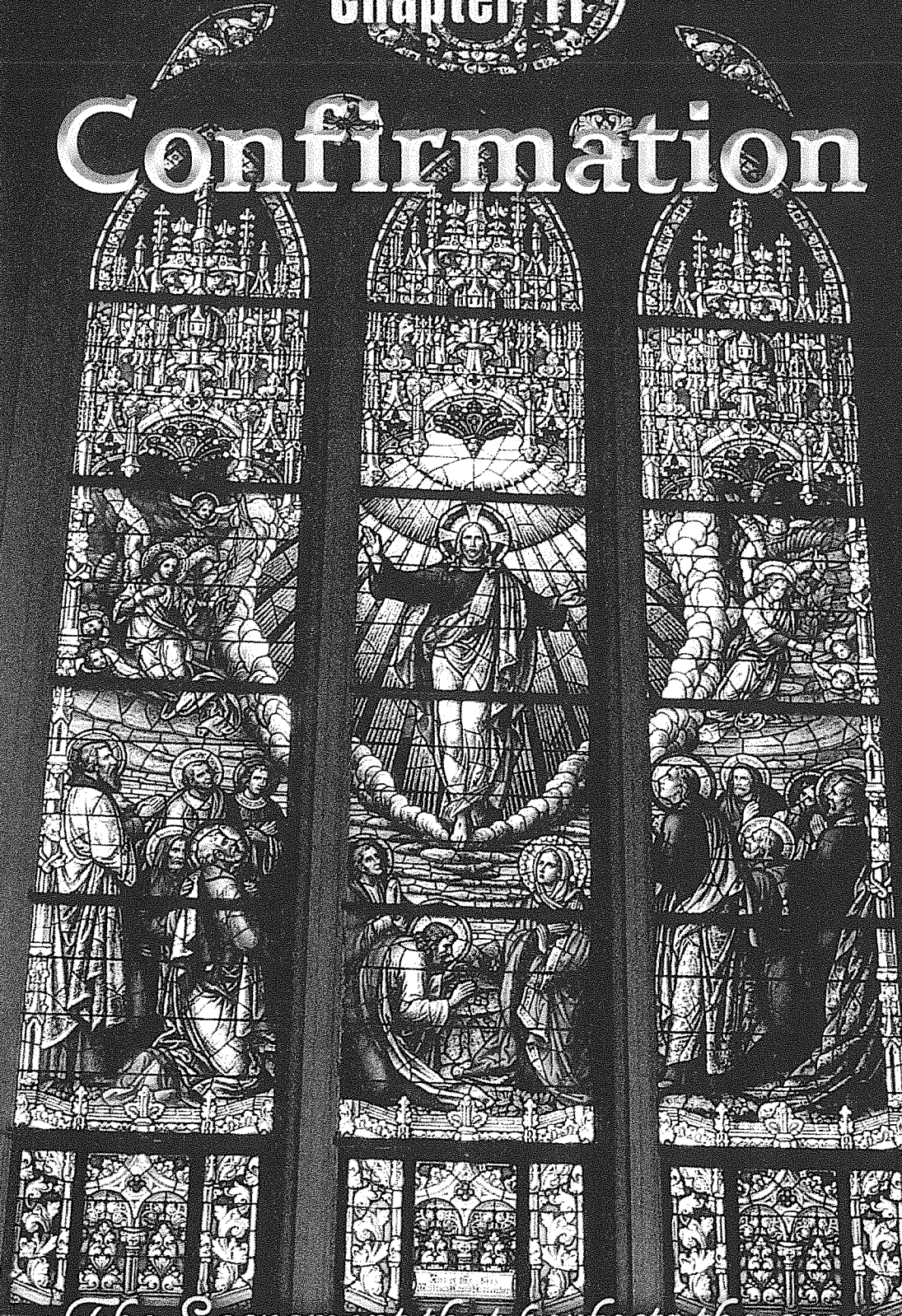


INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter 11

Confirmation



*The Sacrament that perfects the grace
received in Baptism.*

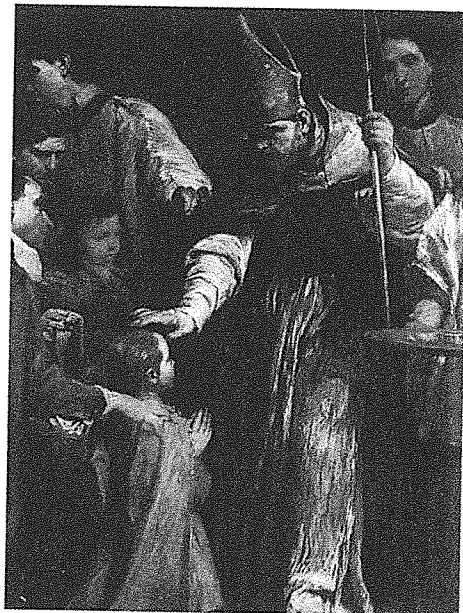
Chapter 11

Confirmation

You've heard it before. During the teen years you'll be faced with many challenges and choices about what type of life to lead, what type of friends to have, what to believe. It sounds routine by now.

But just because you've heard it often doesn't make it any less true. You will be, and probably are now, facing a lot of choices. One of the choices you'll make is how seriously you live your faith. Most people your age who have been going to Mass their entire lives want to stand up for what they've been taught. Sometimes, though, the courage to live and defend your faith is hard to muster. That is where Confirmation comes in.

Confirmation is the sacrament that gives people courage: courage to do what they know is right, even when others mock their beliefs; courage to defend the truth, even when people deny that such a thing as truth exists; courage to profess their faith in Jesus, even when no one else around them believes.



CONFIRMATION

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2: 1-4)

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8: 14-17)

Before Pentecost, the members of the early Church were, for the most part, a frightened people who gathered secretly to worship behind closed doors. