

Ten After Ten Session 64: 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. 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.

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. 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.

1287 This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah's, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people. On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost... Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.

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... 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.

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 rite of anointing has continued ever since, in both East and West... In the West, the term Confirmation suggests that this sacrament both confirms baptism and strengthens baptismal grace.

1290 In the first centuries Confirmation generally comprised one single celebration with Baptism... 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.

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.

Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy; it cleanses and limbers; oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds; 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 Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off "the aroma of Christ."

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. 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.

1296 Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father's seal. 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." 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.]...The sign of peace that concludes the rite of the sacrament signifies and demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful.