

# Confirmation

Diocese of Dodge City  
September 23, 2008

## Overview

- 1) Meaning, age and occasion of the Sacrament of Confirmation
- 2) The history of Confirmation
- 3) The preparation and celebration of the sacrament

Part One

## MEANING, AGE, OCCASION

## Confirmation memories

- Bishop
- Questions from bishop
- Slap
- Gowns
- Saint's name

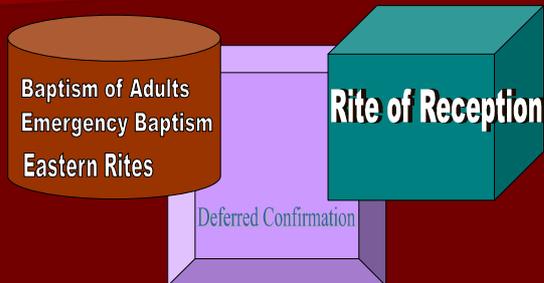
## Confirmation memories

- Age and occasion
  - Many confirmed as preteens
  - Others as adolescents
  - Some confirmed as infants
  - Some confirmed as adults joining church
  - Marriage preparation

## What these memories tell us

- The role of the bishop
- The importance of catechesis
- Defending the faith
- Self-appropriation of the faith
- Other meanings?

## Confirmation as Initiation, Maturity and Transfer Rites



## Meanings of confirmation

- Three different circumstances
  - Initiation
  - Maturity
  - Transfer
- Constants
  - Gift of Holy Spirit
  - For purpose of bearing witness

## Catechism 1285

- Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.

## Catechism 1285

- For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] 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."

## *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 215

- In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults are not to be baptized without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the Son and the Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized.

## Meanings of the Sacrament

- Initiation and the paschal mystery
- Completion of baptismal grace
- Becoming more perfectly bound to the Church
- Being enriched by grace of the Holy Spirit
- Becoming witnesses who spread and defend the faith by word and deed

## The age of confirmation

- *Rite of Confirmation* 11: With regard to children, in the Latin Church the administration of confirmation is generally postponed until about the seventh year. For pastoral reasons, however, especially to strengthen the faithful in complete obedience to Christ the Lord and in loyal testimony to him, episcopal conferences may choose an age which seems more appropriate, so that the sacrament is given at a more mature age after appropriate formation.

## The age of confirmation

- Range of ages in US: age of reason to about 16
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1308: "Although confirmation is sometimes called the 'sacrament of Christian maturity,' we must not confuse adult faith with the adult age of natural growth, nor forget that the baptismal grace is a grace of free, unmerited election and does not need 'ratification' to become effective."
- The dying, even infants

## Benedict XVI and Sequence

- "Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the centre, as the goal of the whole process of initiation." *Sacramentum caritatis* 18 (22 February 2007).

## July 2007 examples in US

- 10 dioceses celebrate confirmation before or with communion: Phoenix (2005), Tyler (2005), Gaylord (2003), Marquette (2003), Fargo (2002), Spokane (1998), Portland ME (1997), Great Falls-Billings (1996), Greensburg (1996), Saginaw (1995)

## July 2007 examples in US

- 16 dioceses have some parishes doing the same: Amarillo, Cleveland, Dallas, Fort Worth, Las Vegas, Honolulu, Rochester NY, Peoria, Salt Lake City, San Angelo, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Jose, Steubenville, Toledo, Venice

## July 2007 examples in US

- Dioceses where it was under discussion: Dodge City, Raleigh, Rapid City, Richmond
- Dioceses where it was tried and abandoned: Amarillo, Chicago, Corpus Christi, Grand Rapids, Joliet, Newark, New York, Sacramento, Tucson, Wheeling-Charleston, [Kansas City-St. Joseph]

## Confirmation before Communion

- Disadvantages
  - Lots of sacramental preparation in a short space of time
  - Older children would have more understanding
  - Older children would be challenged to make the faith their own

## Confirmation before Communion

- Advantages
  - Unifies confirmation theology
  - Faithful to early history
  - Grace of the Holy Spirit lasts a lifetime
  - Confirmation is a gift of the Holy Spirit
  - The Church's requirements are minimal
  - Distinguishes confirmation preparation from youth ministry

Part Two

## HISTORY OF CONFIRMATION

## Historical Guideposts

- New Testament
  - Pentecost
  - Baptism and eucharist
  - Handlaying and prayer for the Holy Spirit
    - Acts 8:14-17 and Acts 19:5-7
    - Hebrews 6:1-2
  - Anointing as image of Holy Spirit
    - 2 Corinthians 1:21-22
    - 1 John 2:20, 27

