

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2018 LIGUORI
PUBLICATIONS,
A REDEMPTORIST
MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.

Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

C9510A

CONFIRMATION

A Deepening of Our Christian Identity

BY CAROL LUEBERING

Confirmation is a sacrament of commitment, one of faith in God's fidelity to us.



Older Catholics remember confirmation as the moment when their identity changed: they “received the Holy Spirit” and became “soldiers of Christ.” Today, confirmation is often defined as a sacrament of mature Christian commitment. It is the occasion when young people baptized as infants put their “personal signature” on their parents’ decision.

But the bishops have fixed the age for confirmation in the United States at between seven and seventeen. Can “commitment” mean the same thing to a second-grader and a high school senior? This *Update* will explore the rich meaning of the sacrament of confirmation by looking at it in terms of our Christian identity.

ACQUIRING CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Our earliest ancestors in faith did not distinguish confirmation from baptism. The apostle presiding over the little community baptized new members, anointed them with oil, and offered them the Eucharist for the first time in one rite of initiation.

As the Church grew and spread throughout the world, the apostles’ successors, the bishops, could no longer personally baptize every new Christian. They delegated the rite to priests. Still, the bishops made regular visits to local communities to confirm the priests’ baptisms with a second anointing. Thus, a separate sacrament was born.

Confirmation is still, with baptism and Eucharist, a sacrament of initiation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insists that the unity of the three sacraments “must be safeguarded” (1285), even though most children do not receive them at the same time.

The *Catechism* describes confirmation as a deepening of baptismal gifts. It says that the sacrament roots us more deeply in our identity as God’s children, unites us more firmly with Christ, increases in us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, binds us more closely to the Church, and gives us special strength to bear witness to our faith (see 1303).

With baptism and Eucharist, confirmation shapes us as Catholic Christians. Each of these sacraments focuses on a different aspect of our life as believers: birth, breath, and nourishment.

Baptism is birth into the family of the Church. In the baptismal font, we die and rise to new life in Christ. Parents bring an infant to the font because they want more for the child than physical life. They come to ask the *fullness* of life that only Christ can give. When infant baptismal symbolism is at its best, a baby is lowered beneath the water into the death of Jesus and rises again, gasping with eternal life.

Inhale, exhale: that’s the essential rhythm of life; it’s the first thing a newborn must do to survive. The breath of Christian life is the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God dwelling within us. First received at baptism, the gift of the Spirit is celebrated more fully in confirmation. It’s like taking a more grown-up breath.



CNS PHOTO/AMBRIA HAMMEL, CATHOLIC SUN

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved
Liguori.org • 800-325-9521