

THE SACRAMENT OF

Confirmation

A COMPLETE PREPARATION COURSE
and Activities with Parents & Sponsors



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“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. (Mk 10:15-16)

THE SACRAMENT OF *Confirmation* Chapter 1 GOD REVEALS HIMSELF TO MAN

INTRODUCTION

*We naturally want to be happy;
true and lasting happiness is found
only in God.*

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. (CCC 27)

Deep down, we all desire to know God; we were created for this. Whether we realize it or not, we want to know who God is and what he is like. We also wonder about the meaning or purpose of our lives. We are created with a desire to know the truth about who we are and why we are alive.

All of us search for the answers to these mysteries. Some of us look to various religions and philosophies, trying to discover the key to the meaning of existence. Others come up with their own conclusions based on their life experiences apart from religion.

Do you ever want something, get it, and then still feel unsatisfied? This happens to all of us, because we cannot find complete, full happiness here on earth.

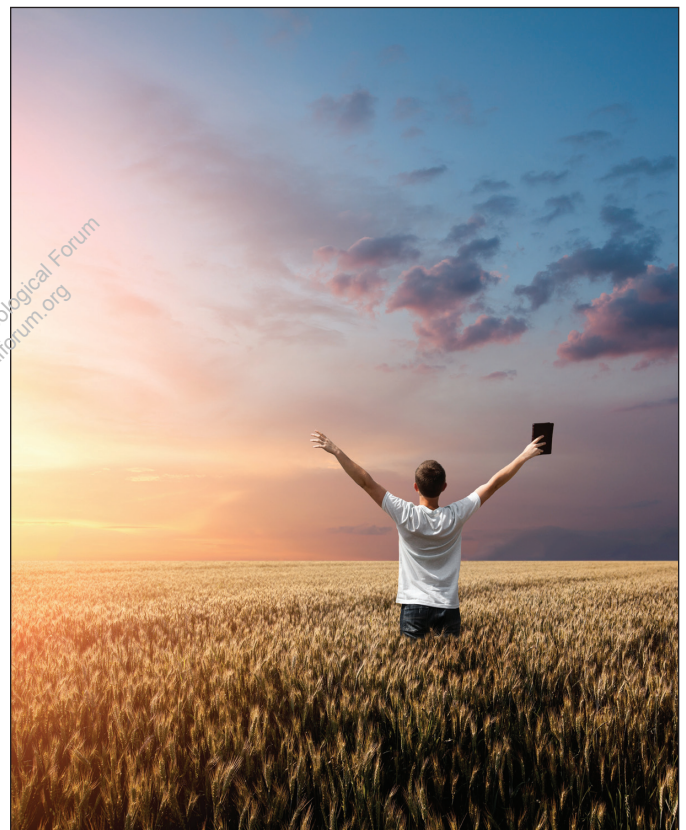
So we are restless beings. The desire to be happy is a natural desire, and it comes from God himself. Our desire for perfect happiness is a desire for God, and God alone can satisfy us. *God alone can satisfy you.* As St. Augustine famously wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you."

It may amaze you to learn that just as you have an innate desire for God, God deeply desires you, too. He wants to enter into a personal relationship with you. He is always actively seeking you out, even

when you hide from him or ignore him. But God will not force himself upon you. Instead he will invite you to freely choose a friendship with him, a friendship which will lead to perfect happiness with him forever in heaven.

After reading this chapter, you will be able to answer these questions:

- ✦ What is natural revelation?
- ✦ What is supernatural Revelation?
- ✦ What is the Deposit of Faith?
- ✦ What is the Magisterium?



Our desire for perfect happiness is a desire for God.

ST. AUGUSTINE, Convert and Teacher

St. Augustine is one of the greatest philosophers and theologians of the Church. However, before he was a bishop, priest, or even a Christian, he was a brilliant, highly educated man who refused to seek God. Instead, he tried to fulfill his desire for happiness with many worldly things.

Augustine was born in 354, and his mother, St. Monica, prayed continuously for her son. Eventually, when Augustine was in his 30's, he experienced a religious conversion and embraced Christianity. Before long, he was appointed Bishop of Hippo, a diocese in North Africa. His writings and influence helped to develop our understanding of Original Sin, the Sacraments, the nature of the Church, and many other teachings of the faith.

St. Augustine is well known for his book *Confessions*, which is his spiritual autobiography and describes his search for God, his attraction to sin, and his pursuit of true happiness in God. It is still considered one of the greatest spiritual classics of all time. In this book, St. Augustine famously writes, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you," meaning that God made us to be fulfilled only by loving him, and if we try to find fulfillment anywhere else, we will not be satisfied.



