

Introduction

Pre-Easter catechesis culminates in the actual experience of the sacraments, which is spiritual and real. *Personal encounter with the Risen Christ*. Presence of the Spirit in new Catholics opens them, if well disposed, to deeper understanding of them.

This includes the impact on the way of looking at self, others (family, community) and world, as well as inspiration for behaviour inspired by the graces received, especially works of charity.

What are those *realities* of grace now experienced? What do they mean for my life in all its dimensions? How do I see them at work in the lives of others, e.g. the saints?

Mystagogia refers to the teachings which “lead through the mysteries” those have already been initiated into them. The Mysteries refer to the sacraments. Mystagogia is teaching leading to a deeper understanding of the sacraments once they have been experienced. It’s moving from the external signs to a deeper grasp of the internal grace which the signs signify.

CONFIRMATION

1. *Some Reminders from the Catechism (1293-1296; 1302-1305)*

Confirmation was announced in the Old Testament. The Spirit of the Lord would rest on the Messiah and, through Him, would be communicated to the whole messianic people. Christ received the fullness of the Spirit and promised repeatedly that He would send the Paraclete on His disciples. The Spirit pushed the Apostles to proclaim publicly the mighty deeds of God in Jesus. St. Peter declared the outpouring of the Spirit as the sign of the messianic age.

As the Apostles baptized they also laid hands on the baptized, understood as the conferral of the Spirit. Soon, the oil of chrism was added the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit. Sharing in the mission of Christ more fully, Christians give off the aroma of Christ.

By this anointing the confirmand receives the "mark," the seal of the Holy Spirit. A seal is a symbol of a person, a sign of personal authority, or ownership of an object. A seal authenticates a juridical act or document and occasionally makes it secret.

Christ himself declared that he was marked with his Father's seal. Christians are also marked with a seal: "It is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned us; he has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrolment in his service for ever, as

well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological (end of time) trial.

It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!";
- it unites us more firmly to Christ;
- it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us;
- it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.

Like Baptism which it completes, Confirmation is given only once, for it too imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, the "character," which is the sign that 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.

This "character" perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism, and "the confirmed person receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*)."

2. *Understanding the various rites in the light of the events of our salvation.*

Laying on of Hands. The bishop (or priest) extends his hands over the candidates and prays for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. It is a biblical gesture symbolizing the conferral of the Holy Spirit's power and grace. In the Old Testament, laying on of hands served as a physical sign of *transference of spiritual power*. It was primarily used to impart blessings (Jacob on his grandsons), commission leaders for service (Moses to Joshua), and transfer guilt (sinful Jew onto sacrificial offering's head) or dedicate a sacrificial offering to God (Yom Kippur).

Anointing of Sacred Chrism. The bishop anoints the candidate's forehead with Sacred Chrism (a mixture of olive oil and balsam consecrated by the bishop; chrism means anointing or unction) in the shape of the cross. This symbolizes being chosen, set apart, and marked with the indelible seal of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament it was usually poured out on the whole head. The concept of an "indelible seal on the soul" generally refers to sacramental character in Christian theology. It represents a permanent, unrepeatable spiritual mark imprinted by God through certain sacraments: in confirmation, it deepens the seal received in baptism empowering to profess faith publicly.

Spoken Words. While anointing the candidate, the minister says, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit". This verbally anchors the physical action to the bestowal of the Spirit's seven gifts. Words give meaning and direction to the physical action, while the action grounds the spoken word in the physical

world. Together, they form an "efficacious sign"—meaning they not only symbolize God's grace but actually cause it to happen. No Old Testament sacraments: they are only from Christ.

Sign of Peace. The bishop concludes the anointing by saying, "Peace be with you". This symbolizes unity with the bishop and the broader Church community, but also with God. "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives, do I give to you" (John 14). In the Old Testament, the "sign of peace" is fundamentally rooted in the Hebrew concept of Shalom, meaning wholeness, completeness, and reconciliation. It was visibly enacted through physical greetings (like bowing or a holy kiss), symbols of restoration, and the ritualized communal peace offerings.

