

The Spirit of Ordinary Time

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

If you enter a church and find the sanctuary decked out in red flowers, chances are that, unless it is Christmas, the parish has just celebrated Confirmation. This is particularly true in spring when so many such celebrations take place in the wake of Easter.

I wonder, though, if this Sacrament is in danger of being deeply underappreciated.

Unlike Communion and Reconciliation, Confirmation is celebrated only once in a lifetime. Thus, it is not repeatedly recalled in such a tangible way.

Unlike Holy Matrimony and Ordination, Confirmation does not bring forth an obvious reorientation of daily life and the organization of that life to meet the demands that come with a new state of life.

Unlike Baptism, it does not come with such constant reminders as the Baptismal candle prominently placed in every church or the annual renewal of Baptismal vows at Easter or the reminder of Baptism at every Christian funeral.

Unlike the Anointing of the Sick, it is often celebrated amidst the myriad distractions and angsts of teenage life rather than in those days when the mind and heart are intensely oriented toward the spiritual.

It is also centered on the Holy Spirit, perhaps the most intangible member of the Holy Trinity.

Yet, when considering the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of that Spirit, and the great promise of strength that comes with it, there may be more that can be done to emphasize the importance of this Sacrament for those receiving it this year, those for whom Confirmation was a long-ago celebration, and for the life of a parish as a whole. So, perhaps:

- If space allows, all parishioners should be invited to and urged to attend the parish's celebration of Confirmation to remember their own celebration, hear the beautiful prayers of Confirmation, and support the newly confirmed with their presence and their prayers. Attend if you can and recall the graces you received that special day of your own life.
- Consider hosting a parish wide celebration each year for those who are confirmed – perhaps on the Feast of Pentecost or on a Sunday close to the Confirmation celebration. This can be an occasion for all to rejoice in the gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- Occasionally the beautiful words of the Confirmation rite might be printed in the parish bulletin or website so that those who last heard these words long ago can have a chance to reflect on them once again.
- Confirmation sponsors may consider all the ways they can help the one they sponsored grow in wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Often, godparents are chosen for their critical role because of their relationships with the parents of the infant to be baptized. Typically, however, when a teenager or adult is being confirmed, he or she chooses the sponsor. Hopefully, those special relationships will inspire sponsors to play active roles in the lives of faith of those they presented for Confirmation. Perhaps the anniversary of Confirmation Day, or the Feast Day of the Confirmation patron saint can be particular occasions to renew and strengthen that commitment.
- To the extent possible, the years after Confirmation might be given greater attention. All too often, Confirmation can become a day that marks the end of religious education rather than the beginning of a newer and deeper life of faith. Those who lead parish organizations might consider how to reach out to the newly Confirmed to play an active role in parish life. Yes, this may mean a vibrant youth and young adult ministry program. But it should also involve real invitations for the newly confirmed to join every other activity and form of service that is part of parish life.
- Planning for Pentecost Sunday – celebrated on May 28 this year -- might include ways to recall the celebration of Confirmation, remember what it meant, and pray for continued openness to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- If those to be Confirmed are still teenagers or younger, their parents – the first teachers of the faith – have a sacred role to play in helping them to prepare, by sharing with them a strong witness of a faith-filled life and prioritizing their growth in faith above all the other demands on their time.
- Likewise, godparents should accompany their godchildren as they journey toward Confirmation. With the intimate connection between Baptism and Confirmation, this support can be essential.

My own Confirmation was decades ago. I have happy memories and some photographs in which I am wearing a red robe and a white felt stole bearing the name of my patron saint, “Ann.” I wish I remembered more. However, with every passing year, I get a bit more grateful for that long ago day and what happened on it.

Perhaps as individuals and as parish families this can be the year to celebrate Confirmation and its important role in the life of Baptized Christians and in the very life of the Church herself. When the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, these men who had trembled and hidden in fear were strengthened to do great things boldly and bravely

for the rest of their days. May we seek ways to more fully embrace the Holy Spirit in our own lives and to rejoice in the way it fills our ordinary times.

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