



Lectio Meditations on:

CONFIRMATION

Sacraments Through Scripture: A Still Small Voice

SACRAMENTS THROUGH SCRIPTURE: A STILL SMALL VOICE

Confirmation

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By R. Jared Staudt, Ph. D.

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PART I: THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

A Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Samuel J.

Aquila

1 Read - Lectio:

Read the passage. Ask: What does the text say in and of itself? Utilize the points of reflection to better understand the passage. Note: Catechism quotes are intended to be read silently and used to support a fuller understanding of the passage

2 Meditate - Meditatio:

Reflect on the words chosen and their meaning in the passage. Ask: What is the Biblical text saying to me? Use the points of Meditation to assist you in seeing how the Lord is speaking to your life through this passage.

3 Pray - Oratio:

Respond in prayer to the passage and the fruit of the meditatio. Ask: What do I say to the Lord in response to this passage?

4 Contemplate - Contemplatio:

Rest and rejoice in this gift from God and be transformed by the new reality that you have been opened to. Ask: What is the Lord asking of me? What do I need to let go of? What do I need to embrace?

Praying with Scripture is deeply rooted in our Catholic tradition. Every Christian knows that it is “good” to pray and that it is “good” to read the Bible, but we almost always get stuck on the question of method, “How should we do this?”. Thankfully, the Church has passed down her favorite prayer practices through the generations and the methods of our father are available for us today. Lectio Divina is a method with which Christians have been prayerfully engaging the Scriptures that is at least 1000 years old. In short, the practice merges the reading of Scripture with the prayer of the one reading it in order to foster a dialogue and encounter with the living God.

Why should we engage Sacred Scripture in this way?

There are many reasons why practicing Lectio Divina should be a normal part of a Christian's life. To begin with, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God. This means that God literally speaks through the Bible. The Catechism teaches,

“In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, “but as what it really is, the word of God”¹ “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.”² CCC 104

Practicing Lectio Divina teaches us how to hear the voice of God and opens us to the life-giving mysteries contained in His Word. Truly, the Scriptures are an endless fountain of wisdom and joy. A lifetime of scholarship would not nearly exhaust their depths. Yet they are not the only way in which God speaks to His people.

The words of the Mass, and other liturgical Rites are both sacred and revealing. In a similar way, since

God is Creator of Heaven and Earth, Male and Female, and all things completely, He reveals Himself through creation as well. The goal of Lectio Divina is primarily to come to an intimate encounter and knowledge of Jesus Christ, His Father, and the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, in coming to know what God sounds like, the practice of Lectio Divina opens our horizons and enables us to hear His voice and see His face in the Mass, the sacraments, our human relationships and all of creation. In this sense, the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture acts as the gateway to a new Eden, where man once again lives in the conscious presence of his Maker and Savior.



SACRAMENTS THROUGH SCRIPTURE: A STILL SMALL VOICE

Confirmation: Session 1

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are mindful that we are always in your presence. Jesus, we know you are here and that you love us. Thank you, Lord, that we belong to you. Thank you, Lord, that you want to speak to our hearts today in Scripture. Come Holy Spirit; open our hearts to the truth of your word as we read the Acts of the Apostles. Show us what you want us to see in this passage.

READING/READ/LECTIO:

Read the passage aloud or ask someone in the class to read the passage. Have someone read the passage again.

Acts 2:1-8 - When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language?"

POINTS OF REFLECTION:

How is the Holy Spirit manifested in this passage?

What function do the gifts have?

CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1286-1287: In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission.³ The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God.⁴ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives him “without measure.”⁵

This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah’s, but was to be communicated to the *whole messianic people*⁶. On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit⁷, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost⁸. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God,” and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the messianic age.⁹ Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.¹⁰

MEDITATION/REFLECT/MEDITATIO:

We now reflect on what this Scripture says to us.

Pause for 5 minutes.

POINTS OF MEDITATION:

What moves in you as you read this powerful account of Pentecost?

What desires, hopes, or questions arise in your heart?



CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1302-1303: It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"¹¹;
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect¹²;
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.¹³

PRAYER/RESPOND/ORATIO:

Let us silently speak to the Lord in response to His Word.

Pause for 5 minutes.

SHARING:

We now share with the group how the Word has spoken to us.

Share for 10 minutes.

Has everyone had a chance to share?

CONTEMPLATION/REST/ CONTEMPLATIO:

Where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, He is in their midst. We thank you for this time of sharing and drawing closer to you. Let us now rest in the presence of the Lord.

Pause for 5 minutes.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for this time spent together with you, reflecting on your Word. In you we live and move and have our being. We ask you to give us the grace to be doers of your Word and not hearers only. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENTS THROUGH SCRIPTURE: A STILL SMALL VOICE

Confirmation: Session 2

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are mindful that we are always in your presence. Jesus, we know you are here and that you love us. Thank you, Lord, that we belong to you. Thank you, Lord, that you want to speak to our hearts today in Scripture. Come Holy Spirit; open our hearts to the truth of your word as we read the Acts of the Apostles. Show us what you want us to see in this passage.

