

29 THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION



Spirit of God,
You anoint me
with your gifts
and empower me
to use them.
Set your seal
upon me
and bless my words
and deeds
that all may know
I am your child
and your witness
to the world.

Amen

You might not realize it, but you use oil almost every day. How many ways can you think of? Many foods you eat are probably cooked with it. If you love French fries, they are likely cooked in oil. Soap has oil for cleaning. Oil in your conditioner keeps your hair soft. Lip balms heal your lips. Cars break down without oil. Bike chains need oil to keep moving. Did you ever put ointment on a cut? That's made with oil. Have you used perfume or cologne? That has oil too.

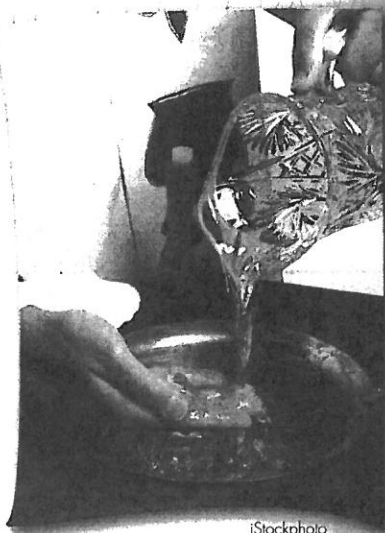
Oil is everywhere. We wouldn't live well without oil. It's essential for life. It's essential for the Church too.

Water and Oil

Do you ever use lotion or moisturizer after a shower? You know how it keeps your skin from becoming dry

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and stiff. Lotion seals in the moisture from the water. In a way, the Sacrament of Confirmation does the same thing. In this sacrament, a baptized person is anointed with a consecrated oil called Chrism and strengthened with the Holy Spirit.



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Did you know that you must be baptized before you are confirmed? The water of Baptism is the gateway to Confirmation and all other sacraments.

Confirmation is so closely tied to Baptism that it is almost impossible to speak about it without also talking about Baptism. This is because Confirmation adds to the gift of new life we received in Baptism. When we were baptized, we received the Holy Spirit. Confirmation is like getting an extra gift. It deepens and seals in the Gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive in Baptism. The oil used in Confirmation symbolizes the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit keeps us close to the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. It also gives us a stronger tie to the Church. It sends us out strengthened to carry on the Church's mission. Confirmation helps us put our faith into words and actions.

Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm. (Song of Songs 8:6, NRSV)

Stained for Life



THINK & ABOUT IT!

The title *Christ* means "anointed one." Jesus Christ is the anointed king chosen by the Father to save his people. When you were baptized, you took on a new identity as a Christian. The anointing with Chrism that you received strengthened you to do the work of Christ. What do you think you have been anointed to do? How do Baptism and Confirmation give you the strength to serve others?

Have you heard of people staining wood with oil? Perhaps you have furniture or flooring made of stained wood where you live. The oil protects the wood and brings out its unique grain. It also gives the wood an aged look.

Confirmation marks us in a way that is similar. Like Baptism, the Sacrament of Confirmation places a permanent mark on our souls that can never be taken away. (For this reason, Confirmation is celebrated only once in a lifetime.) It's the mark of God's chosen ones. This mark protects us from the power of evil. It also brings out our unique talents and gifts. It does this by blessing us with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are called to use our unique talents to serve the Church as full, maturing members of the Body of Christ. Just as its name implies, Confirmation confirms in us the faith that God planted there when he first called us before Baptism.

How do you use your God-given talents to serve the Church and other people?



**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good
news to the poor." (Luke 4:18)**

East and West

In the earliest centuries of the Church, the anointing with oil of the newly baptized was done by the bishop immediately following Baptism. But as the Church grew larger and as more people were being initiated, bishops couldn't be everywhere to baptize and anoint all the new Christians. Two different practices emerged as a result.

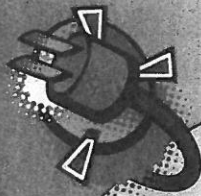
The Church in the West (that's the former western part of the Roman Empire) still wanted the bishop to confirm the newly baptized. This was because the West focused on the connection the bishops had to the Apostles of Jesus. Jesus commissioned the Apostles. They, themselves, commissioned new bishops. Those bishops ordained new bishops. Therefore, every bishop is directly connected in a long line to Jesus. Because of this connection, Western Churches delayed the Confirmation until a point in time when the bishop could do the anointing. This practice eventually led to the separation of Confirmation from Baptism by many years.

The Churches in the East (that's the former eastern part of the Roman Empire) also valued the connection to the Apostles. But for them, the connection was less in the presence of the bishop and more in the oil he blessed. Therefore, whether or not the bishop was

KEY WORDS
Chrism Mass
age of reason
Chrism

present, Eastern Churches continued to confirm immediately after Baptism as long as they had oil blessed by the bishop. Confirmation was then followed by the Eucharist, when the newly baptized person received Communion for the first time. This practice clearly shows the close connection and unity among the three initiation sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

Age and Confirmation



LIVE IT!

