

The Rite of Confirmation

In the West, the Confirmation of children is preceded by the renewal of the baptismal promises and a profession of faith to stress the link with Baptism, and the fact that the two sacraments are intimately linked together for initiation into the Church.

The Bishop also extends his hands over all those to be confirmed, to symbolise the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.



The Sacrament of Confirmation proper is conferred by the Bishop by the laying on of his hands on the heads of each candidate, the anointing of their foreheads with **sacred chrism** (oil specially consecrated for this purpose by the Bishop on Holy Thursday), and the words of sealing “**Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit**”.

The consecration of kings and priests has, from time immemorial, been accompanied by an anointing with oil. This acts as a seal to show that they have been consecrated into their new role. In Confirmation, chrism is used in the same way, to provide a visible sign of the seal of the sacrament and to symbolise its effects in uniting us even more deeply into Jesus’ Kingly and Priestly office that first occurred at Baptism.

In the **baptism of children**, the post baptismal anointing with oil anticipates the anointing with Chrism that will take place later at Confirmation. In the **initiation of adults** into the Church, there is no post baptismal anointing with oil because the second anointing will, in fact, be that of their actual Confirmation as that sacrament immediately follows their Baptism. In the case of adult initiation, the Sacrament of Confirmation may be conferred by the priest, who will have delegated authority from the Bishop.

Our Catholic Faith

21. Confirmation

- Sacrament of Initiation into the World



Questions for Reflection

1. Why are both Baptism and Confirmation needed as sacraments of initiation?
2. Does it make more sense to confer the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation together for infants or keep them separated in time, as is our present custom?
3. Explain why there is a community dimension in the sacrament of Confirmation?

Where Does Confirmation Originate?

Matthew and Mark's Gospels record Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, and the fact that this was accompanied by the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus. (Mtt.3// Mk.1). Luke's Gospel states that after Jesus' baptism, when he was at prayer, the Holy Spirit came down on him (Lk.3). John's Gospel does not mention Jesus' actual baptism but records the Baptist saying he saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus (Jn.1).



Jesus had no need of Baptism but allowed himself to be baptised as an example to people of its importance. Similarly, the fact that the Holy Spirit followed Jesus' baptism shows the parallel importance of what we now call Confirmation, or the sealing of the Holy Spirit, the seal that Jesus received after his baptism and later spoke about **“for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal”** (Jn.6:27), and the same seal St Paul refers to (2 Cor.1:22)

Jesus told Nicodemus that **“no-one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit”** (Jn.3) and promised the apostles that after he was gone he would send the Holy Spirit to them in a special way: **“When the Spirit of Truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth”** (Jn.16: 13) so that they would be properly equipped to be witnesses to Christ **“When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send you from the Father .. He will be my witness and you too will be witnesses”** (Jn.15:26-27).

Later, after Jesus' ascension, when the apostles started to undertake this witness, they too would, by the laying on of hands, pass the Holy Spirit on to those who had been baptised into the Faith (Acts 2:38, 8:12-17).

Why Does Confirmation Differ from Baptism as a Sacrament of Initiation?

It is clear, from what Jesus instructed the apostles about the gift of the Holy Spirit (Confirmation), that the giving of the Holy Spirit was necessary in order to make believers have that fullness of grace they would need to act out their lives as members of his community or Church in the **wider world**. Remember, even though the apostles had the benefit of spending considerable time with Our Lord in his ministry, Jesus knew that without him physically at their side they did not have the strength needed to accomplish their own mission to the world. The sending of the Holy Spirit upon them would guarantee them that strength and grace.

Baptism is the means of entering the community of Christians, of entering into the body or home of Christ. In that home of like minded believers there is security and peace, that security and peace only Jesus can give. However, being a member of that community is not, and must not be seen as, a self-centred achievement. It brings with it responsibilities, including the responsibility to witness to Jesus according to our abilities, just as the apostles witnessed to him. To do this requires the believer to go outside the Christian community, into a different, more hostile world. This requires different gifts, strengths and graces and it is for this reason that Confirmation is necessary.



- Confirmation complements and supplements Baptism.
- It serves to further strengthen our faith, and brings us even closer to Christ within his Church and his Kingly and Priestly office.
- It seals with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit in a specially holy way
- It equips us for our Christian responsibilities in the outside world
- It can be called the **Sacrament of Witness and Evangelisation**.

Traditions Concerning Initiation into the Church

Because the early Church preached to adults, their conversion and entry into the Christian community was achieved by Baptism, the Laying on of Hands (Confirmation) and participation in the Breaking of Bread (the Eucharist). Later, even small children were initiated in this way, and it is still followed in the Eastern Orthodox Church. This three-fold giving of the Sacraments of Initiation is still given for adult converts today.

However, in the West, as the Faith spread from cities into rural areas it became more difficult for the bishop to visit frequently to initiate children. It was decided that the local presbyter (priest) would carry out baptisms and allow children to partake of the Eucharist, but the bishop would retain the privilege of **Laying on of Hands** which he would do when he made his next visit. Later, it was felt more appropriate for children to grow in the faith and reach the age of reason before receiving the Eucharist and Confirmation. This is the practice in the West today for children and, of course, the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is also now given prior to the Sacrament of the Eucharist.