

**Wisdom** This gift enables us to judge things in the way God judges them, to see them as he sees them. Whoever has divine Wisdom delights in considering the beauty and majesty and infinite love of God.

**Understanding** The gift of understanding gives us insight into the great truths of our faith. It enables us to grasp them, relish them and realise in a practical way how they can be applied and lived.

**Counsel** Counsel means advice. The great counsellor in the New Testament is the Holy Spirit himself. "I will pray the Father," said Jesus at the Last Supper, "and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever" (Jn 14:16). By this gift we know what we must do or say in a particular situation. It preserves us from foolish decisions and helps us act wisely.

**Fortitude** To be a saint takes courage. The gift of fortitude, or courage, enables us to overcome all obstacles to Christian holiness, to remain true to our faith in spite of opposition, and to bear with patience the sufferings that come our way in the service of God.

**Knowledge** The knowledge given by the Holy Spirit is not just information, such as we can get by reading or study. It is a spiritual and interior knowledge, allowing us to see the hand of God in the happenings of the world, to see his likeness in all created things, and to realise that creatures are of no value to us unless they lead us to our Creator.

**Piety** Piety is the virtue of loving children towards their parents. The gift of piety makes us see God as our Father and relate to him with love, reverence and obedience. It fills us with trust in his fatherly care, and helps us live our moral life not as mere obedience to rules, but as the response of love to the God who has loved us first.

**Fear of the Lord** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," we read in one of the Psalms (Ps 111:10). This fear is not the fear of punishment but rather the fear of offending God, our good and loving Father. It leads us to cling to our Saviour in all trials and temptations, and to avoid sin as something offensive to God and degrading to ourselves.

**Increase of the fruits of the Holy Spirit**

St Paul writes to the Galatians (cf Gal 5:22-23) about the "fruits of the Spirit", which grow in us through living according to the Spirit, helped by the Sacrament of Confirmation. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. (cf *Catechism*, n. 1832)

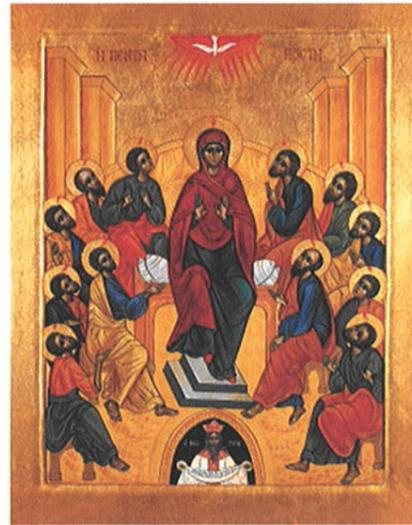
*How should we prepare for this sacrament?*

As always, prayer is the best preparation for Confirmation, to give us a more personal

relationship with Christ and a more lively friendship with the Holy Spirit. In this way we imitate the apostles who, when awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, "with one accord devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14).

Since "to receive Confirmation one must be in a state of grace", we "should receive the sacrament of penance in order to be cleansed for the gift of the Holy Spirit." (*Catechism*, n. 1310) We should be sorry for our sins, and ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit, so that we may avoid doing what is wrong and grow in love for Christ. The Holy Spirit makes our bodies his temple, says St Paul (cf 1 Cor 6:19). To respect our bodies and the presence of the Holy Spirit within them, we should keep away from self-indulgence, impurity and everything degrading.

Confirmation strengthens our union with the Church and with her mission of spreading the faith. Therefore, the *Catechism* says that preparation for the sacrament "should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of



Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community." (n. 1309) To this end it is good to prepare ourselves for Confirmation by attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion in our parish church.

Since Confirmation strengthens us to proclaim our faith to others, we should endeavour to acquire a deeper knowledge of the teachings of the Church so that we can explain them better to others.