A teen was chosen by his pastor to carry the Chrism for their parish in the diocese's **Chrism Mass**. In this annual celebration, the bishop blesses all the oil to be used in the diocese for the following year. The teen's pastor told him that the Chrism had perfume in it. Immediately the teen wrinkled his nose and imagined his mother's perfume—a little too sweet and strong.

As he carried the Chrism for his parish, the teen took a big whiff, and his eyes lit up. After Mass he ran to his pastor and exclaimed, "You mean I'll smell like that when I'm confirmed? That's the best thing I've ever smelled in my life!"

How can your life be like the awesome perfume of Chrism? Find out when your diocese celebrates the Chrism Mass and plan to participate.

In the Eastern Churches today, anyone who is baptized is immediately confirmed and given the Eucharist. It doesn't matter if the person is a baby or an adult.



Bill Wimon

The ages of Confirmation candidates vary. How old are most candidates in your parish?

Today, most dioceses in the West (this includes the United States) continue to separate the celebrations of Baptism and Confirmation by many years. If you were baptized as a baby, this is probably your experience too. In fact, most Catholics in the United States today do not celebrate Confirmation until their teens. U.S. bishops determine the age for their own dioceses.

If you were baptized after you reached what we refer to as the age of reason, however, your experience probably reflects the typical practice in the Eastern Churches. That is, when you were initiated, you likely celebrated Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist in that order in the same liturgy. The **age of reason**, usually considered age seven, is when a person is old enough to understand what she or he is doing. The person is capable of knowing the difference between right and wrong. Adults who are baptized are also confirmed and given the Eucharist at the same liturgy, typically the Easter Vigil.

Rite of Confirmation

Because most people in the United States today are confirmed many years after their Baptism, let's look at that way of practicing Confirmation.

Before you can be confirmed, you need to have reached the age of reason. This is because in the rite, you must also profess your faith. If you have committed any serious, or mortal, sins, you would need first to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. (See chapter 30.) Next,

you have to ask for the sacrament freely. That means no one can force you to celebrate it. Last, you need to be ready to live your life as a disciple of Christ. Confirmation calls you to speak about your faith both in the Church and in your daily life.

Did You Know?

Who's Who in Confirmation

The ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation is the bishop. However, he can give priests permission to confirm. Priests do not need permission to confirm someone if they are also baptizing that person. This usually takes place at the Easter Vigil with catechumens.

Each Confirmation candidate has a sponsor. This person is usually the person's godparent from Baptism. During the rite, the sponsor stands with the candidate as a sign of support and a reminder of their baptismal relationship. Who is your godparent?

The essential parts of the Sacrament of Confirmation are the anointing of the forehead with **Chrism** (in the East, other parts of the body are also anointed) along with the laying on of hands and the following words:
"Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

Did You Know?

Three Oils of the Church

The Church uses three different types of holy oils in her liturgies, as follows:

- ♦ **Sacred Chrism**, consecrated olive oil with perfume, represents the sweet fragrance of Christ and the good works of his Body, the Church. **Chrism** is used in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Ordination and to consecrate objects for sacred work.

- ♦ **The Oil of Catechumens** is blessed olive oil used to anoint those preparing for Baptism. The anointing helps the person battle evil. It's like ancient athletes who oiled their bodies before competitions. This made it harder for their competitors to grab and hold them.

- ♦ **The Oil of the Sick** is blessed olive oil used in the Sacrament of Anointing to anoint the forehead and hands of people who are seriously ill or near death.

The anointing strengthens the sick and prepares those who are dying for death.



Read about these three sacred oils in the "Did You Know?" article above. How many of these oils have you been anointed with in your lifetime?



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

Confirmation isn't the only time we use Chrism. When babies are baptized, they are anointed with Chrism on the top of the head. This anticipates their Confirmation later in life. The hands of newly ordained priests and the foreheads of newly ordained bishops are also anointed with Chrism. When a new altar is dedicated, the bishop rubs Chrism all over the top of it. The bishop also uses Chrism to make twelve crosses on the walls of new churches. Sometimes these spots where he anoints the walls are later marked with an actual cross. (Does your church have these?)

The Chrism, along with the Oil of the Sick and the Oil of Catechumens, is kept in a box called an ambry. A church's ambry is often found near the baptismal font or in a wall niche within the worship space.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Because Baptism is closely connected to Confirmation, the Confirmation rite includes some reminders for us. Let's imagine now that you're about to be confirmed. One of the things in the Confirmation rite that would remind you of your Baptism is the renewal of baptismal promises. Here, the bishop asks you the same questions your parents were asked back when you were a baby about to be baptized: "Do you reject Satan? Do you believe in God the Father? Do you believe in Jesus, his Son? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you believe in the catholic Church?" Because you couldn't even talk yet at your Baptism, your parents responded to these questions for you. At your Confirmation, you speak for yourself and publicly renew your baptismal promises.

For this reason I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead his Spirit fills us with power, love and self-control.

