

Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation has a checkered history in Catholicism. In the early church, the initiation rite into the church was water baptism, an anointing with oil, and the reception of Eucharist. As Christianity spread, the anointing gradually got separated from the baptism and was reserved for the bishop to perform later on. Soon Confirmation took on a life of its own and became separated from baptism, a sort of rite of Christian adulthood or even a sort of “knighting” ceremony to don people “soldiers of Christ.”

This has all changed since Confirmation was renewed and once again integrated in the Christian initiation of baptism and Eucharist. Now this sacrament, plain and simple, is viewed as a “confirmation” of baptism. Especially for those who have been baptized as infants and had no say in the matter, it is an opportunity to step up and agree to the baptismal vows and commitment. It is a time to say: “Yes, I know what it means to be a Catholic, and have lived as one for some time. Now I want to complete my initiation into the Christian life and say ‘Yes’ on my own.”

But there are still problems. For many, Confirmation is celebrated in junior high or high school at a time of searching and questioning. Many lack the maturity or even the desire to step up and accept baptism. For many young people it is seen as a forced march under pressure from parents and peers, a commitment that soon becomes a vague memory. Many believe therefore that the Church should delay Confirmation to a later age, when there is sufficient maturity and a real desire to accept baptism.

For the time being, Catholics make the best of it. They try to prepare the young people as well as possible and be satisfied that for many, the sacrament is at least a choice to ask for God’s help to get through the often tumultuous years of adolescence. The sacrament symbolizes God’s love and power at a time when the young Catholic needs it the most. Later we hope each will become more mature and able to make his or her own commitment to the Catholic faith.

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