

FEBRUARY 4, 2024: 5TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME



It has often been stated that Confirmation is a sacrament in search of a theology; in many ways, it does appear that this gracious gift from God has an identity crisis. A way to help us discern the true meaning and potential of the sacrament may be understanding what is needed to grow a garden. In a real sense, this sacrament helps us grow a garden of virtues. As with any garden, we start by properly preparing our garden.

The first step in preparing our garden is to weed it. We need to get rid of preconceived notions of what Confirmation is about—what many people wrongly believe about the sacrament. Confirmation is *not* a rite of passage preparing us to become adults in the Church, nor is it about the individual making a choice as an adult to confirm their faith. These and similar misconceptions have led people astray as to what the sacrament is intended to do. We must pull these weeds out in order to prepare the soil and plant the right seeds, or ways of thinking.

The next thing we need to do is rototill the soil. Our rototiller is using the proper understanding of the sacrament. The only way to really understand Confirmation is to recognize its connection to Baptism. The core identity of this sacrament is discovered when we realize that it is about completing our baptism. When a person is baptized, the Church assumes that he or she will be confirmed, i.e., take the next step of completing their initiation into having Christ in their life. We need to understand that Baptism is not really the individual's choice, or in the case of an infant, the parents' choice. It is God who calls for the person to be baptized, and the individual or parents really are responding to that call. The same is true with Confirmation: we should understand it as God choosing to confirm himself in us. And a decision *not* to be baptized is really a rejection of God and the grace He is offering us. Rejection of God is, by definition, an act of defiance against God and is a grievous offense.

Once we accept that the theology of Confirmation can only be truly comprehended by connecting it to Baptism, we can unpack what this wondrous gift is intended to give us in our relationship with God. What we see is that Baptism is the soil in which the gifts of Confirmation are intended to grow. Confirmation brings to completion what was begun in Baptism: it strengthens the grace we have received and gives more direction to what that grace is intended to accomplish in our life. As Christians, the primary purpose of our Baptism is to open us to live life as a person saved in Christ, and to continue the mission of Christ on earth as his instrument of grace in the lives of others. Confirmation helps us to do this through strengthening and completing our baptismal grace and by helping us recognize that our initiation in Christ never ends as we deepen our conversion to Him. We must acknowledge, therefore, that Confirmation binds us more perfectly to the Church, for that is the mission *not* just of an individual Christian, but of the entire Church.

Christ, in a real sense, becomes the water and sun for our new garden that Confirmation is trying to create for us. And the Holy Spirit becomes our fertilizer, helping to ensure, if we are open to it, that the garden will have the proper nutrients it needs. Hence, at its core it ratifies what our baptism has already done for us, and like baptism, it is a character sacrament that imprints itself on our very soul. In other words, our very being is now impacted by Confirmation as it wraps us even more fully in the work, power, and grace of the Holy Spirit. We contemplate the Pentecost event as the Holy Spirit overwhelms a group of disciples who, in fear, were hiding in the upper room. The Holy Spirit pours his gifts into their hearts, endowing them through those gifts to exhibit the fruits in action. The disciples continue the mission of Christ, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and baptizing 3,000. The story is simple, and yet it speaks to who we are called to be through the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. As our relationship with the Spirit grows through Confirmation, we are strengthened in order to grow more fully in our relationship with Christ and be more perfectly conformed to Him.

As our life becomes more centered in Christ, we are called to a life of service, but not just *any* service. Christian service is not simply about making people feel better or meeting their personal and material needs. We feed the poor, clothe the naked, give shelter to the homeless, comfort the ill, etc., for a definitive purpose—to make Christ present. In and through our baptism we are called to serve, and Confirmation strengthens that indwelling truth. In our service, we act to continue Christ's mission of bringing the message of salvation to the whole world. We are intended to be Christ's instrument and bear witness to Him in the lives of others.

As our lives come to be more centered in serving Christ, we also realize that Christ lived a life of perpetual thanksgiving. Christ's entire being was directed towards worship and so should ours. Confirmation, therefore, helps to perfect our common priesthood and orients us toward a life of praise and thanksgiving. It strengthens us to be part of "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pt. 2:9)

As we live out our Confirmation, it makes us more completely dedicated to our baptismal vocation and helps us recognize that it is not something we do, but the way we live. We come to understand that Christ lived his life centered in fulfilling his Father's will. As we seek to do the same, we become more fully an image of Christ in the world; through our words and actions, we work to build up the body of Christ to its fullness here and now. We become more deeply rooted in our divine filiation and embrace more deeply that we are truly adopted daughters and sons of God through our connection to Christ. So, we come to participate in and proclaim the truth of Christ in how we live our life. The message of Christ is not about some future time. It is intended to be embodied in our lives now, and Confirmation strengthens and orients our lives to this reality.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call me at (978) 254-0560. If you prefer to email, please visit.....

<https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".