(2 Timothy 1:6-7)

Laying On of Hands

Next the bishop extends his hands over you and all the candidates. This is a powerful gesture. It is a sign that the bishop is asking the Holy Spirit to come upon you and be with you. You see this gesture often when someone or something is being blessed with the Holy Spirit. As the bishop does this, he leads a prayer that puts into words the request that the Father send the Holy Spirit upon you. He also asks the Spirit to help and guide you with the spiritual gifts you will need to live your faith fully.

What are some things these spiritual gifts help you do? They help you feel more confident and courageous about your faith. This lets you talk about your faith more easily with your friends and with those who ask you

Did You Know?

The Awesome Gifts of the Spirit

Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to the newly confirmed: wisdom, understanding, right judgment (counsel), courage (fortitude), knowledge, reverence (piety), wonder, and awe (fear of the Lord). (See chapter 16 for descriptions of all the gifts.)

This last gift, awe, is closely tied to fear, as in "fear of the Lord." But this doesn't mean that we should be afraid of God. It means we realize how awesome God is. God is much greater than anything we can think of. In fact, a definition of God by Saint Anselm was "that than which greater cannot be thought" (*St. Anselm's Proslogion*, page 117). Think of the greatest thing ever. Then try to imagine what is beyond that—that's God. Magnificent and powerful though God is, he still cares for each one of us. Now that's an awesome God.

FUN FACT

What do Jesus and an olive tree have in common? Ask Saint Cyril, who lived in the fourth century AD, and he'd say "lots." The oil used in Confirmation comes from olives, which come from olive trees. The Holy Spirit we receive comes from Jesus. Therefore, if oil is like the Spirit, the olive tree is like Jesus. For Saint Cyril, we become a part of Jesus, like branches on his tree, when we are anointed with his Spirit.

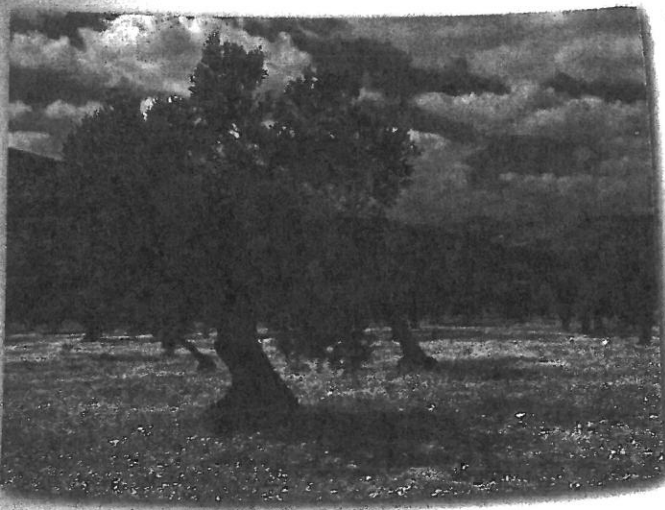
Read the "Fun Fact" above to find out what kind of tree this is and how it is like Jesus.

about your Catholic beliefs.

The gifts help you know how to use your talents to serve the Church and others in need. They help you be able to make better decisions between right and wrong.

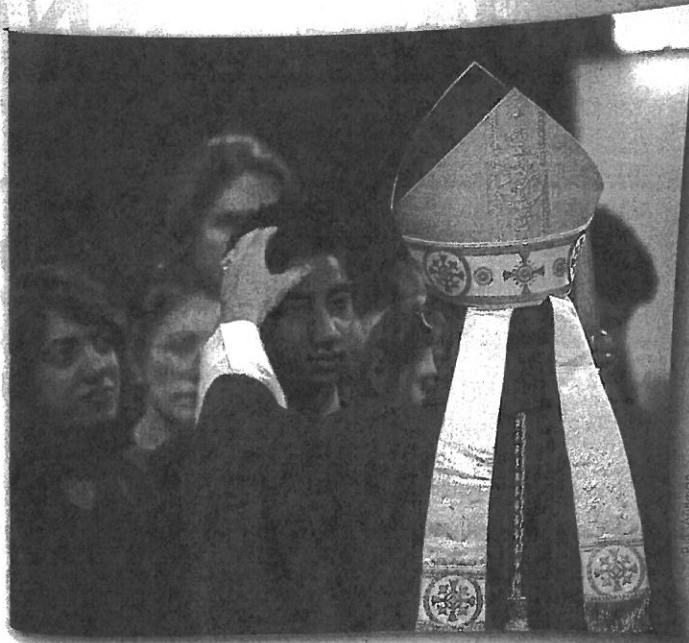
Anointing with Chrism

Finally, the bishop anoints you, making the Sign of the Cross on your forehead with Chrism. As he does this, he calls you by your name, saying, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." You respond "Amen." Then you and the bishop share a sign of peace. All the Gifts of the Spirit are yours. Are you ready to use them?



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"When the Holy Spirit comes upon you,
you will be filled with power, and you will be
witnesses for me." (Acts 1:8)



Which gift of the Spirit do
you most need?