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CONFIRMATION NEWSLETTER – No 3

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this the third Confirmation Newsletter. I hope that you found the previous two newsletters, interesting, helpful and useful. As I stated in the first newsletter, the purpose of these newsletters is to help parents carry out their part in the preparation of their child for Confirmation. To that end I will focus in this newsletter on the symbols of the Sacrament of Confirmation. These symbols are used during the 'Rite of Confirmation'.

The Symbol of the Dove

There are many things in life that we cannot see, yet we know they exist. We cannot see the love that our parents/guardians have for us, yet we know it exists. We cannot see electricity, or gas, but we know it exists. We cannot see text messages flying from one mobile phone to another, yet we know they do. We cannot see the Holy Spirit, yet we believe the Holy Spirit exists. The writers of the Gospels wanted to find ways to describe the Holy Spirit, so they did what all writers do - they used symbols. These symbols are wind, breath, fire and the dove.

Jesus left Galilee and went to the river Jordan to be baptised by John. But John kept objecting and said, 'I ought to be baptised by you. Why have you come to me?' Jesus answered, 'For now this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do'. Then John agreed. So, Jesus was baptised. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, 'This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him' (Matthew.3:13-17; Mark.1:9-11; Luke.3:21-22)

The symbol of the dove is very much the symbol of the Sacrament of Confirmation. In baptism, we become daughters and sons of God. The Holy Spirit, which comes to us in Baptism, confirms this in a special way in the sacrament of Confirmation, which we receive only once. But throughout our lives, the Holy Spirit is always ready to reaffirm us as daughters and sons of God. We may not recognise this at the time; we may not 'see' it, but we believe it happens.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

This is a symbol of giving your word. As parents I invite you to talk to your children about their baptism explaining why you had them baptised and what you had in mind for them at the time

RENEWAL OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES

Do you renounce Satan?

Candidates: I do.

And all his works?

Candidates: I do.

And all his empty promises?

Candidates: I do.

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth?

Candidates: I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered death and was buried,
rose again from the dead
and is seated at the right hand of the Father?

Candidates: I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who came upon the apostles at Pentecost
and today is given to you sacramentally in Confirmation?

Candidates: I do.

Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Candidates: I do.

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.
We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Candidates: Amen.

Confirmation Names

At Confirmation the bishop (or a priest representing him) calls us by our own Baptismal names as well as our new Confirmation name. Our names are very special. Everybody knows us by our name. God knows us by our name. He says to us: *'I have called you by your name; you are mine'*. People choose a new name at Confirmation. The choosing of a name is a development of a biblical tradition according to which a person's new relationship to God was marked by a change of name. In the Old and New Testament God sometimes changed people's names when they took on a special work for him, e.g. Abram became Abraham; Sarai became Sarah; Simon became Peter; Saul became Paul. People who are setting out on a new way of life often choose a new name, e.g. actors, models, singers, etc.

When we choose a new name at Confirmation it is a sign that we are ready to begin living in a new way. We are ready to start working for the Kingdom of God on earth. The choosing of a name helps highlight the new role that the young adult is called upon to exercise in the community. Often people choose the name of a Saint for their Confirmation name, because it reminds them of the example that Saint offers them of how to live the life of a Christian today. The candidate may also take the name of a parent, grandparent, or other relative or close family friend. In all cases the name should be one with which the child has some connection and which sets a standard for the child to emulate. Exotic names are not appropriate as we are celebrating a Christian ceremony – a Sacrament,

Laying on of Hands

In the Old Testament times the laying on of hands or imposition of hands was a sign of blessing. (Genesis.48:13-20). It was a sign that the strength and love of God was being communicated through the person being blessed. The laying on of hands was also a sign that the person was being specially chosen and set apart to do **GOD'S WORK**. It was a sign of consecration.

In the Gospel we read of Jesus placing his hands on people as a sign of blessing or healing, e.g. he placed his hands on the little children and blessed them; he touched the leper and healed him; he placed his hands on the eyes of the blind man and cured him.

In the New Testament, the laying on of hands also signifies the calling down of the Spirit. The early Christians always spoke of the Spirit as 'coming down'. (Acts.2:14)

The apostles used the laying on of hands as a sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In Confirmation the bishop (or the priest appointed by the bishop) lays his hands over those he is confirming. This is a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit about to be given to them. It is a sign that God is blessing them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign that God is choosing them or consecrating them for a special mission.

Olive Oil

At the time when Jesus lived, there was hardly any part of life not touched by the olive tree. Its oil was used for food, as fuel for lighting lamps, as a medicine, to soften and clean, as an anointing oil, in sacrifice, and its wood was used for furniture. The olive branch was the first vegetation seen by Noah after the Flood and today the olive branch is seen as a symbol of peace. The olive tree is particularly suited to the Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters, and some trees can survive for a thousand years. When the olives were picked, they were crushed and squeezed to collect the oil, each tree producing up to a half ton of oil each year.

Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit

We speak about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, but do not often refer to the Holy Spirit as a Gift. And yet this is precisely what happens at Confirmation. As the bishop (or his representative) traces the sign of the cross on their foreheads with chrism he will address the young people by name, adding these words: ***“Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy spirit”.***

Just as historic documents often carry the seal of the crown or the seal of other important governing bodies, God places his seal on you at Confirmation to certify that you are real and that you belong to him. Oil is a symbol of abundance and joy. Some people put oil on themselves after bathing, and many athletes use oil to massage their sore muscles. Oil is also a sign of healing since it is soothing to bruises and wounds. It also glistens, which is why beauty queens and weightlifters often “anoint” themselves with oil – it makes their skin glisten

Anointing with oil has all these meanings in the sacraments of the Church. Before you are baptised you were anointed with oil to symbolise strengthening and protection. The anointing of the sick and dying symbolises healing and comfort. In Confirmation you are anointed with the sacred chrism as a sign of consecration – meaning you are joined to Christ. It’s the same chrism used to consecrate new priests. (Christ is not the surname of Jesus. It comes from chrism. Jesus Christ – Jesus the anointed one)

This seal says we belong to God forever and promise to serve the Church. In return, we acknowledge that God is our protector. That’s why we can have the confidence to go to God in time of need. Because of this seal we know that God is there for us.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
Enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth. **Amen**