Additional Symbols. 1) The Dove: a universal symbol representing the Holy Spirit (the Flood; Baptism of Jesus). 2) Fire & tongues of fire: the transforming energy, zeal and courage of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. 3) The Sponsor: Placing of hand on candidate's shoulder signifies ongoing spiritual support and guidance in living out the Faith.

3. Meaning of the signs.

Bishop/Priest. Exteriorly, he is his human self. But by sacramental priestly or episcopal ordination, he bears the sacrament of Christ's power to confirm. It is in reality Christ who confirms.

Words. Every word is a symbol of meaning and confers meaning on the actions and signs used. Throughout the rite of confirmation, the words identify the meaning of the other actions and symbols used.

Oil. Symbol of the blessings God bestows on his people, chiefly of the Holy Spirit Himself, in different ways and degrees. Consecration with oil means being set apart by the Spirit for God. It also signals joy, abundance. It cleanses, limbers, heals and soothes, and makes radiant with beauty, health and strength. Oil came from the pressing of the olives. Here, then, oil symbolizes the refining of our souls through challenges and suffering.

Forehead. The forehead universally symbolizes intellect, consciousness, and one's spiritual or personal identity. Because it is highly visible, it represents what is "foremost" in your mind and your outward allegiance. Across different cultures and traditions, it holds several specific meanings. In Christianity & Judaism, the forehead is a biblical symbol of identity and loyalty. In the Old Testament, the High Priest wore a gold plate on his forehead declaring "HOLY TO THE LORD" (Exodus 28:36). In the Book of Revelation, the "seal of God" or the "mark of the beast" on the forehead indicates who a person serves. Additionally, many Christians receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday, a public symbol of penitence and devotion

4. *Significance of the rites for the Christian life.*

“The mature fruit of mystagogy is an awareness that one's life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated. The aim of all Christian education, moreover, is to train the believer in an adult faith that can make him a ‘new creation’, capable of bearing witness in his surroundings to the Christian hope that inspires him” (Pope Benedict XVI).

Confirmation confirms and strengthens the Christian identity received in baptism. It represents the outward push by the Spirit to make us witness in every way possible to the person and Gospel of Christ in the world. We are not baptized for our own sakes only but for others, too, and Confirmation emphasizes this missionary witness to others. But Confirmation also deepens our connection to the Church and equips us with the spiritual gifts to navigate life's challenges. Gifts received are not magical and automatic: they require that we cooperate to bring them alive.

Significance for Christian Life Dimensions:

Assumption of Personal Responsibility for Baptism: For many, baptism occurs in infancy through the promises of parents and godparents. Confirmation is the point where the individual also takes personal responsibility for those vows. It signifies moving from a faith inherited from family to a mature, personal commitment to Christ,

Outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Often likened to a personal Pentecost, Confirmation brings a special, strengthening outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Believers are traditionally sealed with seven spiritual gifts to guide their daily actions:

- **Wisdom & Understanding:** To perceive God's purpose and grasp the truths of faith.
- **Counsel & Knowledge:** To make right judgments and navigate moral dilemmas.
- **Fortitude (Courage):** To stand up for Christian values, even in the face of adversity.
- **Piety & Fear of the Lord:** To deepen reverence for God and a sense of awe in His presence.

Empowerment for Service and Witness: Confirmation is not a "graduation" from the Church, but an equipping for mission. It provides the spiritual strength (or "dynamite") needed to actively defend the faith, serve the community, and boldly share the Gospel through both words and everyday actions.

Deepened Relationship with God: The sacrament roots individuals more profoundly in their identity as adopted children of God, allowing them to intimately approach Him and rely on His grace. It cements an individual's union with Jesus Christ and calls them to bear the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, and peace.

Perfecting Bond with the Church: Confirmation completes the rites of Christian initiation. By receiving this sacrament, believers are fully integrated into the ecclesial community, enabling them to take up active leadership and ministerial roles within their parishes.