

CHRISTIAN INITIATION

Confirmation is one of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and is therefore linked to Baptism and the Eucharist which we first received at our First Holy Communion.

When an adult is baptized, the person is also confirmed and receives Communion in the one celebration. But for most of those born into a Catholic family, the more common experience is to be baptized as an infant, receive 1st Holy Communion about the age of 7 or 8 years and to be confirmed at age 12.

But that has been the common practice only since the early 20th Century. Before that time, it was more common for those baptized as infants to be confirmed at age 12 and then to receive 1st Holy Communion at the age of 15 when they were seen to have become adult members of their community.

Receiving Holy Communion is still the sign of full membership in the Church. But when the order of receiving the Sacraments changed just over 100 years ago, Confirmation came to be seen as the final stage of Christian Initiation.

That change in the order led to an emphasis being placed on the personal choice of the candidates. The candidates are saying “yes” to gift of the Holy Spirit received at their Baptism when they renew their Baptism promises. However, Confirmation like all the Sacraments is more about what God does.

We do not receive the Holy Spirit only twice in the Christian life: at Baptism and at Confirmation. The Holy Spirit is constantly being poured out upon us. Confirmation therefore celebrates that ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit that we first received at Baptism.

Confirmation is linked to Baptism but the Eucharist (the Mass) remains the final stage of Christian Initiation because every time we share in the Eucharist, we are receiving again the gift of the Holy Spirit. We become one Body, one Spirit in Christ.

We are baptized and confirmed only once, but we constantly say “yes” to God in every Mass and then we go forth to live as children of God.

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