Many candidates for Confirmation take the name of a saint whom they admire and would like to adopt as a patron saint. It would be good to get a book on that saint and read about his or her life. The saints are models of the virtues. They show us how to live the Gospel in all sorts of circumstances and they help us greatly by praying for us before God.

*Growth in the Christian life*

Confirmation is a major step in our new life as adults in the Church. It is a day for rejoicing and for renewing our resolve to serve Christ with all our hearts and to live lives that show others we have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We can take to heart the words of Pope John Paul II to a group of people about to be confirmed: "Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit is going to be poured out upon you in a particular way. You will hear the words of the Church spoken over you, calling upon the Holy Spirit to confirm your faith, to seal you in his love, to strengthen you for his service. You will then take your place among fellow-Christians throughout the world, full citizens now of the People of God. You will witness to the truth of the Gospel in the name of Jesus Christ. You will live your lives in such a way as to make holy all human life. Together with all the confirmed, you will become living stones in the Cathedral of peace. Indeed you are called by God to be instruments of his peace..."

"You too are strengthened inwardly today by the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that each of you in your own way can carry the Good News to your companions and friends. ... The same Holy Spirit comes to you today in the sacrament of Confirmation, to involve you more completely in the Church's fight against sin and in her mission of fostering holiness. ... The world of today needs you, for it needs men and women who are filled with the Holy Spirit. It needs your courage and hopefulness, your faith and your perseverance. The world of tomorrow will be built by you. Today you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit so that you may work with deep faith and with abiding charity, so that you may help to bring to the world the fruits of reconciliation and peace." (Homily, Coventry, 30 May 1982)