READING/READ/LECTIO:

Read the passage aloud or ask someone in the class to read the passage. Have someone read the passage again.

Acts 8:12-17 - They paid attention to him because he had astounded them by his magic for a long time, but once they began to believe Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, men and women alike were baptized. Even Simon himself believed and, after being baptized, became devoted to Philip; and when he saw the signs and mighty deeds that were occurring, he was astounded.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit.

POINTS OF REFLECTION:

What was the fruit of Phillip's work?

Why were Peter and John sent?

CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1288: "From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ's will, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of Baptism. For this reason in the *Letter to the Hebrews* the doctrine concerning Baptism and the laying on of hands is listed among the first elements of Christian instruction. The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church."¹⁴

MEDITATION/REFLECT/MEDITATIO:

We now reflect on what this Scripture says to us.

Pause for 10 minutes.

POINTS OF MEDITATION:

What is the significance of the separation of Phillip's baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit? What elements of the sacrament of Confirmation do you see in this passage?

CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1306: Every baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation.¹⁵ Since Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that "the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time,"¹⁶ for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete.



PRAYER/RESPOND/ORATIO:

Let us silently speak to the Lord in response to His Word.

Pause for 5 minutes.

SHARING:

We now share with the group how the Word has spoken to us.

Share for 15 minutes.

Has everyone had a chance to share?

CONTEMPLATION/REST/ CONTEMPLATIO:

Where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, He is in their midst. We thank you for this time of sharing and drawing closer to you. Let us now rest in the presence of the Lord.

Pause for 5 minutes.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for this time spent together with you, reflecting on your Word. In you we live and move and have our being. We ask you to give us the grace to be doers of your Word and not hearers only. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENTS THROUGH SCRIPTURE: A STILL SMALL VOICE

Confirmation: Session 3

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are mindful that we are always in your presence. Jesus, we know you are here and that you love us. Thank you, Lord, that we belong to you. Thank you, Lord, that you want to speak to our hearts today in Scripture. Come Holy Spirit; open our hearts to the truth of your word as we read the Gospel of John. Show us what you want us to see in this passage.

Read the passage aloud or ask someone in the class to read the passage.

Have someone read the passage again.

John 16:7-15 - But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation: sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak

READING/READ/LECTIO:

what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming. He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

POINTS OF REFLECTION:

What does Jesus tell us about the Holy Spirit?

What titles does Jesus give the Holy Spirit?

CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1304: Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an *indelible spiritual mark*, the “character,” which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness.¹⁷

MEDITATION/REFLECT/MEDITATIO:

We now reflect on what this Scripture says to us.

Pause for 10 minutes.

POINTS OF MEDITATION:

What is my experience of the Holy Spirit?

Does Jesus’ description match my experience?

CATECHISM QUOTE:

CCC 1296: Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father’s seal.¹⁸ Christians are also marked with a seal: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”¹⁹ This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.²⁰



PRAYER/RESPOND/ORATIO:

Let us silently speak to the Lord in response to His Word.

Pause for 5 minutes.

SHARING:

We now share with the group how the Word has spoken to us.

Share for 15 minutes.

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CONTEMPLATION/REST/ CONTEMPLATIO:

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CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for this time spent together with you, reflecting on your Word. In you we live and move and have our being. We ask you to give us the grace to be doers of your Word and not hearers only. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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- 1 *1 Thess* 2:13; cf. *DV* 24.
 - 2 *DV* 21.
 - 3 Cf. *Isa* 11:2; 61:1; *Lk* 4:16-22.
 - 4 *Mt* 3:13-17; *Jn* 1:33-34.
 - 5 *Jn* 3:34.
 - 6 Cf. *Ezek* 36:25-27; *Joel* 3:1-2.
 - 7 Cf. *Lk* 12:12; *Jn* 3:5-8; 7:37-39; 16:7-15; *Acts* 1:8.
 - 8 Cf. *Jn* 20:22; *Acts* 2:1-4.
 - 9 *Acts* 2:11; cf. 2:17-18.
 - 10 Cf. *Acts* 2:38.
 - 11 *Rom* 8:15.
 - 12 Cf. *LG* 11.
 - 13 Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1319; *LG* 11; 12.
 - 14 Paul VI, *Divinae consortium naturae*, 659; cf. *Acts* 8:15-17; 19:5-6; *Heb* 6:2.
 - 15 Cf. CIC, can. 889 § 1.
 - 16 CIC, can. 890.
 - 17 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1609; *Lk* 24:48-49.
 - 18 Cf. *Jn* 6:27.
 - 19 *2 Cor* 1:21-22; cf. *Eph* 1:13; 4, 30.
 - 20 Cf. *Rev* 7:2-3; 9:4; *Ezek* 9:4-6.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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20 CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH -
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38 SAINTS AMONG US

