

# Confirmation

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### Guide Six

By Debbie Repp

## The Sacrament of the Holy Spirit

Because the sacrament of confirmation focuses on the special presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the life of the community, this lesson attempts to review what the Church teaches concerning the Holy Spirit. The first part of the lesson examines excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which help us to better understand the nature and role of the Holy Spirit. The second part takes a look at how the Holy Spirit is described in sacred Scripture. Special emphasis is placed on the Hebrew word *RUAH*, which describes the life-giving Spirit of God as “breath.” Finally, **Home-work for the Family** draws the candidates’ attention to instances *in their everyday lives* in which the action of the Holy Spirit is truly evident.



## Objectives

1. Study the Church’s teaching regarding the Holy Spirit by examining excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
2. Review the effects of the sacrament of confirmation through the action of the Holy Spirit as described by the *Catechism*.
3. Through a brief study of relevant passages from Scripture, examine the influence and activity of the Holy Spirit since God’s creation of the world.
4. Through this same study of the *Catechism* and sacred Scripture, better understand the Church’s great reverence for the Holy Spirit.
5. Help the candidates recognize the work and influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives today.

## Self-Preparation

Note: The Activity offers an opportunity for students interested in artwork to do some simple drawing or painting. Ask the candidates who enjoy art to have materials such as pencils, colored pencils, water colors, or even markers with them. They will also need artist-quality white paper. Those who prefer *not* to draw will need writing paper. All the candidates, as usual, should have their spiritual journals.

The *Catechism* tells us that through the sacrament of confirmation, we “are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit” (#1285). Take a few moments to reflect on a time when you believe *you* were strengthened by the power of the Spirit. Perhaps you were able to remain positive and faith-

filled when you were facing the death of a loved one. Perhaps, through faith and prayer, you were able to effectively deal with a troubled child or other family crisis. Recall how your faith in God allowed the Holy Spirit to empower you with a special strength.

The candidates will be asked to do a similar exercise in **Home-work for the Family**. At that time, it might prove helpful if you share examples of the activity and influences of the Holy Spirit from your own life.

## Opening Prayer

Light the group candle. Prayerfully read Luke 4:14-21, a passage that will be referred to again later in the lesson. Luke describes how Jesus himself was anointed by the Holy Spirit and was enriched with a special strength to begin his public ministry. In a sense, this was Jesus' "confirmation" — at this time, "sealed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit," he chooses to become fully immersed in the work of God.

# Getting Started

Ask the candidates to look at the illustration of the young man "strengthening" his body by lifting weights. Ask the students to describe why it is important to keep our bodies strong and fit. What happens when we neglect or mistreat our bodies? If our bodies hurt, are we affected mentally, emotionally and sometimes even spiritually? In the same way, what happens if we neglect or fail to nourish our spiritual selves? How is the "whole person" affected by an ailing spirit? Ask the candidates if they have ever known anyone whose spirit had been lost or destroyed because of severe neglect or abuse. (If you need an example, describe the slow self-destruction of a person dependent on alcohol or other drugs. The "spirit" of the addict is neglected and eventually destroyed because he or she devotes his or her entire being to the relentless and uncontrollable pursuit of the addictive substance.)

Page two of the student hand-out is extremely important and must be studied almost sentence by sentence. Beginning with the second paragraph, it might be best to have students take turns reading individual sentences. Each sentence contains one or more excerpts from the *Catechism*. Some of these excerpts have tremendous implications. For example, the *Catechism* states that the Holy Spirit lies "at the origin of the being and life of every creature" (#703). What powerful words! The Holy Spirit is essential to life itself! It is no wonder that

**In the sacrament of** confirmation, special emphasis is placed on the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the life of the community. It is important for us, therefore, to review what the Church treasures concerning the Holy Spirit.

Our *Catechism* has much to teach regarding the power of the Spirit. We learn that the Holy Spirit animates all creation, being "at the origin of the being and life of every creature" (CCC #30). The Spirit awakens our faith, enables communication with Christ (CCC #683-684), helps us to grow in spiritual freedom (#1742), is the master and source of prayer (#741, 2652), and is the "principal author" of holy Scripture (#304). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God is revealed to us, as is the mystery of the Trinity (CCC #244, 684, 687). The Church, in fact, regards the Holy Spirit as the source of all holiness (CCC #746).

Regarding our Church communities, the *Catechism* teaches that the Spirit is essential in unifying the Church (#813) and is responsible for directing and supporting the Church (#747, 748). The

Church is the temple, the very dwelling place, of the Spirit (CCC #797-801).

The Holy Spirit is also a generous bearer of gifts (CCC #200). One of the great benefits of receiving the sacrament of confirmation is that it "increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us" (CCC #1303). We will take a closer look at the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in the next lesson. For now, let's examine what happens when we are "sealed by the Gift of the Holy Spirit" during confirmation.

### 1303 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.

**1304** 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 [or her] with power from on high so that he [or she] may be his witness.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* firmly states that confirmation is a celebration of "Christian mystery" in which those being confirmed receive "the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost" (#1302). But once we receive this magnificent gift, we assume great responsibility, as did the apostles before us. Carefully read the excerpts from the *Catechism* concerning the effects of confirmation. Hopefully, you will get a better idea of why confirmation is considered the *active* part of the initiation process.



## Notes



**The Catholic Church's** tremendous reverence for the Holy Spirit is rooted in sacred Scripture. The authors of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, were aware of the Spirit's indescribable creative power, and they refer to this power in the first passage of

Scripture: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Gn 1:1-2).

