

The Theological Basis of Confirmation

Confirmation is the last Sacrament of initiation. Looking at Divine Revelation, we see that the Sacrament of Confirmation is intimately linked with the Sacrament of Baptism (one can certainly say that every sacrament is linked with Baptism).

The Rite of Confirmation is our starting point for understanding the theology of Confirmation, because as the Church prays, so she believes. The Rite of Confirmation is made up of three different parts, and these elements will help us see the theology of the Sacrament:

a. **The Renewal of Baptismal Promises:** The candidate pledges for him/herself before the Church that he/she accepts the beliefs of the Church. It is a pledge that is done freely and publicly. They also pledge that they are willing to respond on their own to what was given to them as infants.

b. **Laying on of Hands:** Next, the bishop, the successor of the Apostles, raises his hands over the candidate and prays for a full release of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as stated in Isaiah 11:2-3.

c. **Anointing with Chrism:** The last and most essential element of the Rite is the anointing with Chrism oil. This is an ancient rite of strengthening, that originated in Old Testament times.

In the **Code of Canon Law**, canon 879, we read that Confirmation empowers the Christian to be witness for the Faith. **The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** par. #1285 states that Confirmation unites us with Baptism and empowers the baptized to become true witness for Christ.

Simply put, in Baptism the individual becomes a child of God, being reborn in Christ through the Holy Spirit by water into the family of God: Baptism makes us children of God. Confirmation gives the child of God the ability to become an adult Christian, giving the individual a sort of spiritual 'hormone' to become an adult Christian. Being an adult Christian has little to do with age, but rather with one's ability to commit to and pass on the Faith. Thus, even a child (beyond the age of reason) can be an adult in the Faith (given God's grace and their faith response). Conversely, an adult who has received Confirmation can choose to deny his/her faith and not use the grace received at Confirmation. Every Confirmed Catholic does have a choice to make, but only after God has first given that person the grace of spiritual adulthood.

The CCC, #1309-1310, says that Confirmation preparation should provide the candidate with

- Intimate union with Christ,
- Familiarity with the Holy Spirit,
- A sense of belonging to the Church, and
- Intense prayer.

Teens are honestly searching for a higher calling to follow.

Remember that all of us including our teens have literally been made to receive and follow the Gospel. All of these teens want answers to their deepest questions in life, and desire to live for something. They want a purpose, a cause, and have a desire to change the world for the good.

The role of the Confirmation Sponsor is to answer their questions, especially about vocation, service, identity, relationship, sexuality, all while creating a fun community where they feel comfortable simply 'hanging-out'. Teens want to know Jesus personally, not from a textbook, but from the witness of young adults and peers.

In his encyclical, '**On Catechesis in our Times**' (CT), **Pope John Paul II** tells us the key themes in adolescent catechesis, all of which underscore teens' search for a higher calling. John Paul II tells us that adolescence is, *"the age of deep questioning, of anguished or even frustrating searching, of certain mistrust of others and dangerous introspection, and the age sometimes of the first experiences of setbacks and disappointments."* (CT #38) Our response to these conditions is done through a catechesis that:

- Helps the adolescent re-examine his or her life;
- Helps the adolescent answer his or her great questions, including self-giving, belief, love and the means of expressing it constituted by sexuality;
- Helps the adolescent develop a relationship with Jesus Christ as Friend, Guide and Model, especially through reflection on His passion, death and Resurrection. (CT #38)

How To Prepare The Confirmation Candidate

- The goal of Confirmation preparation might not be what you think. Our preparation is not meant primarily to prepare the candidates for their moment with the bishop. Were this the case, we would be preparing them for 'Graduation' (a rite of passage) from the Church instead of 'Confirmation' (a moment of growth in our faith that leads to deeper conversion and discipleship). **The goal of the Confirmation preparation is to set an environment for High School teens to respond to Christ's basic invitation to follow Him.** 'Setting an environment' means that teens are invited, not forced, to make their decision to follow Jesus. There is no place for coercion or manipulation, but always freedom. This means that the teen may say 'no', but we must remember that even God will not force them to make decisions that they themselves do not want. On the other hand, we are charged to form the teens for life-long active participation in the Church, helping them form their identity in Christ as their dominant identity. The life in Christ must be portrayed as all-penetrating, that there is no part of our life from which Christ is exempt.
- So how do you set this environment? How are teens to be properly instructed in the Faith? It is done through the very gifts that Christ has given us: The Liturgy, the Faith, Personal Prayer and a living witness. In order to keep your candidate evangelized and help him or her remain in the Church as adults, we must teach them how these elements keep them committed to Jesus.

1. *Liturgy*

The most important element to set with your candidate is the liturgical element. Encourage your candidate to attend the sacraments of Sunday mass, regular confession and adoration. Check up on them throughout these next five months to see how he or she is doing in these areas. The candidate has chosen you as their sponsor; it is your role to ensure they are properly prepared for the sacrament of Confirmation this January.

2. *Instruction*

The next way to achieve your goal is through a dynamic and evangelistic presentation of Christ and how He influences our lives. It is important to remember that the presentation of the Faith must be evangelistic, giving your candidate the fundamental understanding of Christ, the Church, answering their basic questions on Catholicism, and helping them to make and keep a commitment to Christ and His Church. Have regular meetings with the candidate (in person is best, but over the phone is okay for long distance) and discuss issues of the Catholic Faith. If you are looking for a good starting point, ask him or about what they have learned in class recently. Each of the teens will be given the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a "Catholic Answers Bible", an apologetics book and a copy of "Pure Love" by Jason Evert; there will be plenty of material there to start from.

3. Prayer

Preparing your candidate for confirmation must include teaching the teen how to pray, not only by your example, but by giving him or her the resources that they need in order to develop that prayer life. Part of connecting them to Christ is helping the candidates develop their own devotional life. We have a perpetual adoration chapel here at Saints Peter and Paul. Encourage your candidate to take full advantage of it, especially during their confirmation preparation process.

4. Witness and Service

Finally, you will need to teach your candidate how to make their lives a witness to Christ. Perhaps share your own testimony about Christ's work in your life. Ask your candidate to share their thoughts or feelings from service they have done (from the required hours or additional experiences). Encourage your candidate to do additional works of mercy and service to the poor, with you if possible. This way, they will learn to be Christ to each other and see Christ in each other and will develop patterns of service to last a lifetime.