

## **The Sacrament of Confirmation**

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 3:36). Jesus knew that this saddened them, so he promised to send Someone who would give them comfort and strengthen their faith: *I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete -to be with you always: the Spirit of Truth. . . He will be within you.*

*(Jn 14:16-17).*

The word *Paraclete* means someone who helps and guide others, an advocate. The "Spirit of Truth", who is the third Person of the Blessed 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 came it found them gathered in one place. Suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong, driving wind which was heard all through the house where they were seated. Tongues as of fire appeared which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to express themselves in foreign tongues and make bold proclamations as the Spirit prompted them (Acts 2:1-4).*

The unusual symbols of wind and fire reveal the powers which the Spirit gives us. Wind is an invisible but very real force: it can even life 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 power within us and it 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**

*Baptism* is the first sacrament that gives us the Holy Spirit and *Confirmation* increases his power within us. The sacrament of *Confirmation* strengthens the new life we have received as infants. It helps us to *witness* or stand up for Jesus before our friends and others.

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 through-out 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, because 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 hands and the anointing with 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 mission and connects this sacrament with Baptism. The words which the bishop says (" . . . be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit") tells 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 that the Spirit gives us special gifts. Like the Twelve Apostles we can be truly transformed into courageous followers of the Lord, who are willing even 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 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 also with you". Through this sacred rite, the person has been sealed with the Spirit and filled with his powerful gifts. (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. One way he does this is by giving us the good examples 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