The Conversion of St. Augustine by Fra Angelico.
Augustine's mother, St. Monica, prayed continuously for her son who had refused to seek God.

GOD RESPONDS TO OUR SEARCH FOR HIM

God wants us to find him, so he reveals himself to us in both natural and supernatural ways.

God wants us to know that he exists and that he loves each of us. So, since the creation of the world, he has been giving us ways to find out about him. This is called "Revelation"—God revealing himself to us. Revelation comes to us in two different ways: through creation (natural revelation) and through his direct action in the world (supernatural Revelation).

Natural revelation refers to what we can know about God through human **reason** by looking at the world around us. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul goes as far as to say that the law of God is "written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15). This is true even of those unaware of having ever encountered God.

From the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. (Wis 13:5)

Scripture tells us that every person, no matter his or her background, is capable of coming to know God. Why? Because God reveals his presence even in nature. In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul writes of nonbelievers:

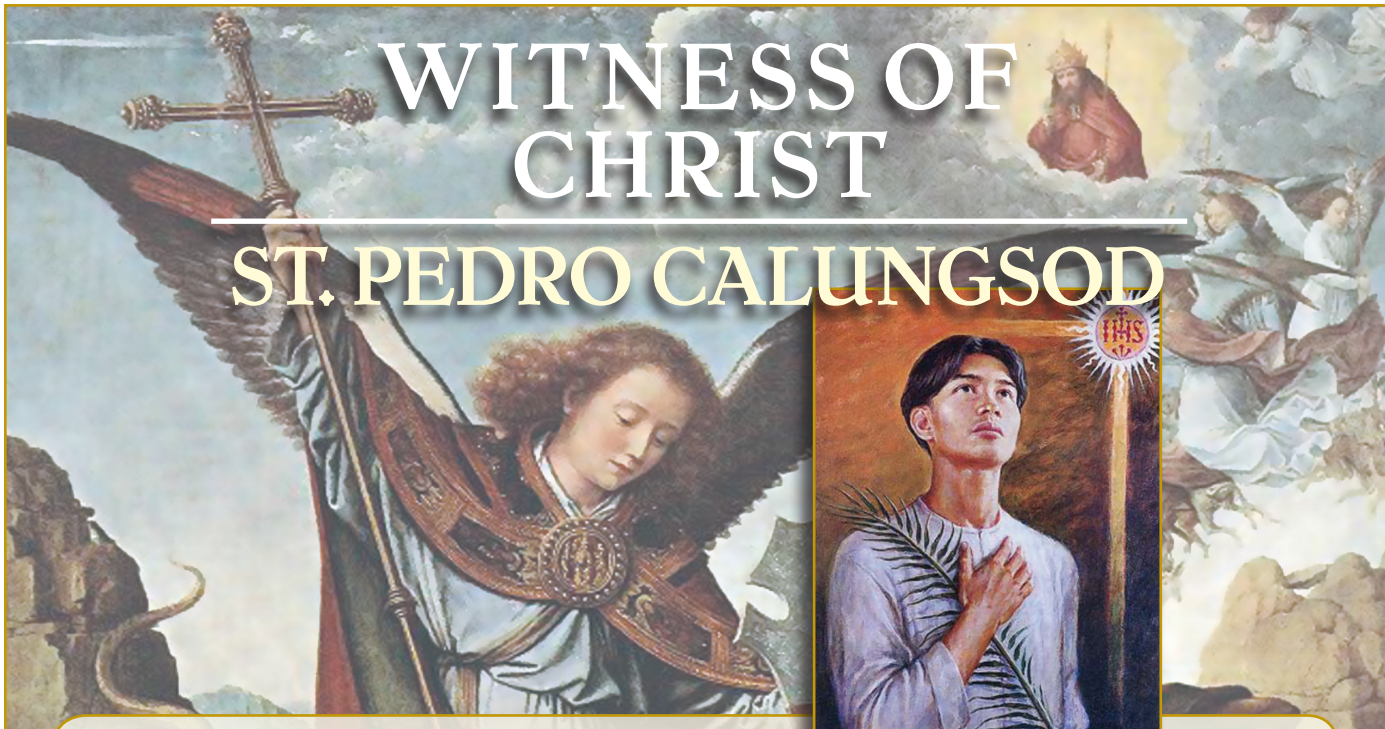
What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. (Rom 1:19-20)

St. Paul explains here that we can come to know God through the use of reason simply by observing his creation. The entire created universe reveals that there is a God. After all, where there is creation, there must be a Creator. Creation also reveals something about the nature of God, particularly his infinite power and goodness.