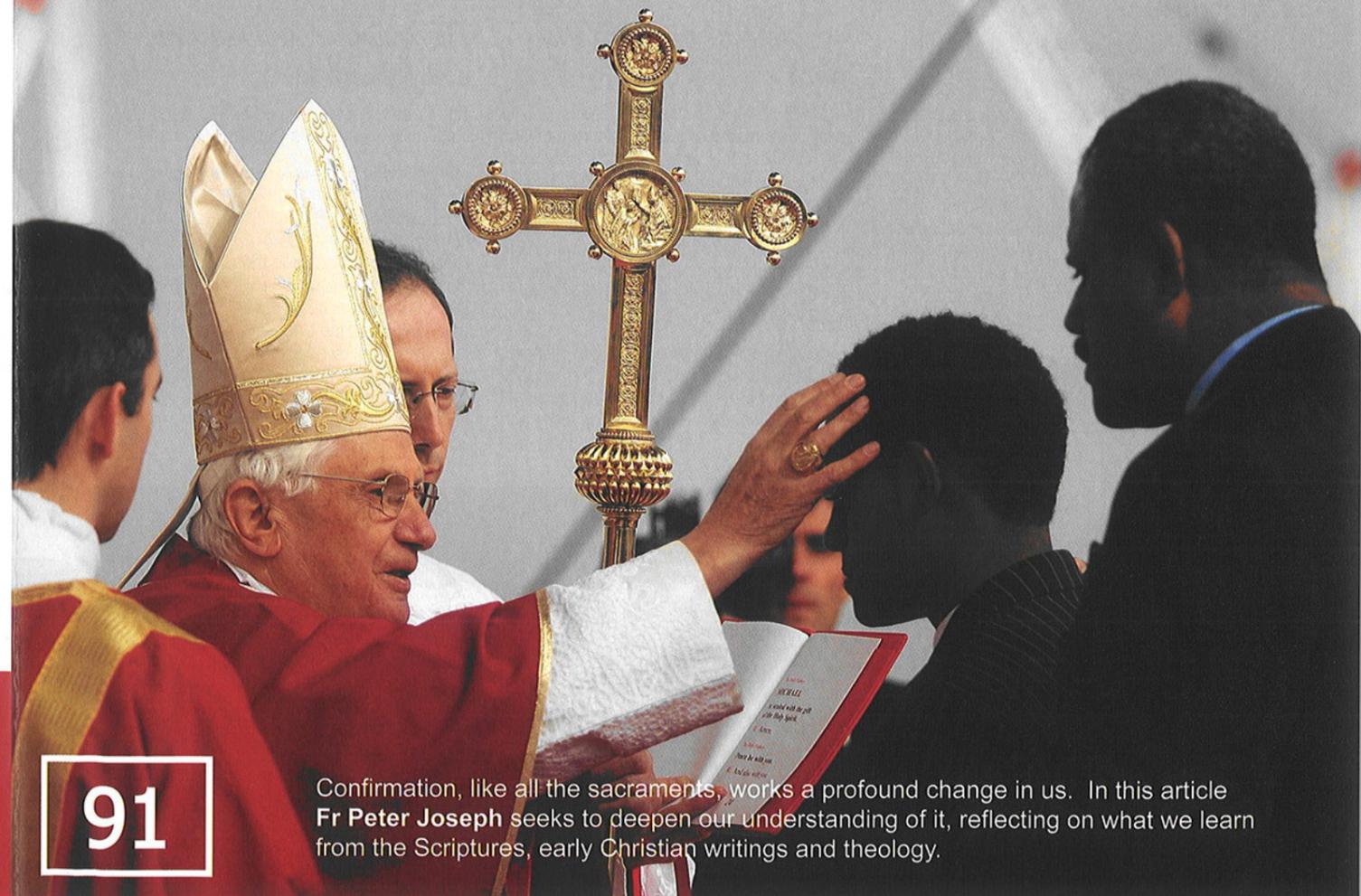
*Questions for Discussion*

1. Now that you know more about Confirmation, how do you think people should be prepared for this sacrament?
2. What good things are given in Confirmation?
3. What practical things can you do, once you have been confirmed, to live out your new life in the Holy Spirit?
4. What are some ways of defending and spreading your faith?

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*Strengthened by the*  
**Spirit**  
The Sacrament of Confirmation



Confirmation, like all the sacraments, works a profound change in us. In this article **Fr Peter Joseph** seeks to deepen our understanding of it, reflecting on what we learn from the Scriptures, early Christian writings and theology.

I recently heard about a girl who told her mother she didn't want to be confirmed. Her mother wisely suggested that she at least attend the classes in preparation for Confirmation so that she could find out more about the sacrament and make a more intelligent decision about whether to receive it or not. The girl attended the classes and, as might be expected, was thrilled to go ahead with her Confirmation.

## What is the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Confirmation is the sacrament that completes Baptism by the gift of the Holy Spirit and gives the grace to live as strong and perfect Christians. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptised] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed." (n. 1285)

While Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual birth, Confirmation, as its name suggests (confirm), is the sacrament of spiritual strength. In the Eastern Catholic Churches it is called Chrismation (anointing with Chrism). Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist are the three sacraments of Christian initiation, which lay the foundations of the Christian life.

Like all the sacraments, Confirmation was instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church to be administered.

## The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 1:8) was fulfilled at the first Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire. In that event we see something of the symbolism of Confirmation. The tongue enables us to speak, and so at once the apostles went out to proclaim Christ crucified and risen. Fire purifies and burns, and the Holy Spirit both purified their souls of defects and weaknesses, and set them on fire with zeal and boldness. The Spirit rested upon them; the apostles knew the Holy Spirit had come to be with them forever, as Christ had promised (cf Jn 14:16).



When the apostles spoke about Christ, everyone heard them in their own language. Thus the confusion of the Tower of Babel (cf Gen 11) was reversed, and God reunited mankind once again in his Son, as the most diverse races spoke the same language of faith in the one Lord.

What were the apostles and disciples like before the day of Pentecost? Despite having seen Christ risen from the dead, they were timid and remained indoors. Perhaps we too are fearful about telling people what religion we are, and afraid to stand up for our Christian beliefs. In Confirmation the Holy Spirit comes down to strengthen us to go out and stand up for our faith. It is the time to ask him to transform us as he transformed the apostles.

