Confirmation: A Sacrament of Initiation

A singular joy of ministry as bishop is the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation. Here the bishop is the immediate instrument God uses to pour out His Spirit upon His people as He did with tongues of fire on the disciples at Pentecost. In the sacrament, God offers the gift of the Spirit to strengthen His people for their service as disciples.

The recipients of Confirmation in our Latin Church are usually in their mid-teens, though adults who were baptized Catholic as infants and who had not been confirmed as teens are most welcome and strongly encouraged, after some immediate preparation, to receive the sacrament at any age.

Adult converts to the Catholic Church usually participate in an extended Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, an invaluably rich faith experience happily restored by the Second Vatican Council. At the Easter Vigil Mass catechumens are baptized, confirmed and receive First Communion, fully incorporating them into the Body of Christ. Because the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life" some see this as the ideal order of the sacraments of initiation and a number of dioceses require youngsters to be confirmed before their First Communion in the early years of grammar school.

Teenagers are expected to attend a yearlong catechesis on the Sacrament of Confirmation and its role in preparing them to live an active, ongoing adult Catholic life. While too often the reception of Confirmation is seen as the termination of formal religious education, today's pastors and religious educators are doing everything possible to remind young candidates that through their anointment with sacred chrism, confirmed Catholics receive a more intimate share in the life of Christ begun at Baptism and that new life of the Spirit must be nurtured. To this end, our post-Confirmation programs are designed to stress: ongoing encounters with Christ through Scripture study, prayer and sacramental participation; the need to give to the local Church their talents and energies in enriching the Catholic community through the various ministerial roles open to adult Catholic members;

the obligation to be of apostolic service to the greater community's needs: the homebound and ill, the poor, hungry and homeless; the overall commitment to evangelize others through their example of living a Gospel-driven life.

This is bedrock Christianity – fundamental Catholicism.

In due time, I hope we can staff an Office of Liturgy, which will assist our generous parish educators in meeting their very critical challenge. Meanwhile, parents' cooperation is essential in encouraging their teenagers to participate fully in the life of our Church.

The best way parents can do this is by their own example of active involvement in the many ministries offered by our parishes.

This is the first in a series of articles about the six-week spring session of Why Catholic?