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the Church, each member receiving gifts that strengthened both the individual and the Church as a whole. The apostles and all who received the Holy Spirit became brave individuals, unafraid to stand up for the new faith. When converts were won over by these brave people, they followed Baptism with a laying-on of hands that would confer these same gifts of the Holy Spirit upon their new brothers and sisters. The laying-on of hands continues to this day as the Sacrament of Confirmation.

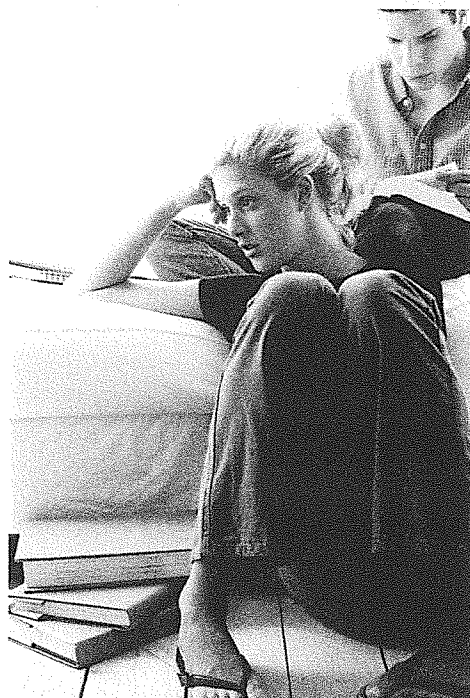
Confirmation is the Sacrament of Initiation that passes on the grace of Pentecost by the laying-on of hands, the anointing of oil, and the saying of the words, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." It perfects the grace of Baptism through the action of the Holy Spirit. With the graces of this sacrament, we are able to spread and defend the teachings of Christ and the Church.

Before the Second Vatican Council, Confirmation included a light slap on the cheek to remind the recipient that the service of Christ is difficult and calls for soldierliness. This slap has disappeared, for the most part, from the celebration of Confirmation. This is a time, though, when we need to understand ourselves as soldiers of Christ. The Church is under a greater attack now than at possibly any time in her history. Newspapers and television often transmit stories attacking the Church for daring to defend the teachings of Jesus Christ regarding abortion, contraception, divorce, and homosexuality. However, many Catholics, afraid to speak up in defense of the Church, stay on the sidelines, forgetting that Confirmation gives them the spiritual strength to speak up for Christ.

In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission.¹ The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God.² He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives him "without measure" (Jn 3: 34).

