

Why Do We Do That: Confirmation

On April 20th many of our young men and women will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation here at St. Martha's. What is so special about Confirmation? Tonight we will go over why we do that!

What is Confirmation anyway?

CCC1285: Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."

Confirmation is the sacrament where we receive the Holy Spirit in a special way to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Christ.

Why do we need to be Confirmed if we already received the Holy Spirit at Baptism?

When we are baptized, we are made members of God's family. In the case of infant baptism it is our parents and Godparents who promise to raise us in the faith. At Confirmation, we are saying that we are ready to become "adults" in the faith and that we'll be responsible for our own spiritual growth. To assist us in achieving this, the Holy Spirit comes in a special way to make us strong enough to accomplish this task.

Where do we find Confirmation in the Bible?

We read in the Acts of the Apostles (8:14-17) that after the Samaritan converts had been baptized by Philip the deacon, the Apostles "sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit."

Again (19:1-6): St. Paul "came (down) to Ephesus where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "We have never even heard that there is a holy Spirit." He said, "How were you baptized?" They replied, "With the baptism of John." Paul then said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid (his) hands on them, the holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

From these two passages we learn that in the earliest ages of the Church there was a rite, distinct from baptism, in which the Holy Spirit was conferred by the imposition of hands, and that the power to perform this ceremony was not implied in the power to baptize.

Why are we anointed with Sacred Chrism (oil) in Confirmation?

Since biblical times, anointing with oil is rich in meaning. (CCC 1293-1296)

1. Oil is a sign of abundance and joy
2. Oil cleanses
3. Oil limbers (athletes use it for muscles)
4. Oil heals (soothes bruises and wounds)
5. Oil makes things radiant (items shine after they've been wiped down with oil)

In the sacramental life, anointing signifies all of this, and most importantly, with the laying of hands and the anointing with chrism, a spiritual seal is imprinted on our souls – a mark that signifies that we belong to Christ.

Why do people choose a Confirmation name?

In the Bible there are many, many examples of the faithful receiving new names when they enter a new phase of their lives (Abram – Abraham; Simon – Peter; Saul – Paul). Newly elected Popes change their names (Cardinal Ratzinger – Pope Benedict XVI), and in religious communities (ie. Franciscans or Carmelites) the brothers and sisters nearly always take on a new name and these become their new identity.

In Confirmation we are truly entering a new existence and it is fitting to have a new name to signify this event.

What do we gain from Confirmation?

We gain the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit:

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom
Understanding
Knowledge
Counsel
Fortitude
Piety
Fear of the Lord

Fruits of the Holy Spirit

Charity
Joy
Peace
Patience
Benignity
Goodness
Long-suffering
Mildness
Faith
Modesty
Continency
Chastity

Did You Know...

...the Archbishop consecrates all of the sacred chrism for the whole Archdiocese at the Sacred Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday?

...you can only receive the Sacrament of Confirmation once in your life?

...In the Eastern Churches, Confirmation is celebrated immediately after Baptism?

...The Rite of Confirmation used to include a small slap to your face by the Bishop to signify that you will have to fight for Christ?