THE RESTORED ORDER OF THE
SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

PART I: THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

A Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

[EXCERPT FROM
CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH]

ARTICLE 2
THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

1285 Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the “sacraments of Christian initiation,” whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.⁸⁹ For “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. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.”⁹⁰

I. Confirmation in the Economy of Salvation

1286 In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission.⁹¹ The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God.⁹² He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives him “without measure.”⁹³ (702-716)

1287 This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah’s, but was to be communicated to *the whole messianic people*.⁹⁴ On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit,⁹⁵ a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost.⁹⁶ Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God,” and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the messianic age.⁹⁷ Those

89 Cf. *Roman Ritual*, Rite of Confirmation (OC), Introduction 1.

90 LG 11; cf. OC, Introduction 2.

91 Cf. *Isa* 11:2; 61:1; *Lk* 4:16-22.

92 Cf. *Mt* 3:13-17; *Jn* 1:33-34.

93 *Jn* 3:34.

94 Cf. *Ezek* 36:25-27; *Joel* 3:1-2.

95 Cf. *Lk* 12:12; *Jn* 3:5-8; 7:37-39; 16:7-15; *Acts* 1:8.

96 Cf. *Jn* 20:22; *Acts* 2:1-4.

97 *Acts* 2:11; cf. 2:17-18.

who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.⁹⁸ (739)

1288 “From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ’s will, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of Baptism. For this reason in the *Letter to the Hebrews* the doctrine concerning Baptism and the laying on of hands is listed among the first elements of Christian instruction. The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.”⁹⁹ (699)

1289 Very early, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (*chrism*) was added to the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name “Christian,” which means “anointed” and derives from that of Christ himself whom God “anointed with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁰ This rite of anointing has continued ever since, in both East and West. For this reason the Eastern Churches call this sacrament *Chrismation*, anointing with *chrism*, or *myron* which means “chrism.” In the West, the term *Confirmation* suggests that this sacrament both confirms baptism and strengthens baptismal grace. (695, 436, 1297)

Two traditions: East and West

1290 In the first centuries Confirmation generally comprised one single celebration with Baptism, forming with it a “double sacrament,” according to the expression of St. Cyprian. Among other reasons, the multiplication of infant baptisms all through the year, the increase of rural parishes, and the growth of dioceses often prevented the bishop from being present at all baptismal celebrations. In the West the desire to reserve the completion of Baptism to the bishop caused the temporal separation of the two sacraments. The East has kept them united, so that Confirmation is conferred by the priest who baptizes. But he can do so only with the “myron” consecrated by a bishop.¹⁰¹ (1233)

98 Cf. *Acts* 2:38.

99 Paul VI, *Divinae consortium naturae*, 659; cf. *Acts* 8:15-17; 19:5-6; *Heb* 6:2.

100 *Acts* 10:38.

101 Cf. CCEO, can. 695 § 1; 696 § 1.

1291 A custom of the Roman Church facilitated the development of the Western practice: a double anointing with sacred chrism after Baptism. The first anointing of the neophyte on coming out of the baptismal bath was performed by the priest; it was completed by a second anointing on the forehead of the newly baptized by the bishop.¹⁰² The first anointing with sacred chrism, by the priest, has remained attached to the baptismal rite; it signifies the participation of the one baptized in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices of Christ. If Baptism is conferred on an adult, there is only one post-baptismal anointing, that of Confirmation. (1242)

1292 The practice of the Eastern Churches gives greater emphasis to the unity of Christian initiation. That of the Latin Church more clearly expresses the communion of the new Christian with the bishop as guarantor and servant of the unity, catholicity and apostolicity of his Church, and hence the connection with the apostolic origins of Christ's Church. (1244)

II. The Signs and the Rite of Confirmation

1293 In treating the rite of Confirmation, it is fitting to consider the sign of *anointing* and what it signifies and imprints: a spiritual *seal*. (695)

Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy;¹⁰³ it cleanses (anointing before and after a bath) and limbers (the anointing of athletes and wrestlers); oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds;¹⁰⁴ and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength.

1294 Anointing with oil has all these meanings in the sacramental life. The pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of catechumens signifies cleansing and strengthening; the anointing of the sick expresses healing and comfort. The post-baptismal anointing with sacred chrism in Confirmation and ordination is the sign of consecration. By Confirmation Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy

102 Cf. St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21: SCh 11, 80-95.

103 Cf. *Deut* 11:14; *Pss* 23:5; 104:15.

104 Cf. *Isa* 1:6; *Lk* 10:34.

Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off “the aroma of Christ.”¹⁰⁵ (1152)

1295 By this anointing the confirmand receives the “mark,” the *seal* of the Holy Spirit. A seal is a symbol of a person, a sign of personal authority, or ownership of an object.¹⁰⁶ Hence soldiers were marked with their leader’s seal and slaves with their master’s. A seal authenticates a juridical act or document and occasionally makes it secret.¹⁰⁷ (698)

