

BAPTISM

CONFIRMATION

EUCCHARIST



# RESTORING ORDER

## *Restoring the Order of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation*

### Part 1                      What's it all about?

Just a few months ago, the Diocesan Synod concluded in November of 2017. With much discussion and input from all parishes across the diocese, one of the major outcomes of that synod was the determination by the members of 12 specific “declarations”. The general focus of these twelve is “.....*to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples...*” throughout the diocese, and in addition “...*the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior...*” These words are part of the first of the twelve declarations and the other eleven build on this foundation, each with their own particular focus.

The focus of Declaration #6 is a topic that has been debated and discussed throughout the Church for many years now. And that topic is twofold; The age for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation and the proper order of receiving the Sacraments of Initiation, that is Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist.

Synod Declaration #6 states:

6. “The Sacraments of Christian Initiation shall be offered in the proper sequence (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) for children as well as for adults. To promote discipleship and

stewardship as a way of life from an early age, those who are baptized as infants are to receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist at about the age of reason, which in this Diocese will normally be in their third grade of elementary school, after they have been properly prepared and have made sacramental confession.”

*Example: You have your baby baptized as an infant, as most Catholic families do. Then when he or she gets in third grade, they will receive the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist in that order, at the same time, at the same Mass, by the Bishop.....*

Bishop Paprocki is convinced of the theological and pastoral reasons for doing this, but early on in the discussion I was not as readily convinced. However, upon further study and prayer, I too have come to agree with the theological and pastoral reasons for making such a change but I am even more encouraged by hearing and reading testimonials from parishes, parents and children from other dioceses across the country who have experienced this change and how the graces they received and continue to receive have impacted their life. This will make available even more Sacramental Grace that God has to offer to children at a younger age, perhaps when they are more open. We are not alone, many dioceses and parishes across the country have begun this same effort.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that Grace is the free gift that “God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.” WOW... That’s a mouthful. It might be easier to think of God’s grace in this way; God’s strength and goodness given freely to each of us to help us to be closer to Him and love Him more by the way we live our life.

Many people today live as if God does not exist, or if he does, only as some kind of remote ruler who rarely gets involved in human affairs. Instead of seeking God’s grace and an intimate relationship with Him, our society turns to science, technology, “new age” things and self-reliance to solve its problems. It seems clear to me that innovations, technology and/or self-reliance do not save humanity. We still have wars, sickness, tragedy and injustice. What will save us is not the next new gadget, magic crystal or the latest guru, but rather, the flood of grace and love that the God desires to pour out upon each one of us.

*The flood of grace and love that God desires to pour out upon each one of us.....* This is what restoring the Sacraments of Initiation to their original order is all about. From the early days of the Church the order begins with life in Christ through Baptism. This is followed by

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Confirmation, which perfects and completes the grace of Baptism, fills us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, prepares us to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, This Sacramental Grace helps each of us to commit ourselves to being lifelong intentional, missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. And not just to be a disciple, but to grow as a disciple and to use that God given gift of grace to make other disciples... which is what our Lord asks us to do in Mathew chapter 28 ...“Go and Make disciples of all.....”

Ss. Peter and Paul parish, the Diocese of Springfield, and the Church as a whole, needs more Catholics who are on fire with their faith. We need more Disciples of Christ who love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. For this reason, I am excited that Bishop Paprocki is restoring the Sacraments of Initiation to their original order.

## Part 2                    Where have we been?

The three sacraments of Christian initiation play an important role in helping all of us become authentic disciples, men and women, boys and girls who are willing to follow Christ and take risks for the kingdom. In this section I will explain how these three sacraments of initiation are oriented toward encountering Jesus in the Eucharist. I will also recall the Church’s history of celebrating Confirmation so that you are able to understand the historical significance of its placement.

