

LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONFIRMATION OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

The formation and preparation of school age candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation follows two complimentary tracts—liturgical and catechetical. The Introduction to the *Order of Confirmation* speaks of the dignity of Confirmation in the following way:

Those who have been baptized continue on the path of Christian Initiation through the Sacrament of Confirmation, by which they receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord sent upon the Apostles at Pentecost.

By this gift of the Holy Spirit the faithful are more fully conformed to Christ and are strengthened with the power to bear witness to Christ for the building up of his Body in faith and charity. They are marked with the character or seal of the Lord in such a way that the Sacrament of Confirmation cannot be repeated. (Order of Confirmation, Introduction, nos. 1 and 2)

The baptized school age candidates are to be considered as on the path of Christian Initiation, already members of Christ and his Church and looking forward to a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Their regular participation in the liturgical life of a Christian, especially with participation in Sunday Mass each week and frequent opportunities for the Sacrament of Penance, provides the foundation for their liturgical formation and preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. This presumes that the parents and/or guardians join their children as well. Catechetical instruction provides for a clear and comprehensive understanding of the gift of the Holy Spirit and of the effects of this gift.

The liturgical formation of school age candidates is enhanced when the following elements are observed and are a part of the calendar of formation and preparation:

- Weekly preparation for participation in Sunday Mass with a review of the *Roman Missal* texts, especially the Collect of the Mass, and the *Lectionary for Mass* texts, especially the Gospel.
- Occasional celebrations of the Liturgy of the Word with biblical readings focused on the Holy Spirit, the Christian life more fully conformed to Christ, bearing witness to Christ and his Gospel, service to the members of the Body of Christ and on the Holy Eucharist, the completion of Christian Initiation. A Liturgy of the Word making use of the biblical readings for the celebration of Confirmation itself near to the occasion of the Sacrament can also be helpful.
- Two or three opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance should be scheduled during the course of formation and preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The *Order of Confirmation* is clear that those to be confirmed must be in the state of grace (see *Order of Confirmation*, Introduction, number 12). These opportunities could coincide with

the regularly scheduled time for Confessions in the parish. One of these opportunities may take the form of a communal celebration for the candidates, parents and/or guardians, family members and sponsors.

- As the day of Confirmation approaches, prayers for the school age candidates are to be included in the Universal Prayer for Sunday Mass. An example of an intention is the following:

For our parish school age candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation, that they may be ready to receive the grace of God, the Holy Spirit, so to be more completely conformed to Christ and be witnesses to his Gospel among us. Let us pray to the Lord/Lord, hear our prayer.

- The newly confirmed may be invited to participate in Sunday Mass as a body the Sunday following the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- A catechetical session should be devoted to a review of the Order for the Conferral of Confirmation within Mass. The *Order of Confirmation* gives special emphasis to the capacity of the candidates to renew their baptismal promises (see *Order of Confirmation*, Introduction, number 12).
- Outside of the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy, in the context of catechetical formation and preparation, prayer services can be developed to highlight the significance of the Confirmation Name and asking the heavenly intercession of the saints, the role of the Bishop as a successor of the Apostles and the role of the sponsor.
- The prayers to open and close the catechetical session can include the Collect for the Mass for Pentecost Sunday (see the *Roman Missal*).
- At some point during the catechetical formation, it is strongly encouraged to introduce the candidates to the Sequence for Pentecost as a reflection on the Holy Spirit (see the *Lectionary for Mass*, Pentecost Sunday).

In recent years and with good intentions, practices such as enrollments and rites of welcome which imitate the patterns of Christian Initiation of Adults have developed. These practices should be discontinued as they are not related to the sacramental preparation of baptized school age candidates. Baptism enrolls and welcomes the school age candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Word of God, the Sunday Mass and the Sacrament of Penance are the primary means of liturgical formation and preparation of school age candidates.