1296 Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father’s seal.¹⁰⁸ Christians are also marked with a seal: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”¹⁰⁹ This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial.¹¹⁰ (1121)

The celebration of Confirmation

1297 *The consecration of the sacred chrism* is an important action that precedes the celebration of Confirmation, but is in a certain way a part of it. It is the bishop who, in the course of the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday, consecrates the sacred chrism for his whole diocese. In some Eastern Churches this consecration is even reserved to the patriarch: (1183, 1241)

The liturgy of Antioch expresses the epiclesis for the consecration of the sacred chrism (myron) in this way: “[Father... send your Holy Spirit] on us and on this oil which is before us and consecrate it, so that it may be for all who are anointed and marked with it holy myron, priestly myron, royal myron, anointing with gladness, clothing with light, a cloak of salvation, a spiritual gift, the sanctification of souls and bodies, imperishable happiness, the indelible seal, a buckler of faith, and a fearsome helmet against all the works of the adversary.”

105 2 Cor 2:15.

106 Cf. *Gen* 38:18; 41:42; *Deut* 32:34; *CT* 8:6.

107 Cf. *1 Kings* 21:8; *Jer* 32:10; *Isa* 29:11.

108 Cf. *Jn* 6:27.

109 2 Cor 1:21-22; cf. *Eph* 1:13; 4, 30.

110 Cf. *Rev* 7:2-3; 9:4; *Ezek* 9:4-6.

1298 When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, as is the case in the Roman Rite, the Liturgy of Confirmation begins with the renewal of baptismal promises and the profession of faith by the confirmands. This clearly shows that Confirmation follows Baptism.¹¹¹ When adults are baptized, they immediately receive Confirmation and participate in the Eucharist.¹¹²

1299 In the Roman Rite the bishop extends his hands over the whole group of the confirmands. Since the time of the apostles this gesture has signified the gift of the Spirit. The bishop invokes the outpouring of the Spirit in these words: (1831)

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.¹¹³

1300 The *essential rite* of the sacrament follows. In the Latin rite, “the sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: ‘*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*’ [Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.]”¹¹⁴ In the Eastern Churches of Byzantine rite, after a prayer of epiclesis, the more significant parts of the body are anointed with myron: forehead, eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet. Each anointing is accompanied by the formula Σφραγς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου (Signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti): “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ (699)

1301 The sign of peace that concludes the rite of the sacrament signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and

111 Cf. SC 71.

112 Cf. CIC, can. 866.

113 OC 25.

114 Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*, 663.

115 *Rituale per le Chiese orientali di rito bizantino in lingua greca*, Pars Prima (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1954), 36.

with all the faithful.¹¹⁶

III. The Effects of Confirmation

1302 It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. (731)

1303 From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: (1262-1274, 2044)

—it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, “Abba! Father!”,¹¹⁷

—it unites us more firmly to Christ;

—it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;

—it renders our bond with the Church more perfect,¹¹⁸

—it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross:¹¹⁹

Recall then that you have received the spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear in God’s presence. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign; Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed his pledge, the Spirit, in your hearts.¹²⁰

1304 Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an *indelible spiritual mark*, the “character,” which is the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with

116 Cf. St. Hippolytus, *Trad. Ap.* 21: Sch 11, 80-95.

117 *Rom* 8:15.

118 Cf. *LG* 11.

119 Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1319; *LG* 11; 12.

120 St. Ambrose, *De myst.* 7, 42: PL 16, 402-403.

power from on high so that he may be his witness.¹²¹ (1121)

1305 This “character” perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and “the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*).”¹²² (1268)

IV. Who Can Receive This Sacrament?

1306 Every baptized person not yet confirmed can and should receive the sacrament of Confirmation.¹²³ Since Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unity, it follows that “the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time,”¹²⁴ for without Confirmation and Eucharist, Baptism is certainly valid and efficacious, but Christian initiation remains incomplete. (1212)

1307 For centuries, Latin custom has indicated “the age of discretion” as the reference point for receiving Confirmation. But in danger of death children should be confirmed even if they have not yet attained the age of discretion.¹²⁵

1308 Although Confirmation is sometimes called the “sacrament of Christian maturity,” we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need “ratification” to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this: (1250)

Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of *Wisdom* says: “For old age is not honored 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.¹²⁶

1309 *Preparation* for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit—his actions, his gifts, and his biddings—in order

121 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1609; *Lk* 24:48-49.

122 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh III*, 72, 5, ad 2.

