



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 14 October 1998

1. In the preceding catechesis we reflected on the sacrament of Confirmation as the fulfilment of baptismal grace. We will now examine the salvific value and spiritual effect expressed by the sign of anointing, which indicates the “seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” (cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae consortium naturae*, 15 August 1971; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 23 September 1971, p. 4).

Through this anointing, the confirmand fully receives that gift of the Holy Spirit which he had already received in Baptism in an initial and fundamental way. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “a seal is a symbol of a person (cf. *Gn* 38:18; *Song* 8:6), a sign of personal authority (cf. *Gn* 41:42), or ownership of an object (cf. *Dt* 32:34) ...” (*CCC*, n. 1295). Jesus himself says that “God the Father set his seal” on him (*Jn* 6:27). And so we Christians, having been incorporated into the Body of Christ our Lord by faith and Baptism, are marked by the seal of the Spirit when we receive this anointing. The Apostle Paul explicitly teaches this in speaking to the Christians of Corinth: “It is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 *Cor* 1:21-22; cf. *Eph* 1:13-14; 4:30).

2. The seal of the Holy Spirit therefore signifies and brings about the disciple’s total belonging to Jesus Christ, his being always at the latter’s service in the Church, and at the same time it implies the promise of divine protection in the trials he will have to endure to witness to his faith in the world.

Jesus himself foretold this, shortly before his Passion: “They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to

bear testimony before them.... And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (*Mk* 13:9, 11ff.).

A similar promise recurs in Revelation, in a vision that embraces the Church's entire history and sheds light on the dramatic situation which the disciples of Christ are called to face in union with their crucified and risen Lord. They are presented in the evocative image of those whose foreheads have been marked with God's seal (cf. *Rv* 7:2-4).

3. By bringing baptismal grace to fulfilment, Confirmation unites us more firmly to Jesus Christ and to his Body, the Church. This sacrament also increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us, to give us "a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross" (*CCC*, n. 1303; cf. Council of Florence, DS 1319; Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, nn. 11-12).

St Ambrose exhorts the confirmed in these vibrant words: "Recall that you have received the spiritual seal, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of the fear of God. Guard what you have received. God the Father has marked you with his sign, Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has placed the Spirit in your hearts as a pledge" (*De Mysteriis*, 7, 42; *PL* 16, 402-403).

The gift of the Spirit obliges us to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to God the Father, and ensures that we have the ability and the courage to do so. The Acts of the Apostles tell us clearly that the Spirit was poured out upon the Apostles, so that they would become "witnesses" (*Acts* 1:8; cf. *Jn* 15:26-27).

St Thomas Aquinas wonderfully summarizes the Church's tradition, saying that through Confirmation all the necessary help is communicated to the baptized so that they can profess publicly and in every circumstance the faith received in Baptism. "The fullness of the Holy Spirit", he explains, "is given *ad robur spirituale* (for spiritual strength) which is appropriate to adulthood" (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 72, 2). This maturity is obviously not to be measured by human criteria, but from within the mysterious relationship of each individual to Christ.

This teaching, rooted in Sacred Scripture and developed by sacred Tradition, is expressed in the teaching of the Council of Trent, which says that the sacrament of Confirmation is imprinted on the soul like an "indelible spiritual mark": the "character" (cf. DS 1609) which is precisely the sign Jesus Christ imprints on the Christian with the seal of his Spirit.

4. This specific gift conferred by the sacrament of Confirmation enables the faithful to exercise their "prophetic office" of bearing witness to the faith. "The confirmed person", St Thomas explains,

“receives the power to profess faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially (*quasi ex officio*)” (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, III, 72, 5, ad. 2; *CCC*, n. 1305). Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council, in explaining the sacred and organic nature of the priestly community in *Lumen gentium*, stresses that “by the sacrament of Confirmation they [the faithful] are more perfectly bound to the Church and endowed with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed” (n. 11).

The baptized who receive the sacrament of Confirmation with full and mature awareness solemnly declare before the Church, with the support of God’s grace, their readiness to let themselves be grasped by the Spirit of God in an ever new and ever deeper way, to become witnesses to Christ the Lord.

5. This readiness, thanks to the Spirit who penetrates and fills their hearts, spurs them even to martyrdom, as we are shown by the uninterrupted series of Christian witnesses who, from the dawn of Christianity to our century, have not been afraid to sacrifice their earthly lives for love of Jesus Christ. “Martyrdom”, says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity” (*CCC*, n. 2473).

On the threshold of the third millennium, let us invoke the gift of the Paraclete to revive the effectiveness of the grace of the spiritual seal imprinted on us in the sacrament of Confirmation. Animated by the Spirit, our lives will spread the “aroma of Christ” (2 *Cor* 2:15) to the very ends of the earth.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet the members of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights. I extend a special welcome to the Rissho Kosei-Kai delegation from Japan. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Scotland, Sweden, Finland, Australia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Japan and the United States of America, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the General Audience, after having greeted the young people, the sick and the newlyweds, the Pope added:

I am thankful for the best wishes and prayers that have been offered to me for the 20th anniversary of my election. I trust in the spiritual support of the People of God in order faithfully to fulfil my ministry. Praised be Jesus Christ.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana