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PART TWO

The Sacrament of Confirmation



PART TWO

The Sacrament of Confirmation

“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.” These words are found in the Nicene Creed, which we profess (say with certainty) every Sunday at Mass. This part of the Creed contains an ancient title of the Holy Spirit, “Lord and Giver of Life.” The description “Lord and Giver of Life” reveals two very important things about the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Is Lord

By calling the Holy Spirit “Lord,” we are saying that the Holy Spirit is God. As Christians, we accept the revelation of God as Trinity: three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—who are one God. Our Catholic faith tells us that the three Persons are equal in every way and that they are so completely one that whenever one divine Person acts, the other two do, too. The three Persons of the Trinity have always existed, and will live forever.

Holy is the Father!
Holy is the Son!
Holy is the Spirit!

The Holy Spirit Is Giver of Life

By calling the Holy Spirit “Giver of Life,” we are describing the role of the Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation and in the other sac-

Name the "communities" and social circles of your life.

How does being a Catholic follower of Jesus influence your participation in the life of each community or group you are a part of? Circle the one where that influence seems least powerful.

raments. What life does the Holy Spirit give? This life is *grace*—a sharing in the very life (or “nature”) of God (see 2 Pet. 1:4).

Referring to the Spirit, Jesus once said, “The wind blows where it wishes.” The Holy Spirit gives grace as he chooses, not only through the sacraments. But the Holy Spirit gives life in *abundance* through the seven sacraments. The sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist—“lay the *foundations* of every Christian life.”

Confirmation, a Sacrament of Christian Initiation

“To initiate” usually means to introduce or to lead in, but it can also mean to set into motion. The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist initiate us into the Christian community, the Body of Christ. By receiving these sacraments we fully take our place as members of the Church. These sacraments set into motion the Christian’s lifelong journey toward being more like Jesus. “The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.”*

An early Church writer explained: “The body is washed, that the soul may be cleansed; the body is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; the body is signed, that the soul too may be fortified; the body is overshadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul may be en-

How is God the Father “Giver of Life”? How is God the Son, Jesus, “Giver of Life”?



1212



Jn. 3:8



1212

Washing and anointing refer to Baptism—both water and oil are used in the Rite of Baptism. Signing

*CCC 1212, quoting Paul VI, *apostolic constitution, Divinae Consortium Naturae*: AAS n. 63 (1971) 657; cf. RCIA Introduction 1-2.

lightened by the Spirit; the body is fed on the Body and Blood of Christ, that the soul may be richly nourished by God.”

The Effects and Purpose of Confirmation

Earlier, we touched on the meaning of one of the Holy Spirit's titles, “Lord and Giver of Life.” We know that the gift of Confirmation is the Spirit, and that the Spirit gives life. When the Holy Spirit gives new life to even one person, the whole Church is built up!

The Spirit brings about a spiritual transformation, bringing the person to share *more deeply* in the grace received at Baptism. The sacrament of Confirmation strengthens the person and binds him or her *more closely* to the three Persons of the Trinity and to the Church. Christ becomes *more “visible”* through the person who is confirmed. The Christian then witnesses to Christ, showing and telling the world about the truth and beauty of the life and message of Jesus. The confirmed Catholic is readied to stand up for the Catholic faith when need arises, and to give an explanation of Church teachings to those who ask.

The Character of Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation can be received only once. When a person has been signed, or anointed by the bishop, he or she has been “sealed.” A seal indicates ownership or belonging; it may also be a sign of authenticity.

By the seal or “character” of Confirmation, one is marked out forever as an authentic witness to Jesus Christ, and a sharer in his priest-

and the laying on of hands refer to Confirmation. Feeding on the Body and Blood of Christ refers to the Eucharist.

Even though Confirmation is usually given by a bishop, the sacrament is so important that Church law authorizes priests to confirm any baptized Catholic—even a tiny child—in danger of death.



1 Pet.
3:15-16

Initials, logos and even the holograms on credit cards and driver's licenses are modern examples of seals.

Do your friends know that you are a Catholic? If yes, how can they tell? If no, how come? Do you witness to your belief in Jesus, both in words about him and in choices that match the Commandments and Beatitudes? If no (or "not really"), name the things that keep you from living your faith openly. Circle one of those obstacles and begin to ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome its influence in your life.



hood. Because of this, every prayer and every deed done in grace takes on a new depth. Even seemingly ordinary acts of service or uprightness become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." When a confirmed Catholic participates in the Mass, the "spiritual sacrifices" of his or her life are taken up into the one sacrifice of Jesus and brought before the Father as Christ's.

Two other sacraments also confer a character on the soul: Baptism and Holy Orders. These are the only other sacraments whose rites include chrism. Since these sacraments have lasting effects, none of them can ever be undone or repeated. The character remains forever, keeping the person open to grace and growth in God. It serves as a "promise and guarantee of divine protection" and as a commissioning to Christian worship and service.