123 Cf. CIC, can. 889 § 1.

124 CIC, can. 890.

125 Cf. CIC, cann. 891; 883, 3°.

126 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh III*, 72, 8, ad 2; cf. *Wis* 4:8.

to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of confirmands.¹²⁷

1310 To receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace. One should receive the sacrament of Penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit. More intense prayer should prepare one to receive the strength and graces of the Holy Spirit with docility and readiness to act.¹²⁸ (2670)

1311 Candidates for Confirmation, as for Baptism, fittingly seek the spiritual help of a *sponsor*. To emphasize the unity of the two sacraments, it is appropriate that this be one of the baptismal godparents.¹²⁹ (1255)

V. The Minister of Confirmation

1312 The *original minister* of Confirmation is the bishop.¹³⁰ (1233)

In the East, ordinarily the priest who baptizes also immediately confers Confirmation in one and the same celebration. But he does so with sacred chrism consecrated by the patriarch or the bishop, thus expressing the apostolic unity of the Church whose bonds are strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation. In the Latin Church, the same discipline applies to the Baptism of adults or to the reception into full communion with the Church of a person baptized in another Christian community that does not have valid Confirmation.¹³¹

1313 In the Latin Rite, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop.¹³² If the need arises, the bishop may grant the faculty

127 Cf. OC Introduction 3.

128 Cf. Acts 1:14.

129 Cf. OC Introduction 5; 6; CIC, can. 893 §§ 1- 2.

130 Cf. LG 26.

131 Cf. CIC, can. 883 § 2.

132 Cf. CIC, can. 882.

of administering Confirmation¹³³ to priests, although it is fitting that he confer it himself, mindful that the celebration of Confirmation has been temporally separated from Baptism for this reason. Bishops are the successors of the apostles. They have received the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. The administration of this sacrament by them demonstrates clearly that its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins, and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ. (1290, 1285)

1314 If a Christian is in danger of death, any priest can give him Confirmation.¹³⁴ Indeed the Church desires that none of her children, even the youngest, should depart this world without having been perfected by the Holy Spirit with the gift of Christ's fullness. (1307)

IN BRIEF

1315 “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 it 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).

1316 Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

1317 Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian's soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one's life.

1318 In the East this sacrament is administered immediately after Baptism and is followed by participation in the Eucharist; this tradition highlights the unity of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. In the Latin Church this sacrament is administered when the age of reason has been reached, and its celebration is ordinarily reserved

133 Cf. CIC, can. 884 § 2.

134 Cf. CIC, can. 883 § 3.

to the bishop, thus signifying that this sacrament strengthens the ecclesial bond.

1319 A candidate for Confirmation who has attained the age of reason must profess the faith, be in the state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ, both within the ecclesial community and in temporal affairs.

1320 The essential rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism (in the East other sense-organs as well), together with the laying on of the minister's hand and the words: "*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*" (Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.) in the Roman rite, or: *Signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti* (the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit) in the Byzantine rite.

1321 When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, its connection with Baptism is expressed, among other ways, by the renewal of baptismal promises. The celebration of Confirmation during the Eucharist helps underline the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

Ressourcement for Confirmation

A theological case for restored order Confirmation

BY R. JARED STAUDT, PH. D.

The Second Vatican Council called for a “ressourcement” (a return to the sources) for the sacraments of initiation, particularly in its call for the restoration of the baptismal catechumenate, carried out in the RCIA process.⁸⁹ Part of this renewal includes the return to the traditional order for the conferring of the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and then the Eucharist. Though this original order of conferring was restored within RCIA, the order that arose later on of Baptism, Eucharist, and then Confirmation continued to be practiced within the regular process for the initiation of children.⁹⁰ Attention has recently and very prominently been placed on the movement to restore the ancient order for the reception of the sacraments of initiation during an ad limina visit of US Bishops with the Holy Father. After meeting with Pope Benedict XVI, Archbishop Samuel Aquila expressed the Holy Father’s personal approval of Aquila’s restoration of the order of the sacraments of initiation: “I was very surprised in what the Pope said to me, in terms of how happy he was that the sacraments of initiation have been restored to their proper order of baptism, confirmation then first Eucharist.” The Holy Father also asked if he had “begun to speak to other bishops about this.”⁹¹ These comments by the Holy Father indicate that the time

89 C.f. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 64.

90 For the history of how Confirmation gradually separated from Baptism and First Holy Communion, see J.D.C. Fisher, *Confirmation Then and Now* (Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois: Hillenbrand Books, 2005).

91 David Kerr, “Bishop Aquila Receives Pope’s Praise for Reordering Sacraments,”

may be ripe for a renaissance for Confirmation, specifically in the reordering of the sacraments on initiation, and the way in which Confirmation preparation is practiced. I will offer some theological reflections on reasons why this change is important for the Church.

1. The unity of the sacraments of initiation

First, I would like to emphasize that the traditional order of the sacraments of initiation until recently has always been baptism, Confirmation, and then Communion. The Code of Canon Law (842 § 2) makes clear that “the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and the Most Holy Eucharist are so interrelated that they are required for full Christian initiation.” This interrelation ties the three sacraments so closely together that they can be seen as one initiation into the life of Christ in the Church, “whose unity,” the Catechism enjoins, “must be safeguarded” (§1285). This is the reason why all three are bestowed at one time even upon children in the Eastern rites of the Catholic Church and upon adults in the Latin rite after the completion of RCIA. Though restored order Confirmation does not confer all three sacraments at the same time, it does draw them closer together by conferring Confirmation closer to baptism and simultaneously with the Eucharist.