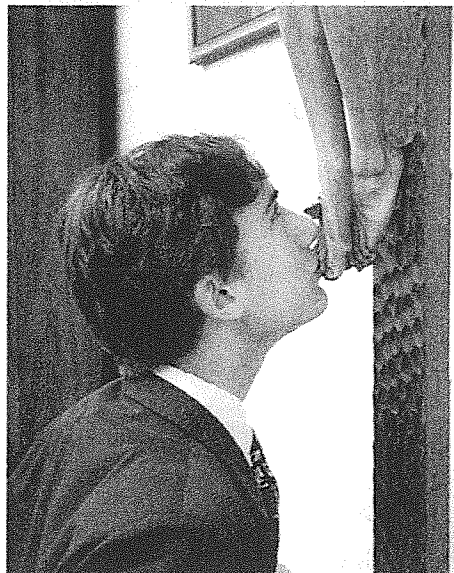
This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah's, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people.³ On several

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Confirmation



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occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit,⁴ a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost.⁵ (CCC 1286-1287)

The word *Christian* means "anointed." In Baptism, the Trinity came to us to share life and love. In Confirmation, we are given increased love and increased strength to serve the Church, in order that we may be enabled to bring not only ourselves but also others to God. The Letter to the Hebrews mentions the connection between Baptism and Confirmation among the first elements of Christian instruction.

To signify the gift of the Spirit, the Church anoints the confirmed with chrism, a sacred oil. The prophet Isaiah indicates that anointing with oil is a sign of abundance and joy. The use of oil indicates the connection between Baptism and Confirmation as a "double sacrament," in the words of St. Cyprian. The pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of catechumens signifies cleansing and strengthening. By Confirmation, Christians, that is, those who are anointed, share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit with which he is filled, so that their lives may give off the "aroma of Christ" (2 Cor 2:15).

CELEBRATION OF THE RITE

The sacred oil of chrism that is used in Confirmation is consecrated during the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday. In most cases, Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, so the liturgy of Confirmation begins with the confirmands (those who are to be confirmed) renewing their baptismal promises and making a profession of faith. This symbolizes that Confirmation follows and is linked to Baptism. It also serves as a reminder of the commitment made to Christ in Baptism. In a case of adult Baptism, Confirmation and the reception of First Eucharist follow immediately after Baptism, all in one ceremony.

After the profession of faith, the bishop extends his hands over the confirmands to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit and recites the following prayer:

All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord.⁶

The essential rite of the sacrament (that which must be done for the sacrament to be validly given and received) follows with the anointing with chrism on the forehead and the laying-on of hands, accompanied by the words, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." The sign of peace concludes the rite, indicating that the confirmand is in communion with the church, the members of the faithful, and the bishop.

The ordinary minister of the sacrament of Confirmation is the bishop. Though the faculty may be given to a priest, ideally one's bishop should

administer this sacrament as a sign of the union between the individual members of the faithful and their particular bishop.

In the Eastern Church, Confirmation is administered immediately after Baptism and is followed by reception of the Eucharist. The joint celebration of these sacraments in this order reminds us of the unity of Christian initiation.

WHO CAN RECEIVE CONFIRMATION?

Every baptized person who has not received this sacrament can and should be confirmed, for Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist form a unity of sacraments that bring us into the Church. If someone has not received all three sacraments, the initiation of that person into the church remains incomplete. In the Latin rite, the recipient of Confirmation must normally be at least the age of reason, but the precise age of reception is left to the discretion of the local bishop. However, every Christian in danger of death who has not received Confirmation (including infants) should receive this sacrament.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RECEPTION:

Under normal circumstances, candidates for Confirmation, like the other sacraments, must meet certain conditions, Confirmands must:

- † Be in the state of grace;
- † Have reached the age of reason;
- † Make a profession of faith;
- † State their intention to receive the sacrament;
- † Accept their obligation to profess Christ in both the Church and the world.

It has become the custom lately to administer Confirmation at the end of grammar school or the beginning of high school to indicate that the confirmand is expected to act as a mature Christian. This means that the recipient is capable of spiritual maturity and acting as Christ wishes even in difficult situations with the aid of grace. The time before Confirmation should be filled with intense prayer to prepare the recipient to receive the strength of the Holy Spirit with docility and a sense of mission.

Preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit — his actions, his gifts, and his biddings — in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community. The latter bears special responsibility for the preparation of the confirmands.⁷ (CCC 1309)

Candidates for this sacrament should seek the help of a sponsor, someone to whom they can talk openly about their shared faith. To emphasize the unity of Baptism and Confirmation, it is appropriate for one of the baptismal godparents to fulfill this role. It is a good practice to take the

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*"Be sealed
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Confirmation

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around us for Christ.*



St. Helena

Mother of Constantine the Great, Christian Emperor of the Roman Empire 312-337. In 326, at the age of 80, St. Helena unearthed the True Cross of the Crucifixion, the nails used to pierce the body of our Saviour and the headboard (Titular). She built a church on the spot where the cross was found.

St. Helena greatly influenced the wider spread of Christianity. The poor and destitute were special objects of her charity.

name of a saint you admire upon Confirmation. This saint will serve as a constant role model of service to Christ and his Church. Having a specific saint as your patron also guarantees the prayers of that holy person.

EFFECTS OF CONFIRMATION

Like Baptism, Confirmation imprints a permanent mark on the soul. Because of this permanence, Confirmation is received only once.

Simply stated, Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as was granted to the disciples at Pentecost. From this Sacrament of Initiation:

- † Baptismal grace is increased and deepened;
- † An indelible mark is imprinted on the soul (like Baptism);
- † The confirmed person is rooted more deeply as a child of the Father;
- † The confirmed person is united more closely to Christ;
- † The gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord) increase;
- † The confirmed person's bond with the Church is perfected;
- † Special graces are given to the confirmed person to enable him to spread and defend the faith by word and deed as a true witness to Christ;
- † The confirmed person is enabled to confess Christ boldly and never be ashamed of the Cross.

All of the graces of Confirmation prepare us as Christians to practice what is known as the apostolate, the work of evangelizing those around us for Christ. Confirmation helps us do this apostolate by presenting the truths of the Church, thereby bringing people closer to faith.

We are called to do apostolate with both our fellow Catholics and those whom we meet outside the faith. The best preparation for this work is a regular prayer life and a serious intention to become fully knowledgeable regarding the history and teachings of the Church.

MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENT

The original minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation was the bishop, the head of the local church. In his role as shepherd of the local church, he administered the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. As the Church grew in number, though, it became nearly impossible for the bishop to administer all of these sacraments to everyone who requested them. A change was made, therefore, which separated Confirmation from the other Sacraments of Initiation. Baptism and the Eucharist were administered by priests, while Confirmation remained the work of the bishop. Most dioceses in the United States continue to celebrate Confirmation separately from the other Sacraments of Christian Initiation. It is usually celebrated after Baptism, although the precise age for Confirmation varies.

The usual minister of this sacrament, then, remains the local bishop or his auxiliary. Today, this indicates that the bishops, as successors to the apostles, unite the confirmands more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins, and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ.

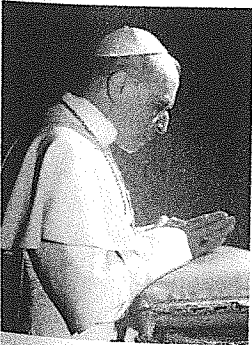
For grave reasons, however, the bishop may cede the authority to confirm to a priest, and if someone is in danger of death, a priest may immediately confirm any Christian. Also, when an adult converts to Catholicism, a priest can administer the Sacrament of Confirmation.

CONCLUSION

The essential effect of Confirmation is to perfect the grace received in Baptism, strengthening the already existing bond that the baptized has with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. It graces the confirmed to witness to Christ by word and life. The phrase *divine filiation* is the key to understanding the mission of a person confirmed in Christ. As sons and daughters of God, the confirmed are called upon to act in every situation as Christ himself would act. This requires that they use the strength of Confirmation in all cases where they are tempted to deny their beliefs, either in word or deed.

Doing what God wants us to do may sometimes lead to loss of friends or good times. Acting contrary to how Jesus wishes us to act, however, makes it more difficult to do the correct thing in more serious situations, when our own spiritual well-being or that of someone we love is in jeopardy. It is possible to do as the Spirit wishes if we cooperate with his grace.

