

Dear People of St. Andrew the Apostle:

We continue our reflection on the Sacraments today. A sacrament is an external sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace. Today we look at the Sacrament of Confirmation – the external signs, its institution in Scripture, and how it gives grace to God’s people.

In Scripture

Jesus told his disciples that he had to return to the Father so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out upon them – an Advocate who would lead them in all truth. After his resurrection Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and passed on the divine power of forgiveness.

After Jesus ascended into heaven the apostles waited for a more complete outpouring of the Holy Spirit who came upon them as a mighty wind and tongues of fire – *the first Pentecost*. In the Book of Acts the apostles hear of people who have been baptized but who have not received the Holy Spirit, and they hurry to them to confer the Spirit upon them and thus complete their Baptism with a *celebration of Pentecost*.



The Biblical Church and the Early Church fathers understood Jesus’ actions as instituting a distinct sacrament that both completed Baptism and conferred the Holy Spirit upon the believer. It was, and continues to be, a *celebration of Pentecost*.

In practice



The early Church baptized and confirmed in the same ceremony. Running water was preferred, so most baptisms took place outdoors in streams, rivers or lakes. Following the Baptism the new Christian was dressed in a white garment and led into Church where the Bishop was waiting to confirm them. When infants were baptized, the same process was used, and the infant was baptized and confirmed in the same ceremony.

The Church very early divided into two major groups: the Latin Rite, headquartered in Rome, and the Eastern Rite, headquartered in the new Roman capital of Constantinople. The Latin Rite church reserved the celebration of Confirmation to the Bishop, while the Eastern Rite gave the parish priest the power to celebrate Confirmation at the same time as Baptism. Thus in the Latin Rite (we are Latin rite) Confirmation became separated from Baptism. Bishops by and large had huge territories and were able to get to their parishes every few years. The practice was that everyone who had been baptized, regardless of age, was confirmed when the Bishop visited the parish. The Eastern Rite churches did not wait for the Bishop and confirmed immediately following Baptism. Gradually the age in the Latin Rite was moved later and later, although the Canon Law of the Church called for it to be at or around the “age of reason” or about 7 years old. Unless permission was granted, Confirmation was to take place **BEFORE** 1st Eucharist.



Just over 100 years ago in 1910, Pope Pius X lowered the age for 1st Eucharist to the “age of reason”. This presented a dilemma. What was to be celebrated first, Confirmation or 1st Eucharist? Confirmation was gradually moved older despite the provisions of Canon Law, and was celebrated somewhere between 5th grade and high school. In the Diocese of Phoenix we have restored the order of the Sacraments to the order they were received in the Biblical Church – Baptism, then Confirmation, then 1st Eucharist.

Importance of the Order

Confirmation is the sacrament by which the Holy Spirit is conferred and the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit are given. It prepares the newly Baptized to “worship in spirit and truth”. Like Baptism it is a gift from God. No particular information is required to receive the gift – it is not a sacrament of Christian maturity, nor is it a sacrament of Commitment. It is the gift of the Father – an external sign instituted by Christ that give us grace.



In the Sacrament of Baptism, the parents are asked if they understand that they are taking responsibility to raise their child in the faith. There are several dimensions to this:

- Teaching the child to pray
- Ensuring the child receives ongoing instruction and formation in their faith
- Ensuring the child is prepared for and celebrates the Sacraments
- Engaging the child in service to others
- Working with the child to discern God’s will in their lives

Any parent who thinks that the child is fully formed and ready to live as a Christian after a 3rd grade study of the faith is not living up to the promises made in Baptism. **Confirmation is not an END – it is an initiation that BEGINS the child’s spiritual growth.**

Effects of Confirmation

This unique Sacrament roots us more deeply in our relationship with Christ, unites us more completely to Christ and helps us encounter the Lord through the sacraments in an intimate way, strengthens the gifts of the Holy Spirit with us, and give us strength to engage in the mission of Jesus to spread the Gospel and defend the faith.

Conferral of Confirmation

In the Latin Rite, the usual celebrant of Confirmation is the Bishop. However, in large dioceses such as Phoenix, the Bishop may delegate to priests the faculty to celebrate Confirmation. When an adult is received into the Church, the priest who has worked with their formation may celebrate Confirmation along with Baptism. In the Easter Rite, priests who baptize automatically have the authority to Confirm in the same ceremony.

There are three elements to the celebration of Confirmation:

- Renewal of Baptismal Vows – a restatement of one’s faith
- Laying on of Hands – signifying the Holy Spirit being outpoured upon them
- Anointing with Chrism – signifying God gifting them with the power of the 7 Gifts to express their faith in times of difficulty and when challenged by temptation.

Should an unconfirmed adult seek Confirmation?

Yes – as soon as possible! There are so many challenges and intense moral temptations, in our world today. Confirmation equips one to seek God’s will in all circumstances.

May we be of support to one another as we live our Baptism and Confirmation fully and without compromise. Let us be proud to be Catholic!

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

All powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy 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**, 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, Amen. (Prayer from the Rite of Confirmation)

The 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Names in Parentheses are older names our parents may have learned.)

- ✦ **Wisdom:** Helps us see God and God's goodness in all things.
The Spirit's gift of Wisdom enables us to see things with God's eyes. The gift of Wisdom helps us interpret life through the lens of Jesus Christ and his vision and teachings.
- ✦ **Understanding:** Gives us insight into our faith and helps us teach others by word and action.
The Spirit's gift of Understanding enables us to understand God's plan for our life and our world. The gift of Understanding helps us to interpret God's plan for us in the daily events of our lives.
- ✦ **Right Judgment (Counsel):** Helps us make the right choices in life.
The Spirit's gift of Right Judgment helps us to make good choices—to make God's choices and to seek God's counsel, God's advice. Right judgments are made in light of God's laws.
- ✦ **Courage (Fortitude):** Strengthens us to do what is right and to be faithful despite difficulties.
The Spirit's Gift of Courage enables us to see where our real strength lies: God is our strength. The gift of Courage enables us to face danger and overcome fear with confidence.
- ✦ **Knowledge:** Helps us know God and God's saving plan for us; what is important and what is not.
The Spirit's Gift of Knowledge helps us to know the right things. The gift of Knowledge helps us to know which things are important and which are not. It helps us to know Jesus and what he teaches us.
- ✦ **Reverence (Piety):** Calls us to love God and to respect God and all creation; we obey out love, not fear.
The Spirit's Gift of Reverence helps us show our gratitude for all that God has done for us. It moves us to worship God, to offer God praise, to pray always in confidence.
- ✦ **Wonder and Awe (Fear of the Lord):** Inspires us to marvel at the power and beauty of God's creation.
The Spirit's Gift of Wonder and Awe enables us to see the beauty of God's creation and the beauty in each person we meet.