## Confirmation in the Early Church

The gift of the Spirit, sent by Jesus to the apostles, was intended for the rest of the faithful as well. We see this when St Peter addresses the multitude: "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2:38-39)

The apostles communicated this gift by a rite distinct from Baptism: "Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that

they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:14-17). Here the rite consisted in prayer and the laying on of hands, but very early on anointing was added to the rite. These same three things are in our rite of Confirmation today.

A priest in the early Church named Tertullian, writing about the year 210, describes the effects of Confirmation: "The body is anointed, that the soul may be made holy; the body is marked with a sign, that the soul may be protected; the body is over-shadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit."

## The recipient and minister of Confirmation

Any Catholic who has been baptised but not yet confirmed may receive Confirmation.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop. The administration of the sacrament by a bishop demonstrates that its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church and to the mission of witnessing to Christ. However, a priest can confirm an adult whom he has just baptised or received into the Catholic Church, and priests may also be allowed to give Confirmation when a bishop is not available or when the bishop needs assistance in confirming a large number of people. Priests can also confirm anyone in danger of death, even infants.

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## When is Confirmation conferred?

In the early Church, it was customary to give Confirmation, and sometimes Holy Communion, to infants immediately after Baptism, and this is still the practice of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Among the many Eastern Catholics in Australia we find, for example, Maronites, Melkites and Ukrainians. If any of these were baptised in their own Church, they will not be confirmed later along with their classmates, since their Confirmation took place on the day of their Baptism and, like Baptism, it is never repeated.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the administration of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist is usually delayed until the child has reached the age of reason and is able to understand what these sacraments mean. Confirmation in particular is postponed so that the bishop can confer it personally, thus showing that the sacrament unites the faithful more strongly with the Church. Even if Confirmation is not administered by the bishop, the link with the bishop is seen in the fact that the Chrism used is blessed by the bishop.

## The celebration of Confirmation

The bishop lays his hand on the head of each recipient and, with his thumb, anoints the forehead with an oil called Chrism in the form of a cross, while saying the words: "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Chrism is one of the three holy oils blessed by the bishop on Holy Thursday, or on some other day during Holy Week, at the Chrism Mass or Mass of the Oils. It is a mixture of olive oil and balsam, or other aromatic substances, and it is used in the three sacraments that confer on the soul a permanent seal called character: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

The oil of Chrism symbolises the Holy Spirit, who anointed Christ in the womb of his mother Mary and who came down upon him again in the form of a dove at his Baptism. (cf Lk 1:35; 3:22). In fact, the very name "Christ" is from a Greek word meaning the "Anointed One". In Hebrew, the word is "Messiah". As the oil seeps into our skin, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit enters us with his grace, giving us a share in the divinity and holiness of Christ.

A pleasant fragrance comes from the Chrism, since the balsam or other substances make it sweet-smelling. This is to remind us that we too are to show forth holiness in our lives and

to give off the "good odour of Christ", as St Paul expressed it (2 Cor 2:15). Just as unkind persons "leave a bad taste in your mouth," as people say, so holy people leave behind an aroma of freshness, sweetness and joy, because the Spirit of Christ shines through them.

A candidate for Confirmation has a sponsor to help him or her live as a true witness of Christ. It is desirable that the sponsor be one of the godparents. At the moment of Confirmation, the sponsor places his or her right hand on the shoulder of the candidate.

Another sign that the Holy Spirit is being given comes when the bishop extends his hands over all those to be confirmed and when he lays his hands individually upon each one.

St Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem who died in 386, devoted a special instruction to Confirmation. He said, "As the bread of the Eucharist ... is no longer mere bread but the body of Christ, so this holy ointment, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is no longer plain ointment ... but the Chrism of Christ, which, by the presence of the Godhead, causes in us the Holy Spirit. This symbolically anoints your forehead ... but the soul is sanctified by the Holy and Life-giving Spirit."

