

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Confirmation – It’s a Real Slap in the Face

Perhaps the title of today’s column brings to mind the reality of the Sacrament of Confirmation for some who were confirmed years ago. In the past, the Bishop actually used to give the newly confirmed person a soft tap on the cheek. This gesture harkened back to medieval times. When a man became a soldier, he was marked with the sign of the leader and slapped as a sign of maturity. The newly confirmed person becomes a “soldier of Christ” [a disciple] during their Confirmation. Today, they are only marked with the sign of the Spirit, which is the Sacred Chrism, the oil used to anoint the newly confirmed. The “slap” has been removed from the Confirmation rite.

However, the above title should also bring to mind the colloquialism of waking oneself up with “a slap in the face.” Confirmation should alert us to the fact that we cannot be passive about our faith. Confirmation reminds us that we are called to take responsibility for our own faith life, and to live it out actively every day.

Many a priest or Religious Education teacher cringes at the fact that young people may refer to Confirmation as “graduation from Religious Education;” however, I believe that, in a way, it *is* graduation. Confirmation is graduation in a similar way as we have graduations in high school or college. These graduations are not so much graduation “from,” but graduation “to” something more. In the same way, Confirmation is not so much graduation *from* Religious Education, but graduation *to* a greater level of involvement in one’s faith. It is time for the student to become the life-long learner, the

disciple! [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, April 15, “A Catholic Community that Grows Disciples”]

Confirmation is the second of the three Sacraments of Initiation, along with Baptism and Eucharist. Last week, I introduced the Sacrament of Confirmation saying that it is “the enrichment of the Sacrament of Baptism.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] explains it this way, “by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.” [CCC 1285 and *Lumen Gentium* 11] Doesn’t that sound like a good definition for a disciple?

For those who are baptized as infants, the Sacrament of Confirmation comes at a time when they are more able to begin taking responsibility for their own faith, and, hopefully, more ready to accept the responsibility, of their own free will, of being disciples. For those who are confirmed as adults during the Easter Vigil, it is easy to see how the Sacrament of Confirmation completes the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism. [cf. CCC 1285]

Next week, we will begin our discussion of the Sacraments of Healing, beginning with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We will save the third Sacrament of Initiation, Eucharist, for later and include it within a larger discussion of the Mass.