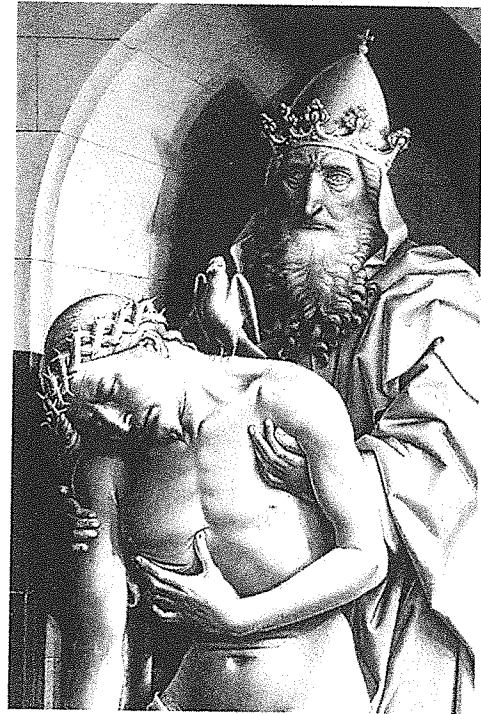
The Pope Speaks



The Church which Christ founded by His blood, He strengthened on the day of Pentecost by a special power, given from Heaven.... [S]itting now at the right hand of the Father, He wished to make known and proclaim His Spouse [the Church] through the visible coming of the Holy Spirit with the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire. For just as He Himself when he began

to preach was made known by His Eternal Father through the Holy Spirit descending and remaining upon Him in the form of a dove, so likewise, as the Apostles were about to enter upon their ministry of preaching, Christ our Lord sent the Holy Spirit down from Heaven, to touch them with tongues of fire and to point out, as by the finger of God, the supernatural mission and office of the Church.⁸ — Pope Pius XII

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Confirmation

Chapter 11 Study Guide

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Imagine for a moment that you're in a dimly lit chapel. Candles light the altar as you are engulfed by soft voices praying the rosary. You promise to focus completely on the prayers. You lift up your heart and... fall asleep. It's just another day in the life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, better known as the "Little Flower." More than any other saint, Thérèse understood and explained the mystery of divine filiation, of living as a child of God. She loved Mary, but didn't enjoy the Rosary. She was a mystic, but hated retreats. St. Thérèse never got upset about falling asleep because she was confident that God, like a good parent, loved his children even when they were sleeping.

Commenting on the mystery of her vocation Thérèse writes, "Jesus does not call those who are worthy, but those he wants to call." This call began as a call to Carmel, a cloistered convent cut off from all of civilization. This call led to her being named the patroness of missionaries by Pius XI. Why would the Church choose as its patroness of missions one who had never physically done a mission? The answer quite simply is that the essence of missions is not persuading, or using a technique, or blasting radio and TV ads. Evangelization is the *transmission of life*, not of words. Words are certainly useful, but "The preachers of the Gospel could well tire themselves out, toil and lay down their lives to lead pagans to the Catholic religion; they might be ever so industrious, ever so diligent and use every means known to man; but none of this would be to any avail, everything would be in vain, if God, with his grace, were not to touch hearts, then the toil of missionaries would be in vain" (Pius XI, *Rerum Ecclesiae*).

Thérèse knew that she must be a child of God, that her only chance at holiness was to trust in God for all things. In the last pages of her



St. Thérèse of Lisieux
(1873-1897)
Feast on October 1

autobiographical *Story of a Soul*, she writes, "In the eve of my life, I will come before you with nothing in my hands because I do not ask you to count the things I've done." Thérèse's holiness flew in the face of the dominant Pelagian heresy of her (and our) time—that it is better and safer to rely on ourselves than to receive God's grace. She truly lived Jesus' words: "Without me you can do nothing."

Instead, Thérèse let God act through her. Whenever God inspired her to a certain kind act, Thérèse shouted "yes!" unreservedly, faithfully, and happily. She didn't try to "earn grace" by her sacrifices and exterior acts, but rather saw each trial as a gift from God so that she may be more closely united to her Savior Jesus Christ. In all things, St. Thérèse acted as a child of God, and in all things she was rewarded as a child of God.

