Confirmation

The Sacrament of Confirmation

1. The word Confirmation comes from the Latin and means to strengthen, because by this Sacrament the soul is strengthened by the Holy Ghost in the profession of the faith, and in the practice of all Christian virtues.

The difference between Baptism and Confirmation is, that the Holy Ghost is given us in Baptism to free us from sin; in Confirmation to perfect us in virtue; the sacrament of Baptism makes us Christians; Confirmation makes us perfect Christians; by Baptism we are made children of God, by Confirmation we are made soldiers of Jesus Christ. Finally, in Baptism we are purified, in Confirmation we are armed.

2. The visible signs of this Sacrament instituted by Christ are: the imposition of hands, and the anointing of the forehead with Chrism. This forms the matter of the Sacrament as expressed in the words spoken while anointing: "I sign thee with the sign of the Cross, and I confirm thee with the Chrism of Salvation, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."

3. The ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop, because, as Holy Scripture testifies, the Apostles administered this sacrament. In extraordinary cases the Pope may empower priests to administer Confirmation, as sometimes occurs in missionary heathen countries.

4. The sacrament of Confirmation may be validly received by all who have been baptized; except in case of necessity, children who have not attained the age of reason, or who have not been sufficiently instructed at least in the most important articles of faith should not be confirmed.

5. The person to be confirmed has a sponsor, who not only presents him to the bishop but should also assist him in faithfully practicing the graces conferred in Confirmation. He should see that his godchild is well grounded in the faith, and lives up to its teachings; he should, furthermore, by his own example guide him in the path of virtue, and assist him by word and deed against the assaults of the enemy.

The sponsor should possess the following qualities:

a) He should be old enough to fulfill the duties of sponsor.
b) Of the same sex.
c) He should have been confirmed, and well instructed in the faith.
d) The sponsor in Confirmation should be different from the one in Baptism. Parents or Religious cannot be sponsors. Neither can criminals, infidels or the excommunicated, because all these cannot fulfill their duties as sponsor. The sponsors in Confirmation, contract, like the sponsors in Baptism, a spiritual affinity with the godchild and its parents.

In some dioceses, however, it is customary to have only one or two persons act as sponsors for a whole class, a man for the male, and a woman for the female parties.

6. It is usual for the person receiving Confirmation to take a new name, which ought to be the name of some saint, whose virtuous example he should strive to imitate. He has, thereby, a new intercessor in heaven and a new model in the spiritual combat on earth.

Ceremonial of Confirmation

1. Since the Sacrament of Confirmation should be received only in the state of grace, the person to be confirmed must previously go to Confession and receive Holy Communion, or at least have made a good Confession. If possible, he should also assist at Mass, and awaken a great desire for the coming of the Holy Ghost.

When Confirmation begins, all should kneel, like the Apostles, to await in humility and prayer, the coming of the Divine Spirit.

2. The bishop prays for the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, while extending his hands over those who are about to be confirmed, to signify that the Holy Ghost takes them under His protection, and is about to replenish them with His graces.

3. Then each one is presented to the bishop who anoints him on the forehead with Chrism in the form of a cross, while saying the words: I confirm thee with the Chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,

Amen. Then he gives him a stroke on the cheek, saying: Peace be with thee. During the ceremonies the sponsor stands behind the one to be confirmed and, puts the right hand on the one being confirmed.

When all have been confirmed they should kneel down; while the bishop says the final prayer and gives them his blessing, before which no one should leave the church.

4. The Chrism, blessed annually by the bishop on Holy Thursday, consists of olive oil and balsam. Oil penetrates the body, so the Holy Ghost penetrates the soul; it heals wounds, so Confirmation effaces venial sin. It also strengthens; the athletes of old rubbed their limbs with oil to strengthen them for the combat; in like manner Confirmation strengthens the Christian to combat for Christ. Oil softens and mitigates, and is an emblem of charity; which the Holy Ghost increases in the soul.

Fragrant balm is mixed with the oil to signify, that he who is confirmed, receives the grace to preserve himself from the corruption of the world, and to send forth by a pious life the sweet odor of virtue. 2 Cor. 2:15.

5. The bishop makes the sign of the Cross on the forehead, not alone because all Sacraments are ministered in this form, but especially because the Cross is the insignia of the Christian, the distinguishing mark which characterizes the soldier of Christ.

6. The Cross is made upon the forehead because the forehead is always open to view, and he should always be ready to profess his faith openly before the whole world; as the Apostles did on Pentecost.

7. The stroke on the cheek confers as it were, knighthood upon the young Christian, whereby he is enrolled in the grand army of the Heavenly King, and from now on is a soldier of Christ. He must he ready to suffer persecution and contempt for Jesus' sake. The bishop gives the stroke on the cheek while saying: "Peace be with thee," thereby expressing that the Spirit of Peace has taken His dwelling in your heart. Never drive Him from you by sin. If you battle bravely, and suffer patiently, He will always remain with you.