



Opening Question:

Do you have any unfinished projects?

Have you ever done a project but didn't complete it? It worked but it just didn't seem finished? Think about your spiritual life. Sure, it's a journey towards God you take one step at a time. But what if you had the gifts of the Spirit that made you whole? That completes the grace God gave you at your baptism? Confirmation is the sacrament that finishes what baptism began.

The Spirit

The Spirit itself connects the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. John baptized Jesus himself in the Jordan:

When Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Spirit descend like a dove. It entered him.

Mark 1:10

We, too, received the Spirit when we were baptized. We, however, were not just promised a taste of the Spirit, but its fullness to grow in and defend the faith. Just like the disciples at Pentecost.

When Pentecost day arrived, everyone gathered together in one place. Suddenly, a noise came from heaven that sounded like a violent wind. The noise filled the house where they sat. Then fiery tongues spread out and sat on each person there. Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit directed them to.

Acts 2:1-4

As baptism begins our faith journey, Confirmation empowers us to live it out in the open. The invitation to faith and the courage to continue in faith come directly from the Spirit.



Signs of the Sacrament

There are two outward signs to Confirmation: the imposition of hands and anointing with oil. During Confirmation, the bishop or priest places his hands on the head of the person and prays, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." In Acts chapter 8, Peter and John did the same. They went to Samaria in order to baptize the converted. Then,

Peter and John then placed their hands on everyone who had faith in the Lord and they were given the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:17

During Confirmation, the ordained minister anoints the person with olive oil that the bishop has consecrated. In the time of Jesus, olive oil had many uses. For example, common people poured oil on wounds for cleansing, healing, and comfort. Jews anointed leaders with olive oil to consecrate them for a task and to show a commitment to that task.

Later, Christians saw anointing as a metaphor for the indwelling of the Spirit. In Acts chapter 10, Peter told Cornelius and his family:

God anointed Jesus with the Spirit and power. Jesus went around doing good and healing everyone under the power of the devil. For God was with him.

Acts 10:38

Jesus was given the title of Christ which means “anointed one.” He has God’s Spirit. His disciples were soon called Christians or followers of the anointed one. We share in his Spirit. The anointing of Confirmation seals us with the Spirit. That means we are consecrated and committed to living out our faith in the open. Even if that means defending what we believe. It orients us in a way we cannot change. It leaves a spiritual but indelible mark on us. Those confirmed might later decide to walk away from their faith but they cannot undo the experience of their commitment. God won’t let them.

Confirmation Administered by the Bishop

In the early Church, the bishop confirmed the newly baptized to emphasize apostolic succession. However, the Western or Latin rite Church grew rapidly. So, these bishops sent out priests to care for distant communities the bishops themselves could not serve directly. Hence, the sacrament of Confirmation was separated from baptism and reserved for these bishops to administer when they could visit their distant communities. The exception to this rule is at the Easter Vigil when the pastor of a parish can confirm neophytes and converts. In the Eastern Churches, the priest still confirms at baptism.

Regardless, the oil used at Confirmation is consecrated by the bishop in charge of his diocese. It is a sign not only of being Christian. It points to the faith of the apostles passed down through their successors, the bishops. In other words, the faith of Peter and John, Paul and Cornelius is our faith. Anointing with the consecrated oil is a sacramental sign of that shared faith.

Effects of the Sacrament

As we have mentioned, Confirmation completes the grace begun at baptism. It is a sacrament of spiritual maturity. The Spirit inspires us to live a fuller faith life with its fruits and gifts. The fruits of the Spirit were listed in Isaiah with reference to the Christ:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of fortitude, a spirit of knowledge and of awe in the Lord...

Isaiah 11:2

In Confirmation, the Spirit also gives us these gifts. We are to develop them in our lives for the good of others. The fruits of the Spirit were listed in St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23a

These fruits are meant for our own good. They list the spiritual qualities every believer would like to enjoy. So, as a result of the sacrament, the Spirit draws us closer to the Father and his Son. And, since the sacrament is administered in the presence of the gathered Church, it deepens our commitment to the Church. Finally, in the sacrament, the Spirit gives us the tools to even defend the faith. Jesus promised us:

Don’t worry about what you will say or how you will say it...The Spirit from your Father will tell you what to say.

Matthew 10:19b, 20b

It can be nice to finish a job that’s been started. Better yet, it’s nice to have the proper tools necessary to continue an ongoing job. These tools may not make it easier but they instill confidence and effectiveness. It’s in this sense that Confirmation completes what baptism began. When we are confirmed, we reaffirm and deepen our faith commitment. We are consecrated to the job of discipleship. And we receive the gifts and fruits of the Spirit to live out our faith in the open. The same powerful faith the apostles had when they received the Spirit at Pentecost.

Closing Question:

How has the Spirit strengthened your faith?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1285-1321

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