

Supplemental Information for
The Celebration of the Christian Mystery—Sacraments
By Deacon Al Laabs
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Session 7: “Confirmation, a Sacrament of Initiation”

Well, welcome back from the first half of this year’s “Why Catholic?” experience. Our steering committee has heard some wonderful stories of personal growth and excitement and a joy of meeting others of our faith community. I offer these notes, thoughts, and suggestions merely as an aid to a more fruitful experience of this session since a number of our group leaders asked for additional thoughts. Each comment is tied into the specific section of this session by a bolded and **underlined heading**. Please note that certain highlighted words may contain links to additional resources, primarily from New Advent, which is the Catholic Encyclopedia online, as an example: [Spirit](#) To follow such a link you may need to hold down the control key on your keyboard and then left click or hit enter while holding down the control key.

Suggested Environment

You may want to consider adding to the Bible, candle, and Catechism a small jar of olive oil. Since oil has such a symbolic nature in this sacrament, its presence will add an extra visible sign tied to the significance of the role of confirmation in the life of Christian.

Sharing Our Good News

Ideas for discussion: Since this is the first gathering since last fall, you might suggest a discussion of the first six weeks’ experience. Perhaps questions to start conversation might range along the line of “Has something changed in your life because of the experience last fall?” Has something changed in your understanding.....has something changed in your practice of faith.....(i.e.: one person told me that he reads the mass readings for Sunday in advance so he can ‘think about’ what they might mean)...Is there an insight that someone has had that just needs sharing? Are you doing or seeing something in your faith differently now than before? Do you see value in the small group process and sessions? If yes, you might consider trying to draw out the explicit value that was felt or perceived. Members of our steering committee have heard positive comments such as “I find it a little easier to talk about my faith....it was good to see other had the same kind of questions I did....same kind of concerns....same kind of hopes, etc.”

Exploring the Catechism

In addition to what is said there, it is helpful to understand that Catholics believe that Jesus, especially in the person of the Holy Spirit, lives and guides our Church. That is why when

the bishops, the successors of the Apostles who received the Spirit first, gather in an ecumenical council united with the Pope as successor of St. Peter, we are certain that God continues to guide his Church in the world through His Spirit and Apostolic succession. In fact, a good citation from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 28: verses 11-13: is worth introducing if time permits.

¹¹ Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, ¹² and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. ¹³ And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

The above is helpful to understand the line in this section which reads: Confirmation..."it renders our bond with the Church more perfect." What that can mean is that if the Spirit is truly living in our Church and we receive through Confirmation the grace to live in the Spirit more completely, we should be aligning our lives "more perfectly" with the life of Christ that is understood to live in the Church. Vatican II saw the Church as the entire People of God (all Catholic believers together with their leaders) giving example to the life of Christ in the world by our actions. We are graced with that same Spirit that animates our Church as individuals and charged with the duty of building up Christ's kingdom on earth by our actions.

Scripture: Pondering the Word

Galatians Chapter 5

English (Douay-Rheims)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, 23 Mildness, faith, modesty, contineny, chastity. Against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be made desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

New American Bible Translation

22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ (Jesus) have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. 26 Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

It is always fun to check and see how different translations render any passage. Note that there is even a difference in the number of fruits identified between these two versions. The following may help with understanding what a "Spiritual Fruit" is....

Some writers extend this term to all the [supernatural virtues](#), or rather to the acts of all these [virtues](#), inasmuch as they are the results of the [mysterious](#) workings of the Holy Ghost in our [souls](#) by means of His grace. But, with St. Thomas, [I-II.70.2](#), the word is ordinarily restricted to mean only those [supernatural](#) works that are done joyfully and with peace of [soul](#). This is the sense in which most authorities apply the term to the list mentioned by [St. Paul \(Galatians 5:22-23\)](#): "But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, [joy](#), peace, patience, benignity, [goodness](#), longanimity, mildness, [faith](#), modesty, continence, [chastity](#)." Moreover, there is no [doubt](#) that this list of twelve -- three of the twelve are omitted in several Greek and Latin [manuscripts](#) -- is not to be taken in a strictly limited sense, but, according to the rules of [Scriptural](#) language, as capable of being extended to include all acts of a similar [character](#).

Sharing Question

Note that the emphasis is on action, a type of action. I think my wife would say that one fruit of mine that needs fertilizing is 'patience.' So how do we give evidence that these 'fruits' are active in us—that old saying, by their fruits you will know them is operative here.

Exploring the Catechism (continued)

Most of this section is really pretty straight forward. I would add that paragraph three introduces an interesting insight. We Catholic are often accused by evangelicals of the false practice of infant baptism—in effect, that being a Christian is really an adult decision. The way we celebrate confirmation in the Western Church does admit of an “adult” decision to really embrace the life of Christ and commit to life within a community of believers.

Another key area is on page 40 in the third and fourth paragraph. "...as the People of God...empowered to practice our faith in the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of our lives...we are charged with being witnesses in our individual lives and to society as a whole. One could go back even further to the great social encyclicals at the beginning of the twentieth century, *Rerum Novarum*, (1891), on the conditions of labor. That document alone set the stage for entire Church position on unions, workers rights, living wages, etc. But the question always comes back to us as individuals, how is it that I live my faith in the “marketplace?” When someone criticizes the Church’s position on life at work, what do I say about that? With the grace of confirmation, we should be strengthened to speak for our values and our faith.

Finally, every Confirmation event that we have as a parish is truly a reenactment of that first Pentecost. Christ’s Spirit continues to enliven his Church through those who receive his Spirit and live His life in the world.

Sharing Our Faith

These are some good questions to reflect on and I would add to the second bullet point a caution that the question is asking about the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit, not the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The following are what are understood by the Church as the Gifts of the Holy Spirit:

They are the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety (godliness), and fear of the Lord.

- The gift of wisdom, by detaching us from the world, makes us relish and love only the things of heaven.
- The gift of understanding helps us to grasp the truths of religion as far as is necessary.
- The gift of counsel springs from supernatural prudence, and enables us to see and choose correctly what will help most to the glory of God and our own salvation.
- By the gift of fortitude we receive courage to overcome the obstacles and difficulties that arise in the practice of our religious duties.
- The gift of knowledge points out to us the path to follow and the dangers to avoid in order to reach heaven.
- The gift of piety, by inspiring us with a tender and filial confidence in God, makes us joyfully embrace all that pertains to His service.
- Lastly, the gift of fear fills us with a sovereign respect for God, and makes us dread, above all things, to offend Him.

For additional information or to have someone look this section up, I would refer you to sections 1830, 1831, and 1832 of the *Catechism* for the discussion of the Fruits versus the Gifts of Holy Spirit. Or you may review those sections below:

Living the Good News

I would definitely suggest that tying a personal action of improvement in one of the fruits of the spirit is an appropriate step toward living the Good News.

Lifting our Hearts

As an ending to the evening you may want to try this little “semi-liturgical” ceremony. After putting a tiny amount of the olive oil in a small bowl, pass out Kleenexes to everyone and ask them to take a dab of the oil on their index finger of their right hand. Then ask them to make a small sign of the cross on their forehead with the oil, saying this prayer as they do so all together in a group.

Lord Jesus, as I sign myself with your cross, I remind myself of my confirmation and my commitment to live your life in all the places and relationships of my life. I thank you for your grace and the courage to give a Christian example to my family, my children, my friends, and in my work place. Be with me in these coming days so that I will always have the courage to put my confidence, faith, and trust in the presence of your Spirit in my life.

Then say the closing prayer together on page 42.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to

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