

# St. Mark Study Guide

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## Confirmation: Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit!

“At a confirmation, a bishop asked a boy he would go to church every Sunday. The boy replied, ‘Would you go and watch the same movie every week?’ ‘It depends on how important the movie is to you’ the bishop replied. Confirmation seals the gift of faith, if there is any there to seal.



The visible sign of Confirmation is when the Bishop or Priest lays hands on the confirmandi's head and seals the head with sacred chrism. When anointing the confirmandi the celebrant says, “Be sealed with the Holy Spirit.” The sign of baptism is water. Oil seals water in and was also used, in ancient times, for healing. The link between these two elements of the sacraments is clear. The Church uses the language of “sealing” to describe Confirmation. Confirmation seals the waters of baptism into which we are plunged. In the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) the unity of

the sacraments of initiation is restored in practice. At the Easter Vigil, adults who are to be baptized will receive all three sacraments at that liturgy.

“Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17

Paul and Barnabas wanted the mission to preach and so they were to Jerusalem to receive confirmation from the Apostles and the Elders (Gal 1: 18 - 2: 10). Paul then appointed assistants and successors. (Tit 1: 5; 1 Tim 1: 3f ) and to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph 4: 11 - 12), Paul instructed those who had been chosen to do likewise. (2 Tim 2: 2). Future leaders and pastors were "sent" by the authority of the Church. (Rom 10: 14 - 15) The sacrament of confirmation seals us in faith and sends us on the mission.

### THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Confirmation, together with Baptism and Eucharist, form the Sacraments of Initiation that are all intimately connected. In the Sacrament of Confirmation, the baptized person is “sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” and is strengthened for service to the Body of Christ. The prophets of

the Old Testament foretold that God's Spirit would rest upon the Messiah to sustain his mission. Their prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah was conceived by the Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus on the occasion of his baptism by John. Jesus' entire mission occurred in communion with the Spirit. Before he died, Jesus promised that the Spirit would be given to the Apostles and to the entire Church. After his death, he was raised by the Father in the power of the Spirit.

The New Testament reports many manifestations of the Holy Spirit, two of which we note here. St. John's Gospel describes an outpouring of the Spirit on Easter night when Jesus breathed on the Apostles and said, "Receive the holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles gives another account of the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days after the Resurrection of Christ (cf. Acts 2). Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles proclaimed God's mighty deeds. Peter preached that this coming of the Spirit fulfilled the prophecy of Joel: "In the last days... I will pour out a portion of my spirit / upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17;; cf. Jl 3:1). Those who believed in the Apostles' preaching were baptized and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

## **THE LITURGY OF CONFIRMATION**

Chrism is used to anoint the newly baptized, to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation, and to anoint bishops and priests during the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In continuity with the New Testament, the custom of laying hands on those who would receive the gift of the Spirit, the bishop or priest extends his two hands over all those to be confirmed. He recites a prayer that begs the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for the seven gifts traditionally associated with the Spirit. These gifts are permanent dispositions that move us to respond to the guidance of the Spirit. The essential rite then follows. In the Latin Rite, "the Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with Chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of hands, and through the words, 'Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Introduction to the Rite of Confirmation, no. 9). The connection between Confirmation and Baptism is also reflected in the choosing of a name by which the candidate will be confirmed, especially when the chosen name is one of the names by which the candidate was baptized.

### **The Effects of Confirmation**

Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace: —it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation [becoming adopted sons and daughters of God] which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"; —it unites us more firmly to Christ;; —it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; —it renders our bond with the Church more perfect;; —it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly and never to be ashamed of the Cross. —CCC, no. 1303

## THE MISSION AND WITNESS OF THE CONFIRMED

Confirmation deepens our baptismal life that calls us to be missionary witnesses of Jesus Christ in our families, neighborhoods, society, and the world. Through Confirmation, our personal relationship with Christ is strengthened. We receive the message of faith in a deeper and more intense manner with great emphasis given to the person of Jesus Christ, who asked the Father to give the Holy Spirit to the Church for building up the community in loving service. The Holy Spirit bestows seven gifts—wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, piety, and fear of the Lord—to assist us in our mission and witness. The impact of these gifts accompanies us in the various stages of our spiritual development.

### Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. **Wisdom** enables us to see the world from God’s viewpoint, which can help us come to grasp the purpose and plan of God. It grants us the long-range view of history, examining the present in the light of the past and the mystery of the future. It saves us from the illusion that the spirit of the times is our only guide.
2. The Spirit’s gift of **knowledge** directs us to a contemplation, or thoughtful reflection, of the mystery of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as well as of the mysteries of the Catholic faith. We are drawn to meditative prayer, where we allow God to lead us while we rest patiently in the divine presence.
3. The gift of **understanding** stimulates us to work on knowing ourselves as part of our growth in knowing God. It is what St. Augustine meant when he prayed, “That I may know You, may I know myself.”
4. When the Spirit pours **fortitude or courage** in to our hearts, we can trust that we will be prepared to stand up for Christ and the Gospel when challenged.
5. As the gift of **counsel or right judgment** grows in us, we can sense the quiet teaching that the Spirit gives us about our moral lives and the training of our consciences.
6. The gift of **piety or reverence** is an act of respect for the Father who created us, for Jesus who saved us, and for the Spirit who is sanctifying us. We learn reverence for God and people from our parents and others who train us in virtue. The Spirit fills us with this gift at liturgy, which is a masterful school of reverence, as well as through popular devotions and piety.
7. Finally, the **gift of fear of the Lord or wonder and awe in God’s presence** can infuse honesty into our relationship with God, a frankness that places us in awe before the majesty of God. Yet the gift also imparts an attitude of grateful wonder that God loves us and that we can share in his life.

When we are responsive to the grace of Confirmation and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, we begin to bear the fruits of the Spirit.

## Fruits of the Holy Spirit

The tradition of the Church names twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. (cf. CCC, no. 1832; Gal 5:22). These virtues are the goals of the Christian moral life.

### FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are the healing and cleansing qualities of anointing with oil symbols of what happens in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation?
2. What are the consequences of the deeper identification with the mission of the Church that comes from Confirmation?
3. How can we cooperate in developing the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
4. **Wisdom** is the view from the hilltop according to St. Thomas. How do we see the whole world from the standpoint of eternity, that is, God. Does God look at the world with hope or despair? What is the difference, if any, between hope and optimism?
5. **Knowledge:** What do you learn about yourself and God in the process of RCIA over the course of this year? Did you learn anything that changed how you see the world? What was it?
6. **Understanding:** Understanding is more than information. Understanding is the result of grace and is the sum total of our failures and successes and insight that brings. How do we seek out the deep things of God in our understanding? Is it possible without prayer, that is, conversation with God?
7. **Good Counsel:** Good judgment in the practical order of life is acquired through experience and the good counsel of respected persons in our life. It is also called prudence. How do you learn to read life better? How can the practice of the sacraments help you to live more prudently? Were the saints we discussed this year prudent? How would you counsel people in your life differently, based on your experience this year?
8. **Fortitude or courage:** Fortitude or courage stands up to threats. What threats can you see in being a Catholic? Christians are persecuted around the world. Do you have any fears about following Christ?
9. **Piety or reverence** is an act of respect for the Father who created us, for Jesus who saved us, and for the Spirit who is sanctified us. How do we avoid becoming indifferent to God's love? Familiarity breeds contempt. Do you think cynicism is impious or irreverent? Is that a good thing? How do we guard against that which would undermine our piety?
10. **Gift of fear of the Lord:** Is the fear of God about terror or reverence?