VOCABULARY

ANOINTING

Symbol of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing of Jesus as Messiah fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Christ (in Hebrew, Messiah) means "Anointed One." Anointing is the sacramental sign of Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Orders.

APOSTOLATE

The activity of the Christian which fulfills the apostolic nature of the whole Church by working to extend the reign of Christ to the entire world.

CHRISM

Perfumed oil, consecrated by the bishop, which signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit; used for consecration in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

CONFIRMAND

Person preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

CONFIRMATION

One of the Sacraments of Initiation; completes the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which seal or confirm the baptized in union with Christ and equip them for worship and apostolic life in the Church.

COURAGE

One of the four cardinal moral virtues which ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in doing the good; also one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

DIVINE FILIATION

One's acceptance by God as a child of God, a consoling mystery bringing one a spirit of sincerity and trust while filling us with love and wonder; see the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32).

PENTECOST

The fiftieth day at the end of the seven weeks following Passover (or Easter). At the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was manifested, given and communicated to the Church, fulfilling the paschal mystery of Christ.

TEMPTATION

An attraction, either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God. Jesus himself during his life on earth was tempted, put to the test, to manifest the opposition between himself and the devil.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the change in the members of the early Church which occurred after they received the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit.
2. How are these graces received today?
3. Confirmation perfects the grace of what other sacrament? Through the action of which divine person?
4. What does Confirmation give us the strength to do?
5. What are the other two sacraments to which the Sacrament of Confirmation is linked? Why are they joined together?
6. What words are said during the laying-on of hands in the rite of Confirmation?
7. Why is the bishop the ordinary minister of Confirmation?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Many people disagree with certain things that the Church teaches are sinful. List three of these and explain what is wrong with them. Also, come up with realistic situations in which the strength we receive in the Sacrament of Confirmation would be needed to defend the Church's teachings.
2. One of the most beautiful aspects of Confirmation is a deepening of one's roots in the divine filiation, which makes one cry, "Abba, Father!" How are we God's children?
3. Because of her writings on being a child of God, St. Thérèse of Lisieux was made a Doctor of the Church even though she died at the age of 24. Ask your spiritual director, pastor, or teacher to recommend a good book on St. Thérèse of Lisieux and divine filiation.

FROM THE CATECHISM

1315 “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:14-17).

1316 Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

1317 Confirmation, like Baptism, imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian’s soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one’s life.

1318 In the East this sacrament is administered immediately after Baptism and is followed by participation in the Eucharist; this tradition highlights the unity of the three sacraments of Christian initiation. In the Latin Church this sacrament is administered when the age of reason has been reached, and its celebration is ordinarily reserved to the bishop, thus signifying that this sacrament strengthens the ecclesial bond.

1319 A candidate for Confirmation who has attained the age of reason must profess the faith, be in the state of grace, have the intention of receiving the sacrament, and be prepared to assume the role of disciple and witness to Christ, both within the ecclesial community and in temporal affairs.

1320 The essential rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism (in the East other sense-organs as well), together with the laying on of the minister’s hand and the words: “*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*” (Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.) in the Roman Rite, or: “*Signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*” (the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit) in the Byzantine rite.

1321 When Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, its connection with Baptism is expressed, among other ways, by the renewal of baptismal promises. The celebration of Confirmation during the Eucharist helps underline the unity of the sacraments of Christian initiation.

Endnotes

1. Cf. Is 11: 2; 61: 1; Lk 4: 16-22.
2. Cf. Mt 3: 13-17; Jn 1: 33-34.
3. Cf. Ez 36: 25-27; Jl 3: 1-2.
4. Cf. Lk 12: 12; Jn 3: 5-8; 7: 37-39; 16: 7-15; Acts 1: 8.
5. Cf. Jn 20: 22; Acts 2: 1-4.
6. *OC*, 25.
7. Cf. *OC* Introduction 3.
8. Pope Pius XII, *The Pope Speaks*, edited by Michael Chinigo, New York, Pantheon, 1957.

