to be confirmed
knows the candidate and is able to help him/her on the spiritual journey, sharing faith and modeling the life of a mature Catholic;
To become a sponsor, a person:

- encourages the candidate to grow in a faith relationship with Jesus;
- assists and encourages the candidate with the study and practice of the Catholic faith;
- accompanies the candidate to special liturgies and events in the preparation program.

The Ceremony
For RCIA candidates

You will be receiving confirmation more as it was in the early church.

- That is, as part of the Easter Vigil and in conjunction with baptism (if applicable) and the Eucharist but Fr. Scott will celebrate the sacrament

There are seven readings at the Easter Vigil

After the Seventh reading (we may not do all of them), the baptisms will be done.

After being baptized, the newly baptized will put on a white robe

For RCIA candidates

Once those are complete the candidates for Confirmation are called up along with their sponsors.

You will then step up to the front of the church with your sponsor.

You will be wearing your white robe
For RCIA candidates

Father will say a prayer while holding his hands over the candidates asking that the Holy Spirit send down His gifts.

Then the sponsor places their right hand on the shoulder of the candidate.

Father will ask the sponsor for the name of the candidate (your new name) and then dips his thumb in the chrism.

For RCIA candidates

He will then make the sign of the cross on the candidate's forehead with his thumb while saying:

◦ “NAME be sealed with the gift if the Holy Spirit.”

◦ Your response is Amen

◦ Father then says: "Peace be with you"

◦ Your response is: And with your spirit
Chrism

A mixture of oil of olives and balsam used to place a mark on each candidate.

It is blessed by the Bishop or a designate during the Mass on Holy Thursday.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Gifts of the Holy Spirit help us to live a holy Christian life.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are:

- **Wisdom** - desire for the things of God – directs our whole life and all our actions to His honor and glory

- **Understanding** - enable us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith

- **Right judgement or counsel** - warns us of the deceits of the devil, the dangers to salvation

- **Knowledge** - enable us to discover the will of God in all things
Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- **Courage or fortitude** - strengthen us to do the will of God in all things
- **Reverence or piety** - love God as a Father, and obey Him because we love Him
- **Wonder and awe or Fear of the Lord** - have a dread of sin and fear of offending God

Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The 12 Fruits of the Holy Spirit grow in our souls with our practice of Virtue as enabled by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit:

1. **Love** – Shown in selfless service to others by words/deeds
2. **Faithfulness** – Keep your promises
3. **Joy** – Deep and constant gladness in the Lord – changes in circumstances cannot affect this.
4. **Modesty** – Moderation in all your actions
5. **Kindness** – Generous acts of service
6. **Goodness** – A sign that you love all people without exception and do good to them
Fruits of the Holy Spirit

7. Peace – A disciple faithful to God’s will is serene, not overly anxious

8. Patience – The love that is willing to endure life’s suffering, difficulties and routines

9. Self-control – Being in charge of your emotions and desires

10. Chastity – Integration of your physical sexuality with your spiritual nature.

11. Generosity – A willingness to give even at a cost to yourself

12. Gentleness – Strength tempered by love giving you the power to forgive instead of getting angry

The symbols

Chrism
Laying on of hands
The white robe (red is also used)