

CONFIRMATION

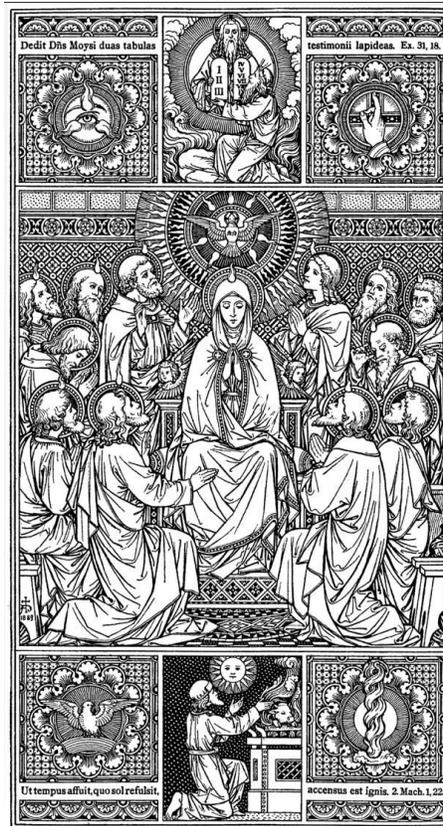
Personal Pentecost

To understand the significance of the Sacrament of Confirmation it is essential to see that Confirmation is the Christian's personal Pentecost. The Catechism teaches this: *The sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost (# 1302)* Before Pentecost, the Apostles were fearful, confused and secretive, gathering only behind locked doors. But, *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..make bold proclamations as the Spirit prompted them.* (Acts 2:1-4) Consider the change in these men! They had been fearful and confused. Now they are courageous, boldly proclaiming Christ with insight and an effectiveness so great that three thousand were added that very day to their number. This is what can happen when we really yield to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is in the Sacrament of Confirmation that we called to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us for our mission of spreading and defending our faith.

You may recall that we have defined a sacrament as "an outward sign, established by Christ to give us grace." It will be helpful for us to consider how Confirmation meets this definition.

The outward sign.

The outward sign, what we see and hear, is the anointing with chrism (holy oil) on the forehead, which is done by the imposition of hands, and these words, *Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.* It is usually a bishop who gives this sacraments but in some cases a



priest may also celebrate it.

Established by Jesus

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. For example, *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you....I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth*

comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:7ff). He also told them, *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.* (Acts 1:8) *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.* (Lk 24:49) Within days, while they were gathered in prayer, the Holy Spirit descended on them like tongues of fire (See Acts 2:1-4 recounted earlier in this flyer). The Apostles began to boldly proclaim the gospel from that day on. Those who believed in the apostolic preaching were baptized. But in addition to baptism these apostles also laid hands on the faithful that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this was done at the time of baptism and sometimes it was done later. Consider for example these two texts. *When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down to these people and prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit. It had not as yet come down upon them any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The pair, upon arriving imposed hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 8:15-19) This text shows some separation between the time of baptism and the time of

confirmation (the “receiving of the Spirit). The text also explains our Catholic tradition of generally reserving the sacrament for the bishop to celebrate since, in the early Church, the Apostles made it part of their mission to impose hands for the outpouring of the Spirit. Phillip the Deacon had performed the baptisms in Samaria but he waited for the apostles to confirm them in the Spirit. This next text shows the Apostle Paul baptizing. Because he, an apostle is present, there is no delay in confirming the newly baptized in the Spirit *“When they heard this, [Paul's preaching] they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down upon them and they began to speak in tongues and utter prophecies.”* (Acts 19:5-6)

Biblical

Thus we see that the sacrament of Confirmation is biblical. Jesus promised the Spirit and did in fact send Him on the day of Pentecost. The Apostles understood that they were not to keep this experience to themselves. So, as the catechism teaches, *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.* (# 1288)

The Graces of Confirmation

In terms of appreciating what Confirmation does for us we must recall what happened to the apostles

on the day of Pentecost. Fearful men behind locked doors came forth to joyfully, effectively and boldly proclaim Christ. Thus, the essential grace (or gift) of the sacrament of Confirmation is that we should be equipped for mission. And what is that mission? Again the Catechism teaches, *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* (# 1304). The Catechism also teaches how the sacrament accomplishes this great strengthening within us: *Confirmation...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* (# 1316). See too how this sacrament is given to us not only for our own sakes but also for the world: *...enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit...the [confirmed] are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith...* (# 1285) Further, *A candidate for Confirmation...[must] be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ, both within the ecclesial community and in temporal affairs* [i.e. “the world”] (# 1319).

The Importance of our call

More than ever, we need to take the power of God given in this sacrament seriously. All too frequently many Catholics are hindered by fear and confusion from proclaiming the Gospel to the world. This need not be so. There

is just too much that needs to be done in proclaiming the Kingdom. We must speak boldly for Christ and announce his salvation day after day. *[F]or God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord..!*(2 Tim 1:7-8) And this gift is not just for some; every member of the faithful is called to receive a special out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

We have a mission to spread the Gospel in union with the Church by what we say and what we do. It is tragic indeed that so many have seen fit to leave this essential task to others. There is a saying that is sadly true: “Evil triumphs when the good remain silent.” Is this not what has happened in our day? How could a nation with so many Christians living in its midst have so many confused and lost sheep? If the Apostles could be so changed for their mission by the Holy Spirit, so can we. We are called to spread that faith handed down from the Apostles to our family, friends, co-workers and neighbors. And we must do so in season and out of season. In our Confirmation Christ unites us more firmly to himself and his Church, increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us and gives us special strength to live holy lives and to spread and defend the faith (see 1303). It is in Confirmation especially that Christ lays his hands upon us to strengthen us for this mission of evangelization. The task may seem daunting but this is exactly why Christ himself strengthens us so that we can truly say *I can do all things in Christ, who strengthens me.* (Phil 4:13)

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