2. The logical progression of the sacraments of initiation

The Eucharist is the consummation of the sacraments of initiation and the very “source and summit of the Christian life.”⁹² Confirmation should follow baptism, because it is understood as a completion specifically of baptismal grace. The Catechism states that “it must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary

Catholic News Agency, March 8, 2012. See also Archbishop Aquila’s excellent explanation of restored order confirmation in his pastoral letter, *Send Forth Your Spirit* (August 15, 2002).

92 CCC, 1324, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, II.

for the completion of baptismal grace.”⁹³ After baptismal grace is strengthened, the next and final step of initiation is entering into communion with Christ, which most perfectly anticipates the eternal vocation of union with God in the beatific vision. The first two sacraments lay the ground for and enable the union with Christ that is found most fully in the Eucharist (the only Sacrament, which is Christ Himself, and is therefore the greatest sacrament). Indeed, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that “the Eucharist is, as it were, the consummation of the spiritual life, and the end of all the sacraments ... for by the hallowings of all the sacraments preparation is made for receiving or consecrating the Eucharist.”⁹⁴ Therefore, having received Confirmation, the first communicant will approach our Lord strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which will aid in making a more perfect reception.

3. Confirmation at the Age of Discretion

The Code of Canon Law establishes that “the sacrament of confirmation is to be conferred on the faithful at about the age of discretion [about age 7] unless the conference of bishops determines another age” (§891). In the year 2000, the United States Bishop approved complementary legislation stating: “The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescriptions of canon 891, hereby decrees that the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Latin rite shall be conferred between the age of discretion and about sixteen years of age, within the limits determined by the diocesan bishop and with regard for the legitimate exceptions given in canon 891” Although it has become customary to perform Confirmation in Middle School and High School in the United States, some dioceses are returning to the age of discretion, which is described in the Catechism as a point of reference: “For centuries, Latin custom has indicated “the age of discretion” as the reference point for receiving

93 CCC, 1285.

94 Summa Theologiae (ST), 111, q. 73, a. 3.

Confirmation” (1307). Returning to this custom allows for a restoration of the traditional ordering of the sacraments of initiation, with Confirmation bestowed before First Communion.

4. Confirmation as bestowing spiritual maturity, which does not require physical maturity

Confirmation is defined as a sacrament which “impresses a character and by it the baptized, continuing on the path of Christian initiation, are enriched by the gift of the Holy Spirit and bound more perfectly to the Church; it strengthens them and obliges them more firmly to be witnesses to Christ by word and deed and to spread and defend the faith” (Code, Can. 879). There are two essential elements stemming from this definition. The first is a permanent imprint on the soul (a character), which completes and strengthens the grace bestowed at Baptism. The recipient of the Confirmation sacramental is fully initiated into the sacramental life of the Church and, furthermore, is strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit who works within the soul in His seven gifts.

The second element shows the ordering of this grace toward the active role that every Christian must undertake to witness, defend, and spread the faith. The interior life of grace is meant to lead to a mature outward manifestation. It is on account of this second element that many have desired to move the sacrament to adolescence so that the recipient may be more readily disposed to fulfill the outward duties of the sacrament. We hear this sentiment expressed in the common definition of Confirmation as “becoming an adult in the Church.” The Catechism cautions against interpreting this adulthood too literally. It states:

“Although Confirmation is sometimes called the ‘sacrament of Christian maturity,’ we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, or forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of

free, unmerited election and does not need ‘ratification’ to become effective. St. Thomas reminds us of this: ‘Age of body does not determine age of soul. Even in childhood man can attain spiritual maturity: as the book of Wisdom says: ‘For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years’ (Wis 4:8). Many children, through the strength of the Holy Spirit they have received, have bravely fought for Christ even to the shedding of their blood.’⁹⁵

Confirmation does not require an adult decision to join officially the Church; it is rather God’s grace binding the recipient more fully to Christ and the Church. In regards to spreading and defending the Church at a young age, the quote from Aquinas affirms that children have done so, but even if this was impossible due to age, the grace to do so would be present and ready when the opportunity arose (as happens with baptismal grace).

5. Need for grace at an earlier age

The reception of the strengthening and maturing grace of the Holy Spirit at a younger age will give children greater courage and guidance in facing the ever increasing difficulties of living a Christian life. Waiting another five or even ten years to receive this grace unnecessarily deprives one of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is so vital for spiritual growth and maturity. Initiating children into a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit at a younger age could (and should) be a stimulus for a deeper prayer life, greater participation in the life of the Church, and the formation of virtue.