## The effects of Confirmation

### Increase of sanctifying grace

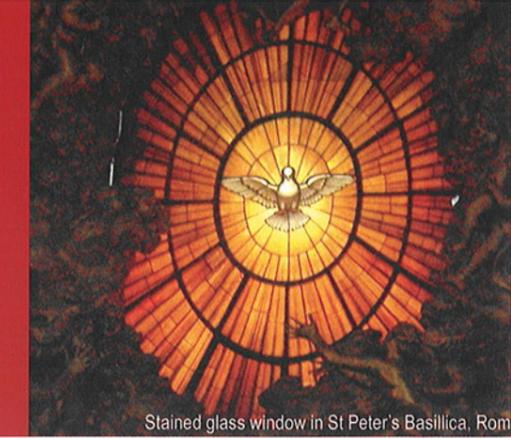
The primary effect of Confirmation is an increase of sanctifying grace, which is a sharing in God's own life. It gives us an intimate union with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, who dwell in our soul.

### Sacramental character

Like Baptism, Confirmation imprints a permanent mark on the soul called "character", a "sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of his Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness." (*Catechism*, n. 1304) For this reason the sacrament cannot be repeated. Looking at it in another way, Confirmation is a kind of spiritual coming-of-age, and as we become adults only once, so we can come of age only once in the spiritual sense.

### Sacramental grace

Each sacrament gives a special grace, called sacramental grace, which is particular to that sacrament. The sacramental grace of Confirmation strengthens us to spread and defend the faith received in Baptism. It also includes the right to the special spiritual helps



Stained glass window in St Peter's Basilica, Rome

from God, called actual graces, that enable us to lead a more Christ-like life.

### Closer union with the Church and her mission

Confirmation binds the baptised person more perfectly to Christ and the Church, strengthening him or her to spread and defend the faith publicly by word and deed and not to be ashamed of being a Christian. For this reason some bishops give those confirmed a slight tap on the cheek, showing them that they must be prepared to suffer for the name of Christ.

The bishop's homily in the Rite of Confirmation alludes to this mission: "The gift of the Holy Spirit which you are to receive will be a spiritual sign and seal to make you more like Christ and more perfect members of his Church. At his Baptism by John, Christ himself was anointed by the Spirit and sent out on his public ministry to set the world on fire."

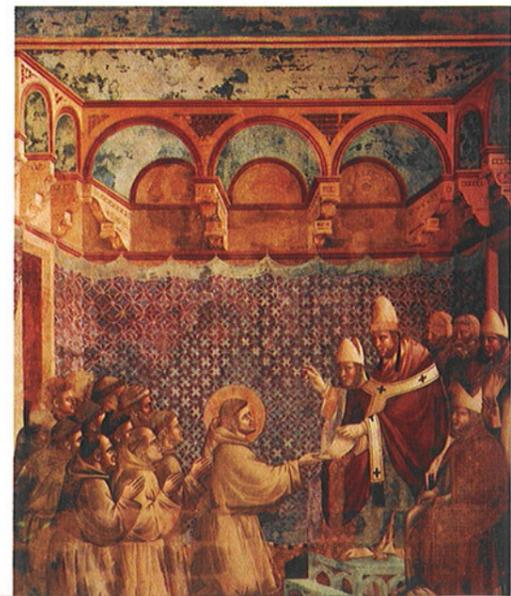
### Increase of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In Confirmation, the Holy Spirit is given to us for our spiritual strengthening, a strengthening which is brought about in a more particular way through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, the Gifts are "permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit." (n. 1830). They are always given along with sanctifying grace. They were given to us first at Baptism, and in Confirmation they are given in a fuller or more perfect form. They are seven in number and are listed by the prophet Isaiah: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord (Is 11:2-3). Let us look at each one and see its contribution to our spiritual life.

*"Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2:38-39)*



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