

Catholic

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Opening the Gifts of the HOLY SPIRIT

BY THOMAS RICHSTATTER, OFM

Team spirit! School spirit!
We're often encouraged to
"get into the spirit" of things.
At issue is not so much how we can
get into the spirit, but how we can
allow the spirit—the Holy Spirit—to
get into us!

THE SPIRIT AND INITIATION

We usually think of confirmation as
the sacrament of the Holy Spirit. But
confirmation is best understood in
relation to baptism and Eucharist.

An analogy illustrates the
relationship among the three
sacraments of initiation. Consider
what you do when you are to attend
a banquet. You (1) take off your
old clothes and wash up, (2) dry
off and put on your good clothes,
and (3) go to the banquet. Baptism,
confirmation, and Eucharist exist in
a similar relationship. We (1) take off
the old, sinful person and wash away
original sin, receiving new life in
baptism; (2) put on the new person
and are anointed with the oil of the
Holy Spirit in confirmation; and (3)
are led to the eucharistic banquet.

The official prayers of these
sacraments indicate how the Holy
Spirit operates in each of these
actions.



Peace of The Holy Spirit: Pentecost is depicted by Stephen B. Whatley, an expressionist artist. Whatley's commissions have included paintings of Buckingham Palace and British public figures, but he and his religious works have been inspirations born of prayer and reflection.

(CNS PHOTO/STEPHEN B. WHATLEY)

Baptism

At the Easter Vigil, we learn of the role of the Holy Spirit in the prayer over the baptismal water: “May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your only begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image and washed clean through the sacrament of baptism from all the squalor of the life of old, may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit.”

The minister lowers the Easter candle into the water and prays: “May the power of the Holy Spirit, O Lord, we pray, come down through your Son into the fullness of this font, so that all who have been buried with Christ by baptism into death may rise again to life with him.”

Confirmation

The prayers of confirmation tell us how the Holy Spirit, received at our baptism, is to function in our lives. The celebrant holds his hands outstretched over the group of those to be confirmed and prays: “All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.”

This prayer names the traditional seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The biblical origin of these seven gifts (seven is the biblical number meaning “completion, totality, all-that-we-need”) is found in a passage where Isaiah foretells the qualities of the Messiah: “The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:2–3). The word *Messiah*—*Christos* in Greek—means “anointed.” When we are anointed in the sacraments of initiation, we “put on Christ” and the qualities of the Messiah take root in us and become our qualities.

Following the prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit, the minister of the sacrament dips his thumb in the holy oil (chrism), makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed, and prays: “[Name], be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Here, *gift* refers to the Holy Spirit. We are sealed with the gift of (“the gift that is”) the Holy Spirit.

Eucharist

Clothed in the Spirit, with our sins washed away, we now come to the banquet table of the Eucharist.

Although the words vary according to the eucharistic prayer, at each Eucharist, we ask God to send the Holy Spirit to transform our food and drink so that we who eat and

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