

Appendix D

The Rite of Confirmation

During the Mass, after the homily, the Rite of Confirmation begins. The essential part of the Confirmation rite is when the bishop (or priest, to whom permission may be delegated) places his hand upon the head of the individual to be confirmed, usually while the sponsor has their right hand on the individual's shoulder, immediately behind them.

The bishop traces the sign of the cross on the individual's forehead—having first dipped his thumb in the holy oil called *chrism*—and says, “Be sealed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The newly confirmed person responds by saying, “Amen.”

Chrism is one of the three kinds of holy oil which a bishop blesses each year during Holy Week. The other two kinds of holy oil are the oil of catechumens (used in Baptism) and the oil of the sick (used in Anointing of the Sick). The holy oils, all of them, are composed of pure olive oil.

From ancient times, olive oil has been looked upon as a strengthening substance; athletes were accustomed to bathe in olive oil before taking part in athletic contests. The significance of the holy oils used in the sacraments is then very evident: the oil represents the strengthening effect of God's grace.

Besides the distinct and special blessing which each holy oil receives, chrism has another difference: balm has been mixed with it. Balsam is a naturally fragrant substance procured from a tropical tree. With the holy chrism, balsam symbolizes the “sweet odor” of virtue; the spiritual fragrance, the *attractiveness* that characterizes the life of those who put their Confirmation graces to work.

Are we allowing the grace to work?

The cross traced on the forehead of the person being confirmed is a powerful symbol of the graces we receive – we only need act on these graces.

We must ask ourselves:

- “In my daily life, do I really bear witness to Christ?”
- “By my attitude towards others, by my treatment of those around me, by my actions in general do I proclaim: ‘This is what it means to be a Christian; this is what it means to live by the Gospel?’”

If the answer is no, then there is a lot of grace being wasted—the special grace of Confirmation. It is a grace available us in abundance if we just put it to use.

Its strengthening grace will enable us to rise above fear in the face of criticism of our faith, have the courage to live and defend our faith, and overcome reluctance to sacrifice for it.

In all of these circumstances, the grace of Confirmation comes to our aid if we only allow it, helping us to overcome selfishness, and preserve the gift of faith.

The peace we then find then is a true peace, a precious fruit of the Holy Spirit.