## Historical Guideposts

- Emerging baptismal rites in 3<sup>rd</sup> century
  - Syria: anointing preceded baptism
  - North Africa: anointing followed baptism
  - Rome: two anointings followed baptism
  - Formal rites, but exceptions for illness



## Historical Guideposts

- Emergence of "confirmation" by 5<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Ambrose: anointing, signing forehead, prayer for sevenfold gifts of the Spirit – signs that Christ had confirmed the candidate
  - Bishops presided for initiation at the cathedral at Easter, but exceptions made for illness, distance, or work
  - Bishops "confirmed" exceptional baptisms and heretics with handlaying and anointing

## Historical Guideposts

- Practice of 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Priests baptized infants, offering communion
  - Bishops presided for initiation at Easter or traveled to confirm with handlaying, anointing and prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit
  - "confirming" came to mean "strengthening"
  - Priests who confirmed were asked to stop
  - Sequence was unimportant, readiness pertained to the availability of the bishop

## Historical Guideposts

- 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century developments
  - Bishops continued making pastoral visits to confirm
  - Communion of infants became less frequent
  - Preparation for communion included catechesis and repentance
  - Orders of confirmation apart from baptism saw it as a ministry of bishops, not initiation



## Historical Guideposts

- 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century developments
  - Infants may have been confirmed, but their communion was deferred
  - Fourth Lateran Council requires annual communion for those at "years of discretion"
  - First communion was deferred till then, forbidden to infants
  - 7 was suggested as an age for confirmation
  - The slap and name were added

## Historical Guideposts

- Counter-reformation to 20<sup>th</sup> c.
  - Confirmation seen as an occasion for catechesis
  - Children received confirmation not before age 7, communion around ages 10-14
  - First communion became a public ceremony for children
  - Opinions about sequence emerge

## Historical Guideposts

- 20<sup>th</sup> century developments
  - Infant confirmation existed in some mission lands
  - The age of confirmation implied its association with penance, not initiation
  - *Quam singulari* set age of first communion around 7, causing catechetical challenges

## Historical Guideposts

- The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* re-imagined confirmation
- Some dioceses deferred the age of confirmation to adolescence
- Priests received the faculty to confirm those in danger of death, those they received into the Church, and adults whom they baptized
- The Eastern rites continued to offer chrismation and communion at baptism.

Part Three

## PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

## Preparation

- Canon 889/2: "Outside the danger of death, to be licitly confirmed it is required, if the person has the use of reason, that one be suitably instructed, properly disposed and able to renew one's baptismal promises."
- Dioceses have added other requirements, but bottom line is minimal

## Why we confirm

- Outpouring of the Holy Spirit
- A help for bearing witness
- Unity with Christ
- Unity with the Church
- Once in a lifetime expression of baptism

## Sponsor

- The use of the baptismal sponsor is encouraged (RC 5)
- Responsibilities

## Sponsor

- Eligibility (Canons 872 and 874 §1)
  - Help child lead a Christian life
  - Be at least 16, though there are exceptions
  - Be fully initiated
  - Lead a life “in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken”
  - Be unbound by any penalty
  - Be someone besides the parents

## Cautions about catechesis

- Beware making service projects and class attendance a means of *earning* confirmation
- Beware teaching that children are not committed to the Catholic Church unless they are confirmed
- Beware teaching that confirmation is an only-once-in-a-lifetime affirmation of faith
- Beware linking the choice of a saint’s name to a personal affirmation of faith

## Stresses for catechesis

- Connections to baptism: sponsor, promises, name
- Confirmation is a gift of the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit will empower those confirmed to bear witness *afterwards*
- Every Sunday we profess our faith in the Creed and the eucharist
- Sunday mass is our most important commitment as Catholics

## Liturgical Catechesis

- Scripture readings for confirmation (volume IV of lectionary, #764-768)
  - For example, Isaiah 11:1-4ab (#764-1)
  - Psalm 104 1ab and 24, 27-28, 30-31, 33-34 (#766-4)
  - Acts of the Apostles 2:1-6, 14, 22b-23, 32-33 (#765-2)
  - John 14:23-26 (#768-10)

## Liturgical Catechesis

- Elements of the confirmation liturgy
  - Bishop’s homily
  - Renewal of baptismal promises
  - Prayer for sevenfold gift of the Spirit
  - Handlaying
  - Chrism

## Celebration

- Outpouring of Holy Spirit through handlaying and chrism
- Connection with the bishop
- Confirmand’s affirmation of faith in renewal of baptismal promises
- Sponsor & community giving support
- Masses with children