6. The creation of obstacles

The next point is similar to the previous one. Confirmation is essentially a sacrament of docility to the Holy Spirit. The gifts are ⁹⁵ CCC, 1308, quoting Summa Theologiae, III, q. 72, a. 8, ad 2. Examples of childhood holiness, even before the age of discretion, have been given to us by God in great numbers, affirming Aquinas’ assertion. Ellen Organ (Little Nellie of Holy God) is one example. She died in 1908 at the age of 5. She received permission to receive the Holy Eucharist from her bishop, which in part inspired Pope Pius X to lower the age for first Holy Communion.

dispositions, which allow the Spirit to act in and through us.⁹⁶ In order for the grace of the sacrament to be operative in the life of the one receiving it, it is necessary that obstacles opposed to this grace be removed. Many obstacles to the reception of the grace of the sacrament (even if they do not impede the imposition of the character on the soul) arise in the teenage years: vices, sins, and other bad habits and dispositions, picked up at an ever earlier age, and also the general lack of respect for authority, religion, and tradition.

Speaking of the reception of the character and grace in baptism (though it applies equally to Confirmation) and the hindrance of insincerity, Aquinas states: “When a man is baptized, he receives the character, which is like a form; and he receives in consequence its proper effect, which is grace whereby all his sins are remitted. But this effect is sometimes hindered by insincerity. Wherefore, when this obstacle is removed by Penance, Baptism forthwith produces its effect.”⁹⁷ Therefore, insincerity, which means approaching the sacrament without the right disposition or without removing impediments, hinders the reception of the grace of the sacrament. Receiving confirmation at an earlier age makes it more likely that a docile spirit will be found in the child and also that serious impediments will not yet have been formed.

7. Improper catechetical approach

Finally, placing confirmation at a later age has created a catechetical environment that uses Confirmation as an incentive to keep children active in the parish catechetical program. While it is important to keep children engaged, rather than providing a dynamic program, it becomes too easy to simply use the sacrament primarily as a means to ensure participation at parish events.⁹⁸ This creates the

96 ST, I-11, q. 68.

97 ST, II-2, q. 69, a. 10.

98 Though this sounds harsh, I say it with great understanding, having run two Confirmation programs and desperately trying to keep everyone involved. It is part of the nature of trying to engage teenagers and their parents, who are many times not practicing the faith. Nevertheless, this modus operandi is not the ideal climate for

wrong attitude toward the sacrament, which is seen as a “hoop to jump through” and often as a graduation ceremony. Confirmation preparation is also being used as a last attempt to fill all of the catechetical gaps that have not been addressed during previous years (either because there has been no participation since first communion or because the program itself has been ineffective). This gives Confirmation programs a lack of focus without sustained catechetical treatment of the Holy Spirit, the actual sacrament of Confirmation, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (all of which are normally treated in passing). Confirmation preparation attempts to accomplish too many things, if not everything, while it should be more of a focused time of catechetical and spiritual formation oriented toward coming to know the Holy Spirit and how to be docile to Him.

Conclusion

Restoring the order of the sacraments of initiation can serve as an opportunity for a twofold renewal in catechesis. First, it will restore the proper spiritual dynamism intrinsic to the sacraments themselves: Confirmation completes Baptism and both of them point toward the Eucharist as their consummation. Secondly, it can provide an opportunity for a renewal of Confirmation programs. The Catechism speaks of the proper focus needed for these programs:

“Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts, and his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.”⁹⁹ Rather than exclusively focusing on general content, Confirmation preparation needs to make possible the formation of a deeper relationship with Christ and also especially with the Holy Spirit. It needs greater focus, expounding in much greater depth on the realities associated with Confirmation, and must create

running such a spiritually significant program and time of formation.

99 II. CCC, 1309.

opportunities for moral and spiritual growth to complement what is learned.

Certainly this process will present certain challenges for parishes. Catechetical programs will have to reevaluate their structure and focus more on Christian discipleship: living out the sacraments of initiation within the life of the community. They must serve as a means of learning how to live the Christian life. This is a great opportunity for the reinvigoration of catechesis. Rather than keeping children within the catechumenate for a long period of time (basically keeping children in a prolonged stage of incompleteness), catechetical programs should rather take their bearings from the mystagogical stage of catechesis, deepening the understanding and expression of what has been received. If parishes can effectively overcome the obstacle of reorganization, restored order Confirmation may be an important part of catechetical renewal, bringing about a renaissance of the way this Sacrament is conferred and hopefully also in the way in which it is received.

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Saints Among Us

The Restored Order of the Sacraments of Initiation

A Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

[Excerpt]

Part I: The Sacraments of Initiation

The three sacraments of Christian initiation play an important role in helping all of us become authentic disciples, men and women who are willing to follow Christ and take risks for the kingdom.

In this section I will explain how these three sacraments of initiation are oriented toward encountering Jesus in the Eucharist. I will also recall the Church's history of celebrating Confirmation so that you are able to understand the historical context of its placement.