When he listens to the message of creation and to the voice of conscience, man can arrive at certainty about the existence of God, the cause... of everything. (CCC 46)

WITNESS OF CHRIST

ST. PEDRO CALUNGSOD



Pedro Calungsod was a Filipino teenager who lived in the seventeenth century and was devoted to the Church and the Sacraments.

In 1668, when he was just 14 years old, Pedro became a missionary to the Pacific island of Guam. Pedro accompanied the missionary priest Blessed Diego San Vitores and immediately set about teaching the Catechism to the people of Guam.

The mission was soon blessed with many converts to the Catholic faith; however, the missionaries did face opposition. The local medicine men disliked the missionaries and began to circulate rumors that the priests were poisoning babies through the Sacrament of Baptism. A few of the babies who had been baptized had died, and so the medicine men were able to convince a number of the islanders to turn against the missionaries.

One morning Father Diego and Pedro traveled to one of the villages. They had received news that one of the women had just given birth to a baby girl, and Father Diego and Pedro wished to baptize the baby. However, when they arrived, the child's father, Matapang, refused to allow his daughter to be baptized.

Father Diego and Pedro gathered some of the other villagers together and began to teach the

truths of the faith. During this time Matapang went out to find someone to help him kill the missionaries. While he was away, his wife asked the missionaries to baptize their daughter. Father Diego consented and performed the Sacrament.

When Matapang learned that his daughter had been baptized, he attacked Father Diego with a spear. The witnesses reported that Pedro could have gotten away, but he stayed and tried to protect Father Diego. As a result, Pedro was struck in the chest with the spear. One of the other men with Matapang charged at Pedro and hit him in the head with a machete, killing him immediately. Father Diego was then killed. Rocks were tied to their feet and their bodies were thrown into the sea, never to be found.

It has been said that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," meaning that their witness inspires more and more people to become Catholic. Pedro Calungsod's passion for Christ and his eventual martyrdom became one of the seeds that helped to make the Catholic faith grow and spread to subsequent generations.

In March 2000, St. John Paul II beatified Pedro Calungsod, and, in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI canonized him. St. Pedro Calungsod is the patron saint of altar servers, Filipino youth, and the island of Guam.

SEALED IN THE SPIRIT

Your Confirmation name is significant, so choose it thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Congratulations! By beginning your preparation and taking this class, you can officially be considered a confirmand, or in other words a candidate for the Sacrament of Confirmation. (If you are not yet baptized and are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Baptism as well, then you are a catechumen.) You are a candidate because by wanting to be confirmed, you are seeking full initiation into the Catholic Church.

This section contains a quick history lesson. It should give you an appreciation for the history of the practice of Confirmation and help you understand why it is celebrated differently in some dioceses.

In the early Christian communities, what we now call the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion were all given in the same liturgical celebration, even to infants. A person who was ready to be initiated into the Church was baptized by the local priest, deacon, or by the bishop himself; received the Eucharist in Holy Communion from the local priest or the bishop; and then was anointed with oil by the bishop to “confirm” his or her initiation into the Church.

As the Church grew in membership and spread to more remote areas, it became impractical for the bishop to attend all the initiations of new Christians. So, as the practice developed in Western Europe and most of North Africa, the local priests continued to administer Baptism and the Eucharist, but the bishop would confirm the new Christians at a later date. It would often be several years before the bishop could visit and “catch up” on Confirmations. Yet the Church felt it was important to maintain the sense of union with the whole Church that comes from receiving the bishop’s anointing. So even today in the Western Church, Confirmation is ordinarily given at a separate time, so that the bishop may administer it.

The faithful in the Eastern Churches, in locations such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and India, however, arrived at a different practice. The

local priest, not the bishop, would administer the three Sacraments of Initiation in a single liturgical celebration. The sense of union with the whole Church came from the priest using the holy oils that were blessed by the bishop.

Both practices reflect the centuries-old traditions of the Church and faithfully express the teaching of the Church. The Magisterium of the Church does not teach that either practice is better than the other.

The practice today in the Western Church, which includes the United States, is to offer Confirmation to baptized Christians who at least have acquired the use of reason. This is usually considered to be the age of seven. However, Confirmation should be administered to any baptized Christian who wants or would have wanted to receive it when there is a danger of death, regardless of his or her age.

The bishops of the United States have determined that the Sacrament be celebrated between the ages of seven and about sixteen. Each local bishop may decide when Confirmation should be received in his own diocese.