Strengthened by the Spirit

Fortitude, or spiritual strength, is the most clearly recognizable effect of the sacrament of Confirmation. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386), an early bishop, understood Confirmation as filling one with strength, which is usually considered the sacramental grace of Confirmation. He wrote: "After your holy Baptism and sacramental anointing [Confirmation], put on the armor of the Holy Spirit, confront the power of the enemy, and reduce it saying: 'I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.'"

"Confronting the power of the enemy" is not a matter of violence. There are important non-violent struggles that confirmed Christians can and should wage. Some of those may be



*1 Pet. 2:5;
Rom. 12:1-2*



1121

"Sacramental grace" means the particular gift of God that characterizes a sacrament.

Do you ever feel the need for fortitude? When?



*See Phil.
4:13*

very close at hand, such as the effort against sin. Grace, our sharing in God's life, is not fragile but it can be extinguished. Mortal sin (the knowing, deliberate choice of something seriously wrong—or the deliberate avoidance of a serious obligation) is a rejection of God's life. It not only harms the one who commits it: it affects the whole Church. Even less serious (venial) sin can weaken our friendship with and faithfulness to God and the Church. By joining you more closely to God and the Church, Confirmation can strengthen you against the causes of sin. Confirmation can also be the starting point of a vigorous spiritual life—a life in God that never stops growing!

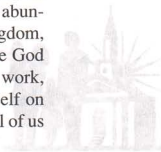
The strength of Confirmation makes it possible to live as Christ's true disciple and witness: forming and obeying a Christian conscience and growing in the spirit of the beatitudes and in virtue. "Grace" and "salvation" involve the whole person. That is why a person transformed by grace can be such an influence in transforming situations of injustice, need, poverty, or alienation. In the lives of many dedicated Catholics, the sacramental grace of fortitude takes the form of perseverance in the service of charity and justice.

The Spirit has been working within you since Baptism, transforming you. In Confirmation, that same divine Spirit will give you spiritual life, light and strength in greater abundance so that you can work for the kingdom, transforming the earth into a place where God can be "seen" as Lord. The harder you work, the more you will need to nourish yourself on the Eucharist, which Jesus has given to all of us

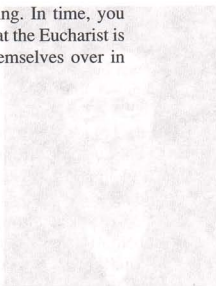
The Church is authorized by Christ to forgive any and all sin, no matter how serious or repulsive. Through the sacrament of Penance, received with sincere repentance, sin is forgiven and grace, if lost through mortal sin, is restored. The sinner "comes back to life" and the angels of God rejoice.



*Lk. 15
(the whole
chapter!)*



to sustain us—to keep us going. In time, you may discover the real truth: that the Eucharist is the reason Christians give themselves over in service.





Witness

Blessed Edel Quinn

1907-1944

“What boundless trust we should have in God’s love....”

Athletic and upbeat, deeply loved by family and friends, at age 20 Edel Quinn of Ireland had already received a proposal of marriage (from her boss!) and been given a leadership role in a Catholic organization. Her daily routine—Mass and rosary before work; lunch hour spent visiting the sick or those who had fallen away from the Church—revealed something of her inner life. When tuberculosis prevented her from following her heart’s dream of consecrating herself to God as a Poor Clare nun, Edel found another way to give her life to the Lord.

Profoundly committed to the newly-founded Legion of Mary, Edel gave her full two weeks’ vacation time over to its mission in Wales, trying to lay the groundwork for the Legion outside of its native Ireland. The trip was exhausting, but Edel came home with surprising energy and even offered to move to England, so that the evangelizing work of the Legion of Mary could take root there. At that very time, a Legion of Mary missionary in Africa wrote a plea for help in bringing the Gospel across that enormous continent. For Edel Quinn, it was the voice

PART THREE

of God, pointing out her true vocation: she would leave everything—her family, her friends and her country—and follow Jesus as a lay apostle.

The challenges were enormous. In Nairobi (which became Edel's home base), the Catholics were divided by ethnic groups and social classes. Even Church leaders were politely skeptical about the work Edel had come to launch: how did she expect people to work *together*—even to spread the Gospel?

But within two weeks, Edel had already formed a small group—the beginnings of the Legion of Mary in Nairobi. They visited the sick and encouraged fellow Christians to actively live the Gospel. Soon another group was formed. Edel began hitching rides on open trucks, visiting villages across Kenya, and inviting the Catholics to become evangelizers in their own region. She spoke of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the one who first gave Jesus to others: the members of the Legion of Mary carried out the same mission when they brought the Gospel to those who had forgotten its message—or had never heard it.

Edel's missionary drive made her creative and confident. She took incredible risks to travel to out-of-the-way places, or to arrive in time for a Legion of Mary gathering or prayer service. She seemed unstoppable. Six months after her arrival in Nairobi, a service of consecration was held for the new Legion of Mary members. An African choir provided the music; the sermon was bilingual (Swahili and English); the prayer of self-offering was made in three different languages. Already the "impossible" had been achieved.

Edel's active service in East Africa lasted just under eight years. She died in 1944, at age 36, her strength consumed by the gift she had made of herself to Jesus and his Church.