



To Be a Soldier of Christ by Joe Sixpack

I fully expect non-Catholics to be void of any understanding regarding the sacrament of Confirmation, but when my fellow Catholics are at a loss to explain what it is and what it does, I'm just a wee bit perplexed. Unfortunately, that seems to be the case, so we'll focus this week on what is, to my way of thinking, one of the most exciting aspects of Catholicism.

Confirmation is the sacrament instituted by Christ that makes baptized persons "more perfectly bound to the Church and...enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence [baptized persons] are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."¹

Confirmation increases sanctifying grace, thus making us more holy. It also increases the supernatural virtues and gives us an increase of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord). Confirmation also imprints on our soul an indelible spiritual character, and for this reason cannot be repeated. Best of all, it enables us to courageously profess our faith, even under the threat of death. Indeed, without Confirmation there would be far fewer martyrs in the Church's glorious history.

At the time of Emperor Gallienus (AD 264), a Roman soldier named Marinus was about to be promoted to a high rank when some jealous fellow soldiers denounced him as a Christian. The emperor asked him if the charge was true. Marius admitted that he was a Christian so the emperor promised that his promotion would stand if he gave up the Christian faith; otherwise, he must die. He gave Marinus three hours to decide.

Marinus went to the bishop who had only recently baptized him. The bishop then and there laid his hands on Marinus in the sacrament of Confirmation to strengthen him with the Holy Spirit. Afterward he put before him a sword and a book of the Gospels, and said, "Make your choice." Without hesitation Marinus chose the Gospels...then went back to meet his martyrdom and heavenly reward.

This true story aptly demonstrates the power of Confirmation, but many non-Catholics claim it's an invention of the Catholic Church because it's not mentioned in the Bible. Well, actually it is. Although it's not called Confirmation in the Bible, we clearly see it in use by the apostles in the historical books of the New Testament. Christ promised that those who believed in Him would receive the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39; 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:4), and St. Peter declared that the Pentecostal gift was intended for all Christians (Acts 2:38). The apostles imparted the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, a sacramental rite distinct from Baptism, as the Samaritans whom Peter and John confirmed had already been baptized by Philip (Acts 7:14,18). Saints Paul and John make frequent references to Confirmation (cf. 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13; Tit. 3:5; 1 Jn. 2:20,27). The apostles certainly wouldn't have confirmed the faithful by a distinct rite after Baptism unless they had received it from Christ.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 11

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the local bishop, but priests may also confirm (when duly authorized by the bishop) under certain circumstances. For example, in case of an emergency, such as impending death, or in institutional situations (prisons, hospitals).

Confirmation must be received only by baptized persons and only when in a state of grace. To not be in a state of grace when confirmed is the grave sin of sacrilege.

The sacrament of Confirmation gives us several serious but delightful obligations. Many people believe that once they're confirmed they've done all they need to do and learned all they need to learn. That couldn't be further from the truth. The fact is, we are obliged to study the faith for our confirmation, be confirmed, then *continue our studies for the rest of our lives*. That doesn't mean you have to become some sort of Catholic scholar, but continued study is required. I'm one who prefers to advance my studies by reading books, but others do perfectly well by reading good Catholic periodicals...or even things like *What We Believe...Why We Believe It*.

You may have noticed in recent years that our bishops have been making a strong effort in implementing the New Evangelization called for by St. John Paul II. There is a reason for that. One of the biggest obligations we have as recipients of Confirmation is that we are to evangelize non-Catholics. Prior to Vatican II, evangelization was left largely to the efforts of priests and religious sisters. Vatican II reminded us that *all* Catholics are obligated to evangelize. It was a real eye-opener for the laity, and the bishops are helping even more to open our eyes to that fact.

Evangelization doesn't mean we have to stand on street corners and preach to passersby. Neither does it mean we have to corner folks we know and hammer away at them. Indeed, most folks feel that we should stay away from controversial subjects, and I fully agree. That's why I never discuss organized sports and soap operas, but religion and politics are wide open for discussion. Why? Because these topics deal with elements of truth, and truth is never controversial. Truth can bring out emotion in a lot of people, but that isn't because it is controversial, rather because some people don't want to accept truth.

Blessed Fulton Sheen defined truth as conformity of the mind to reality. In other words, subjective opinion does not determine truth, but rather it is determined by objective reality. When someone says to me that what is true for one person is not necessarily true for another person, I'm tempted to hand him a Bill Engval sign, because that statement doesn't even make any sense.

Let's say you're standing on top of a forty story building and shout, "I don't believe in gravity!". Then you jump off the roof. Your subjective opinion that gravity doesn't work in no way changes the objective reality that it does work, and your mind will conform to reality sometime between the time you jump and the time you land.

Is gravity a controversial subject? No, but I suspect for the guy falling it is indeed an emotional one. So truth isn't controversial, but it can be emotional. Therefore, when talking about religion, the way to keep the conversation calm is to be calm yourself. It has been my experience that when people aren't calm it is because they aren't sure of their subject. The best way to remain calm and collected during such a discussion is to know what you're talking about, and that is done by obeying the Church's conformational mandate to study our faith. Of course, that is the purpose of this column—to know *What We Believe...Why We Believe It*.

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