



Confirmation as a sacrament of connection

In the current life of the church, the sacrament of Confirmation is seen as one of the three sacraments that as a whole complete the initiation of a believer into the church. This reflects the practice of the early church where Confirmation took place with Baptism, and was the Bishop's seal on the membership of this newly formed Christian. This combined Baptism and sealing was held within a celebration of the Eucharist, at which the newly baptized Christian was admitted to Holy Communion. In the main the ritual was designed for adults.

The three sacraments of initiation

Across the twentieth century popes and church officials had sought the reintroduction of this ancient schema, one still held by the Orthodox churches. Finally under the reforms of Vatican II the reorienting of confirmation as a sacrament of initiation has taken root. In Baptism we receive our adoption as God's children, the forgiveness of our sins and begin a new life as members of the church. The key symbol is immersion in water. Then in Confirmation we receive the fullness of the gift of God's Holy Spirit, making us all the more able as witnesses of Christ in the world. The key symbol is anointing with oil. Finally in the Eucharist we become fully one in Christ as we participate in the Mass and receive Holy Communion – placing us in intimate communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. The key symbol is eating and drinking.

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I would like to take up here one often overlooked feature of confirmation: in many ways it is truly a sacrament of connection. The sponsor of the candidate is most appropriately a godparent from baptism, indicating the continuity between baptism and confirmation. The bishop anoints with the oil of Chrism, itself sanctified at the diocesan Chrism Mass which takes place in Holy Week. In the anointing, then, it is clear that this ritual is of concern to the whole local church, the diocese. The rite is celebrated with the local bishop, who signifies that the child or adult undergoing confirmation is being initiated into a worldwide community, interconnected with believers and communities across the face of the globe. Finally there is the custom of the candidate choosing a saint's name, bringing home the ever present reality of the communion of saints.

These deep layers of interconnection and community are brought to fullness in the complete celebration of the Eucharist, including participation in the Prayer of the Faithful and eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Christ. In all this, Confirmation as a sacrament of initiation is truly a sacrament of connection.

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