

Seven Sacraments *Our Encounter with Christ*

Confirmation: Sealed by the Holy Spirit for Witness and Mission

Last week I spoke of Baptism as the gateway to all of the sacraments. This week, I am writing about Confirmation, the sacrament by which we are sealed by God's Spirit as belonging to Jesus Christ and empowered to witness and preach the gospel to the world.

Confirmation is one of the three sacraments of Christian initiation by which we are fully conformed to Christ and made mature members of his church. In the early church, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist were administered together at the Easter Vigil. This still happens today when catechumens are brought into the church at the Easter Vigil. But as the baptism of infants became more common, the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist were separated from each other. Infants were baptized. Years later they received First Communion, and then later they were confirmed.

In the Archdiocese of Hartford, those who are to be confirmed must be sophomores in high school or older. While this results in a long period between Baptism and Confirmation, it has an important benefit: those who are confirmed are at an age when they can "confirm" and "ratify" what was done for them at their Baptism.

Confirmation, however, is not just a moment when a person confirms or ratifies what occurred at infant baptism. It is more than that: It is the moment when the baptized are *sealed* with the gift of the Holy Spirit and *empowered* to witness and proclaim the gospel to the world. At their Confirmation, the baptized enter into a mature Christian faith.

To be sure, we received the gift of the Holy Spirit when we were baptized into Christ. But at Confirmation we participate in the gift of the Spirit in a new way. First, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit who identifies us as belonging to Christ. Just as a seal is put on a letter or package to identify it in an official way, so we are sealed with the Holy Spirit at Confirmation in a way that identifies our relationship to Jesus Christ. Second, at Confirmation the Holy Spirit strengthens us with gifts of wisdom, counsel, and fortitude so that we can witness and proclaim our faith to the world.

Sometimes Confirmation is seen as graduation from religious instruction and regular church attendance. Such a view misunderstands the meaning of this sacrament. Confirmation is the moment we receive our adult status within the community of the church so that we take up our share of the work of the gospel by witnessing Christ to others. Those who understand Confirmation in this way will understand their new dignity and responsibility within the community of the Church.

Next week, I will consider the Eucharist, the third sacrament of Christian initiation by which we enter into an intimate union with the risen Christ. *Father Matera*