

Catholic Sacraments / Confirmation

Before Jesus was put to death, He promised His followers that He would send His Spirit to comfort and strengthen them. True to His promise, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them on Pentecost, forty days after His resurrection from the dead. The Sacrament of Confirmation is our own Pentecost. When we are confirmed, we receive the Holy Spirit, through the anointing with oil and the laying on of hands by the bishop or a priest appointed by him. Just as soldiers in Jesus' time were marked with their leader's seal, we are forever marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. As the bishop places his hands on our heads and then anoints our foreheads with oil, he says the words: "Be sealed with the Holy Spirit." When we receive this sacred seal we show that we belong to God. By their anointing, the prophets, kings and priests of the Old Testament were elevated to a special position in their service of God. So it is with us when we receive the holy oil on our foreheads; we become part of the priesthood of all believers, witnesses to Christ and heirs to His throne.



Confirmation is one of the Sacraments of Initiation. It originally formed part of the joint rite of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, which were all given to the new converts at the same time. Nowadays adult converts are confirmed and receive the Eucharist at the time of their baptism, but children are generally baptized in infancy, receive Communion when they are around six or seven and are confirmed some years later. This time lag between First Eucharist and Confirmation allows the young candidates to have a fuller understanding of what is happening when they receive the Holy Spirit sacramentally.

Although the Church has separated the Sacraments of Initiation, they still constitute a unity, as, properly speaking, Confirmation completes the baptismal rite. And so, without in any way devaluing their Baptism, the Church urges all its members to complete their Christian initiation by receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation. Through it we receive what Jesus has promised - the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit, ever present to help us meet the challenges and demands that face us as mature Christians.