

## From the desk of Fr. Jim

### ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE

#### Part 12: Introduction to the Sacrament of Confirmation

It would be good for us to pause again before delving into the sacrament of Confirmation, to be reminded of several general teachings concerning all the sacraments. This is perhaps especially important because of a misconception that Confirmation is mainly a rite of passage into adulthood. Even if this is the perceived value of the ceremony, it is necessary that we see that in the context of a larger meaning of the sacrament.

As with all the sacraments, Confirmation is Christ acting through the Church to bestow grace on those who accept him in faith. Now, it is extremely important that we recognize that this is both the mission of the Church and the design of Christ. In other words, when we seek the supernatural, transforming help of Christ, we can be assured that these sacraments do that. We can also clearly understand that this is not accidental, but is the result of the direction of God. This is the purpose of the Church, to be the instrument of the bestowal of this grace.

God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity. (**Vatican II, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” #9**)

It is not accidental that in the images, words and descriptions of the Church, all point to this reality of the Church as the instrument that, in God’s hand, is intended to bring about the salvation of all.

Thus the Church’s mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity. (**Catechism of the Catholic Church, #738**)

Our disposition toward the sacraments can be simply stated. As we approach the sacraments of the Church, we are approaching Christ. As the Church acts through the sacraments, so, in reality, it is Christ who acts. Further, everything in the life of the Church is directed to this end. Our teachings, preaching, even our charitable works are in the end directed toward the sacramental life. While it is also true that the sacraments strengthen us to carry on that good work, preaching the Gospel in word and in deed, those good works are intended finally to bring us back to the celebration of the sacraments. For the perfection of the worship of God is found in those sacraments and it is for that worship that we have been made.

Now, specifically, we need to consider the sacrament of Confirmation. Again, all the sacraments confer grace, and this grace is intended to transform our lives. Confirmation is linked intimately with Baptism and Eucharist which together comprise the Sacraments of Initiation.

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. 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.” **(Catechism, #1285)**

In all the teachings of the Church on this sacrament there is an emphasis on the effect it has in enabling our witness as Christians. This is the work of the Holy Spirit among us from the very beginning of the life of the Church.

*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. (Acts 2:1-4)*

Even without the conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation, the work of those “sent into the world” is an obligation. By virtue of our Baptism, we are called to proclaim the Good News. All the gifts of the spirit and, indeed, the entire spiritual organism is conferred on the soul at Baptism. Confirmation is the strengthening of that Baptismal grace in the context of a more mature faith. When Baptism is conferred on adults (or children seven years and older) it is immediately followed by the sacrament of Confirmation. Indeed the mission of that individual is also immediate. For an infant who is Baptized there follows a period of growth and protection. As Confirmation is given, the expectation is that the recipient will take their place among the ranks of the lay apostolate, those sent to carry out the mission of the Church, the mission of Christ.