

Be Sealed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

by Fr. Mark Pavlik
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We continue our seven-part series on the sacraments of the Church with Confirmation. Along with Baptism and Eucharist, Confirmation is one of the three sacraments of initiation. These three sacraments bring the faithful into the Christian community. Confirmation completes the Christian initiation begun at Baptism, and, like Baptism, Confirmation 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.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes Confirmation as a deepening of baptismal gifts. It states that the sacrament roots us more deeply in our identity as God's children, unites us more firmly with Christ, increases in us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, binds us more closely to the Church and gives us special strength to bear witness to our faith (CCC #1303). With Baptism and Eucharist, Confirmation shapes us as Catholic Christians.

A bishop is normally the minister of Confirmation, but in the case of an emergency, or for those in the RCIA program who are confirmed at the Easter vigil, a priest can perform the sacrament. The essential part of the Confirmation rite is when the bishop or priest places his hand upon the head of the confirmation candidate. Then the sign of the cross is traced on the candidate's forehead with sacred chrism, while he says: "Be sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit." Chrism is also used in baptism and ordination and is one of the three kinds of holy oil which a bishop blesses each year at the Chrism Mass at the cathedral. The other two kinds of holy oil are the oil of catechumens (used in Baptism) and the oil of the sick (used in Anointing of the Sick). All of the oils are composed of pure olive oil.

From ancient times, olive oil has been looked upon as a strengthening substance. It was common for athletes to bathe in olive oil before taking part in athletic events. The significance of the holy oils used in the administration of the sacraments represents the strengthening effect of God's grace. In addition to the olive oil, chrism is mixed with balm. Balm is a fragrant substance which comes from the balsam tree. In the holy chrism it symbolizes the "sweet odor" of virtue.

And of course, in confirmation, we receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. For today's quiz, can you name the seven gifts? The answers are below. Let's see how you do!

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit (answers to quiz above)

Understanding
Knowledge
Wisdom
Counsel
Piety
Fortitude
Fear of the Lord