The Relationship of the Sacraments

Confirmation should always be seen as a sacrament of initiation that is united to Baptism and the Eucharist. Even though it is closely related to Baptism, Confirmation is more than an appendix of Baptism. It is a sacrament in its own right.⁶ In Baptism the Holy Spirit is truly given, yet in Confirmation he is given in a way that completes the graces of Baptism and imparts special strength upon the recipient.⁷

The relationship can be explained by making an analogy with salvation history: "Confirmation puts the seal on Baptism as Pentecost completes Easter."⁸

When we are baptized, original sin is washed away by our sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In rising with him, we receive our identity as sons and daughters of the Father, and

become destined for heaven.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes about the change that Baptism brings. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”⁹

In Confirmation, we are strengthened in our identity by the seal of the Holy Spirit and the outpouring of his gifts. These gifts of the Holy Spirit also help us engage more deeply in worshipping the Father through Jesus in the Eucharist. The words of the liturgy speak to us when we hear the priest pray, “Through him, with him and in him, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever.”

We need the gifts of the Holy Spirit, every day, every hour, every minute and every second to live a life that gives glory to the Father. The goal of the Christian life is neither mere moralism, where rules are defined and followed, nor is it an ideological system in which truths are presented for one’s assent; rather, it is a “living experience with the Lord Jesus in the grace of his Spirit.”¹⁰

History of the Age of Confirmation

The Church’s understanding and practice of the sacrament of Confirmation has developed over the centuries. To better understand our present practice, it is important to retrace our steps along the path of historical development. We see the first references to the celebration of this sacrament in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter and John pray for the Holy Spirit to descend upon the Samaritans.¹¹ Though the Samaritans were baptized, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

The letter to the Hebrews develops the idea that the laying on of hands is a distinct and important moment after Baptism.¹² As the early Church grew, the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation were celebrated in one continuous rite of initiation leading up to the reception of the Holy Eucharist. This can be experienced today when anyone over the age of reason (seven years old) enters the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at the Easter Vigil. This order is also present in the Eastern rites of the Church, where the faithful receive all three sacraments of initiation as infants.

After the fifth century, it became harder for a bishop to make the rounds in his diocese to baptize and confirm all at once. This obscured the intrinsic connection between Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Infants were baptized and given Communion by the priest, and when the bishop was able to visit the parish he would administer Confirmation and the Eucharist to any baptized child. Over time, the infant reception of Communion ceased and Confirmation received even less attention.

In the Middle Ages, children were confirmed at the age of reason, around seven years old, but they did not receive First Communion until the age of 11 or 12. This meant that the order was restored to its ancient practice.

In France during the mid-1700s one bishop decided that young people should be confirmed only after they had received First Eucharist. This was an important shift, since his decision was based on the person receiving adequate instruction, not on his inability to visit every parish. This spread to other dioceses in France, but Rome rejected the practice, and in 1897 Pope Leo XIII reiterated that Confirmation should be celebrated at the age of reason.

Pope Pius X unintentionally began our current displacement of

Confirmation in 1910 when he lowered the age of First Communion to seven years old. He said nothing of Confirmation in his letter, *Quam Singulari*, and seemed to assume that the practice of confirming at the age of reason would be maintained. His main concern was that the children have all the resources they need to live a rich spiritual life and carry out their mission as Christians in the modern world. Thus, the custom of receiving First Communion as a second-grader and later receiving Confirmation in middle or high school is a recent practice in the life of the Church.

In the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the constitution on the sacred liturgy called for the Rite of Confirmation to be revised. Paul VI clearly stated in the Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation that, “The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity.”¹³ At this point we see the beginning of the move towards the ancient order of the Church: Baptism, Confirmation and then Eucharist.

This return to the original order has appeared in recent history as well. The 1988 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church all use the ancient order of the sacraments of initiation, culminating in the Eucharist.¹⁴

The topic was also addressed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, where he writes, “It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the center and goal of all sacramental life.”¹⁵ His concern was to maintain the centrality of the Eucharist, which in

many parish catechetical programs is often given less attention than Confirmation. As Bishop of Fargo, I was able to personally meet with Pope Benedict during my March 2012 ad limina visit. I shared with him the process we used to restore Confirmation to its original place in the diocese, and he listened attentively. Then he replied, “You have done what I have always wanted to do.”

6 Arturo Elberti, S.J., “Witness of Christ in the Spirit” in Rediscovering Confirmation, ed. Pontificum Concilium pro Laicis (Vatican City, 2000), 42.

7 Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation, *Divinae Consortium Naturae* (August 15, 1971).

8 Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Trowbridge, UK, 1999) 72.

9 Romans 8:14-16.

10 Elberti, S.J., “Witness of Christ in the Spirit,” 65.

11 Acts 8:14-17.

12 Hebrews 6

13 *Divinae Consortium Naturae*, 1.

14 Canons 889§2 and 891 of the Code of Canon Law, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1212-1419.

15 Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 17

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The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer. It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith. Evangelization demands familiarity with God's word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading. We

do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for "God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us". Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.

-Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 175.



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