You are in this preparation program because your bishop and parish priest believe that you are ready for it. And so do you, or else you wouldn’t be reading this. As we continue through this book, make an earnest effort to get all you can out of your preparation so that you may be fully prepared when the big day comes and the bishop anoints your head, calls you by your chosen patron saint’s name, and says, “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”



“Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

YOU AND YOUR PARENTS

The importance of attending Mass, praying, and participating in discussions.

In the introductory chapter we explained that your parents will play a vital role in your preparation for Confirmation. There's a very good reason for that: your parents love you, and they are responsible for your upbringing. They serve as your primary role models, and they are your first teachers, especially in the Catholic faith. Your parents ought to be very active in your religious education and sacramental preparation. As the *Catechism* teaches,

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. (CCC 2223)

Because of this grave responsibility, your parents should expect to attend Sunday Mass with you and your siblings as a family, pray with you and for you, and discuss with you the things you are learning in this book as you prepare for Confirmation.

In addition to making sure that you attend every preparation class and activity yourself, they should seek to participate in the required retreats, service work, meetings, information classes, or other events that your Confirmation preparation may require.

Sometimes parents feel too busy or overwhelmed with work, taking care of a sick relative, household responsibilities, or other duties. As much as they might want to, they may not believe that they have the time to discuss what you are learning in your Confirmation preparation. Try to find a way to get them involved in discussions anyway. Perhaps you can talk about it while preparing dinner, sitting down to eat, or washing the dishes together afterwards; while driving to practice or rehearsal; while working out together in the morning; while fixing the car together; or while getting ready for Mass on Sunday. By taking the initiative you can make it easier for them. You and your parents will probably find that you have a lot of ideas and experiences to share with

one another that can enrich you all. Besides, when they see that preparing for Confirmation is important to you, they might find more time and energy to get more involved themselves.

Here are some ideas for questions that might help you open a discussion with your parents:

1. When did you first start teaching me about God?
2. When did you learn the meaning of being a true Christian?
3. Do you remember the first time that you took me to Mass?
4. When did I begin to become curious about the Catholic faith?
5. Have you ever struggled with having faith in God? (Do not be surprised if they have struggled with faith and doubt. Most people have.)
6. What did you do to overcome your struggle with faith?
7. Why do you go to Mass?



Talk to your parents about your Confirmation preparation during dinner or while helping with the dishes. By taking the initiative you can make it easier for them in their busy day.

YOU AND YOUR SPONSOR

A sponsor can help you choose your Confirmation name.

Your Confirmation sponsor is intended to be your mentor in the Catholic faith. He or she is a source of encouragement and support as you prepare to approach the Sacrament and also should serve as a good role model as you continue to live in the world as a faithful Catholic. That mentoring role does not end the day you will be confirmed! That is why it is important to have a sponsor who seriously practices the faith as their most important quality. He or she will assume the responsibility to be your mentor in matters concerning your faith if your parents cannot do this.

The practice of having a Confirmation sponsor is rooted in the early Church. In the first centuries of Christianity, as we read earlier, the Sacraments of Christian Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—were administered together to the new convert. Each convert had to have a sponsor in order to be received into the Church. The sponsor served as a guide and friend as the catechumen went through the preparation process, called the **catechumenate**. The sponsor would also vouch for the sincerity of the catechumen and would present him or her to the community for acceptance.

The sponsor of the catechumen, in effect, filled what today is often regarded as two roles in the Western Church: *godparent* at Baptism and *sponsor* at Confirmation. His or her word as to the sincerity and readiness of the catechumen was especially important in the early centuries of Christianity because the Church frequently experienced violent persecution, so the Mass and the Sacraments were often celebrated in secret. The sponsor's word assured everyone that the catechumen was not a spy or infiltrator helping the persecuting authorities who wished to arrest the ministers and the faithful, convert them by force, or even kill them.

Thankfully in most of the world today, Christians are not actively persecuted in that manner. The sponsor's role, however, is not merely symbolic, but still very practical. As you will be doing with your parents

throughout this course, you should engage in prayer and discussions with your sponsor. If you can, have your sponsor join your family for Sunday Mass. Discuss what you are learning and other matters of faith with him or her. Try to discuss as much as you can in person, but if your sponsor lives far away, be sure to communicate with them frequently by phone, or email and text messages. Establish this communication early in your preparation process. Here are some ideas for questions that might help you open a discussion with your sponsor:

1. Do you read the Bible often? If so, when? What is your favorite book or story of the Bible, and why? Share about your own favorite book or story and your own reasons.
2. How do you prepare for Sunday Mass?
3. How do you use the Bible to assist your personal prayer? Share how you have incorporated or would like to incorporate Scripture into your own prayer.
4. Can you teach me how to use the Bible in my prayer?



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