In the Hebrew vocabulary, there is one word, *RUAH*, which means "wind," "breath," and "spirit." The different English translations vary mainly in reference to how they interpret the word *RUAH*, but

in all translations, this Scripture verse tells us that the creative power of the Holy Spirit was *present and active at the beginning of creation*.

The word *RUAH* again appears in Genesis 2:7: "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the *breath* of life; and the man became a living being." The spirit of God is as close to us as our very own breath! God indeed made us in God's own image and likeness — and then breathed into us *the divine life and spirit!*

The Spirit that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation also hovered over Jesus, and remained his inspiration throughout his public life. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us:

**RUAH**

**"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 4:18-19**



JESUS does not send us out into the world to do HIS work alone. In confirmation, we are sealed with the *same Holy Spirit*. In confirmation, we

celebrate our acceptance of the gift of the Spirit of Jesus and we commit ourselves to become positive, active members of his Church.

the Hebrew writers use the word *RUAH* — meaning something like "breath" — to describe the "indescribable" Spirit. Yet, the word "breath" helps us to understand how essential the Spirit is to our lives.

The first set of excerpts describes the nature and role of the Holy Spirit, "the source of all holiness." The second set of excerpts describes the Spirit's relationship to the Church. Again, study this paragraph sentence by sentence. The next set of excerpts describes the Holy Spirit's activity during the sacrament of confirmation. This includes the effects of the

sacrament (#1303, 1304) which are highlighted in the middle of page two. Once again, attention should be given to each statement. Make sure the candidates feel free to ask questions or request clarification of any statement.

When you have finished reading and discussing page two, conclude by emphasizing that the Holy Spirit moves us toward positive action and involvement in our families, our faith communities, and our world — that we "may be his witness."

Page three of the student hand-out is a brief review of how the Holy Spirit is described by the inspired authors of sacred Scripture. The candidates may take turns reading this page aloud. Points to emphasize include:

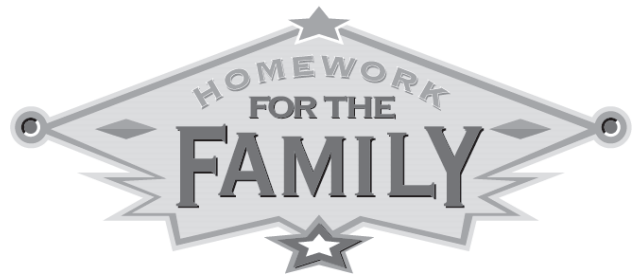
- Scripture refers to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit in both the Old and the New Testaments. In fact, reference is made to the Spirit in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament.

- Hebrew authors use the word *RUAH* which means something like "wind," "breath," or "spirit." Though we have no word to accurately describe the nature of the Holy Spirit, the inspired authors of Scripture make it clear that the Spirit is God's *creative* power ("the breath of life") and the source of all holiness.
- The *same* Spirit that hovered over Jesus, hovers over us and empowers us with his holy gifts. Like the apostles, we are not sent out into the world alone.

## Activity: *RUAH*

This is an opportunity for the candidates to be creative. Ask them to imagine the Holy Spirit. Biblical images like wind or breath may come to mind. So may liturgical symbols such as fire and water. Some candidates may come up with a completely new way of describing "creative power" or "source of all holiness." There are no right or wrong answers in this activity. An image of the Holy Spirit may be very complex for some students, while quite simple for others.

After the candidates have had a few quiet moments to reflect on the meaningful images of the Holy Spirit, ask them to put their thoughts down on paper. This may be done in several different ways, depending on the individual student's interests and talents. Those who love to draw might like to sketch and/or paint a visual image. This artwork could possibly make a beautiful cover for their spiritual journals. Those who enjoy writing poetry should be encouraged to write a short poem, possibly in the form of a haiku. A piece of poetry transferred on to an attractive paper background or



Read through the directions of this assignment before concluding the lesson. Explain that while the **Activity** of this lesson asked the candidates to reflect on *images* of the Holy Spirit, this portion asks them to focus on the *action* of the Holy Spirit — particularly in their own lives. Like the previous activity, this should be a deeply personal account and again there are no correct answers.

This would be a good opportunity for you, as leader and catechist, to give examples of how you have witnessed the Spirit at work in your own life. (Recall the ideas you came up with during **Self-Preparation**.) The directions for this assignment are fairly straightforward and should not require much explanation, but give additional examples if necessary.

Finally, ask the candidates to become more aware of the subtle ways in which the Holy Spirit guides, influences, and affects their lives in the weeks ahead.

displayed within a decorative border would also serve well as a cover for a candidate's journal. A music lover might describe the Spirit using a favorite piece of instrumental music, and a musician might even be able to compose a short melody for the flute, recorder, or piano. These last two suggestions will probably have to be done outside of the classroom and brought in during a later lesson. As leader, judge how complicated you would like this activity to be based on your time and resources. Make every attempt to allow an opportunity for the candidates to be creative.

## Closing Prayer

Read aloud prayerfully to the class:

*Dear Lord, today we reflected on the divine action of your Holy Spirit. May we become keenly aware of the Spirit's gentle guidance and subtle influence by taking time to be quiet, to be still. Sometimes our lives become so busy, so noisy and so anxiety-filled that we lose all awareness of the Spirit who dwells within our hearts. Lord, teach us to follow the gentle urging of your Spirit who strengthens us for our great journey and is the source of all holiness. Amen*

Silently extinguish the candle and dismiss the candidates.



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