

CONFIRMATION

Some say that Confirmation should be when young people are over 13, others that it should be done as near to Baptism as possible because it is part of that Sacrament. Jesus left no instructions on this matter. In fact, he never explicitly mentions sacraments at all. One thing we do know is that they, like the Sabbath, are given to serve humankind and that we were not created for the sacraments. The question then is: how are we served by the sacrament of confirmation? As we have already seen, all sacraments are an opportunity to encounter Christ. This happens first of all at Baptism.

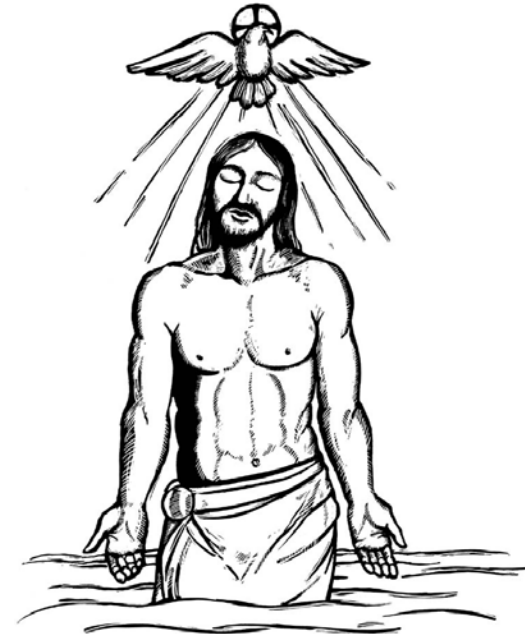


However, since most of us are baptised as infants, it is not something we remember experiencing. Yet prayer and the sacraments are about recognising and experiencing the truth about ourselves and our relationship with God. In confirmation, we celebrate our position as his children'; it is "confirmed" (we are anointed with Chrism as we were at baptism). We also receive our call/mission (laying on of hands) to spread the Good News.

At confirmation, God enables us to carry out this mission. The traditional way of describing this is: the receiving of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. (1) Understanding – to help us understand all that God has told us. (2) Wisdom – lets us judge things in the way that God does. (3) Right Judgement – this gift helps us to know what to do, especially when we are faced with difficult situations, (4) Courage – gives us the strength to do what is right no matter how hard it may be. (5) Knowledge – lets us see the world as it really is. (6) Reverence – This gift gives us the power to love God and our neighbour as we should. (7) The Spirit of Wonder and Awe – enables us to remember the greatness of God; it is the natural consequence of being baptised; that we will be enabled to be true children of God, made in his image.

Baptism and Confirmation

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WHY BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION?

In the early history of the Church, baptism, confirmation and the eucharist were received at a single celebration as new members were welcomed into the community (usually at the first Mass of Easter). As church membership rapidly grew and infant baptism became the norm, the job of baptising and celebrating the Mass was handed over to the local minister. However, the Bishop retained the right to



confirm. At first, Confirmation came as soon after Baptism as the Bishop could make it, but gradually the gap between the two Sacraments widened. Nowadays, there is much disagreement about the best age for Confirmation. In our diocese, it is generally administered at 10 or 11 years of age.

BAPTISM

In baptism, our meeting with Christ is the greatest moment in our lives. For it is the moment when God makes us members of the Church, unites us to Christ, and frees us from all sin ...

- i) **Entry into the Church.** Today we are very much aware of the notion of community. People are employed as community workers, we have community centres and people constantly bemoan the loss of that “community spirit” that used to exist. For Christians, community has always been an essential part of our lives. We have always recognised the need to care for each other, to meet together and communicate, the need to socialise and especially the need to pray together. Our community centres around a person: Jesus Christ. We do not always live up to our ideals, yet we remain a community built around him. We sometimes use the expression “the Mystical Body of Christ”. Paul describes each of us as part or members of the whole body which is Christ. Our union with each other and with Christ in this community is as close as the union of the human body. When we are baptised we enter that community. We become members of the Body of Christ. We begin to share in the privileges and in the life of this community of believers.

- ii) **New Life in Christ.** On the Cross, Jesus plunged into death; by rising he showed that he had conquered death. This conquering of death showed that sin had no hold over Jesus; Jesus is victor over that too. In baptism, we share in that victory.

Sin is washed away (St. Paul looks on it more as a burial than a washing), then we rise as though from the dead to new life.



“And you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin, and alive with a life that looks towards God, through Jesus Christ our Lord”. (Romans 6:11)

- iii) **The Power to Worship.** During the first centuries of Christianity a person who was not baptised was not allowed to attend the whole of Mass. Today this would be a bit of an embarrassment to us. Imagine if you brought a friend to Mass and they were turned away at the door, or asked to leave at the offertory. But in the early Church they had a good reason for it. They did not just see it as a gathering of friends, but as a gathering of those who were entitled to celebrate Mass because of the power given to them at Baptism. Christ enables those who are baptised to offer their lives fully to the Father. Baptism is also the moment when we acknowledge that God is our Father. When we recognise this moment, that we are his children, our prayer too takes on a new meaning. Our prayer changes because our relationship with God has changed. At baptism, we have become his adopted children and so the Eucharist we celebrate becomes a family meal.