Confirmation should always be seen as a sacrament of initiation that is united to both Baptism and the Eucharist. Even though it is

closely related to Baptism, Confirmation is more than an “add on” to Baptism. It is a sacrament in its own “rite” (*pardon the pun*) . In Baptism the Holy Spirit is truly given, yet in Confirmation He is given in a way that completes the graces of Baptism and imparts special strength upon the one receiving the sacrament. Confirmation can be seen as the completion of Baptism in the same way as the celebration of Pentecost is the completion of Easter.

When we are baptized, original sin and any prior personal sin is washed away. We are taught that it is a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In dying to sin and rising with Him, we receive a new identity as a child of God.

In Confirmation, we are strengthened in our identity as a child of God and receive an outpouring of His gifts. These gifts of the Holy Spirit also help us to love God more deeply and to better live as a Missionary Disciple. We need the gifts of the Holy Spirit, each and every moment of our life to live a life of closeness to God, to live a life that gives Glory to God. .... Again, to live a life as a true intentional, missionary disciple of Christ.

Over the centuries the Church’s understanding and practice of the Sacrament of Confirmation has developed. To better understand our present practice, it may be helpful to look back. We see the first references to the celebration of this sacrament in the Acts of the Apostles. The letter to the Hebrews develops the idea that the laying on of hands is a distinct and important moment after Baptism. As the early Church grew, the Sacraments of

Baptism and Confirmation were celebrated in one continuous Rite of Initiation leading up to the reception of The Eucharist. This can be experienced today when anyone over the age of reason (*seven years old*) enters the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (*RCIA*) at the Easter Vigil. There at the vigil, anyone over the age of reason who is not baptized will receive Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in that order at the same Mass.

Although the age for the reception of both Confirmation and Eucharist has changed, for the most part the order of Confirmation followed (*sometimes years later*) by Eucharist has remained the same. Until 1910; the usual age for Confirmation at that time was seven years old and First Eucharist was not until about eleven or twelve years of age.

It was not until 1910 when Pope Pius X unintentionally began our current displacement of Confirmation when he lowered the age of First Eucharist to seven years old. In his letter entitled *Quam Singulari*, Pope Pius X said nothing of Confirmation

and seemed to assume that the practice of confirming at the age of reason and prior to Eucharist would continue. When

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making the change, his main concern was that the “children have all the resources and graces they need to live a rich spiritual life and carry out their mission as Christians in

the modern world.” Because many had become accustomed to the two sacraments spread out over several years, over time and without any real resistance, the age for Confirmation crept up to an older age. Thus, the custom of receiving First Communion as a second-grader and later receiving Confirmation in middle or high school is a recent practice in the life of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council in the mid 1960’s called for the Rite of Confirmation to be revised. Pope Paul VI clearly stated that, “The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and finally are sustained by the food of eternal life in the Eucharist. By means of these Sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity.” Here we see the beginning of the move towards the restoration of the proper order of the sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation and then Eucharist.

This call for a return to the original order has appeared in Church documents as well. The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, the 1988 Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* all describe the order of the sacraments of initiation as Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist.

The topic was also addressed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, where he writes, “It must never be forgotten that our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist, then, brings Christian

initiation to completion and represents the center and goal of all sacramental life.”

### Part 3                      Where are we going?

On a personal level, I pray daily for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Piety, and “Fear of the Lord” (or “wonder and awe” of the Lord). These gifts are an essential part of the preparation for each of us to be a disciple, grow as a disciple and reach out to make other disciples by the way we live our life.

The family is the first place in which DISCIPLES are formed. God created the family to be a reflection of the love and unity that exists within the Holy Trinity. The Second Vatican Council describes parents as being the primary teachers of the faith for their children. All Catholic parents are called to make their home a “domestic church” where their children meet and come to know and love Christ, grow in virtue, and are prepared for the “vocation” God calls them to. In essence, all Catholic parents are called to make their home a place of Being, Growing and Making disciples.

This also means that parents are called by God to be the main teachers who prepare their children to be disciples and to assist in their preparation for receiving the sacraments. This requires that parents make every effort to know and love the Catholic faith. If we do not understand and/or love our Catholic faith, how can we ever expect our children to love it or understand it? If we are not living our Catholic faith in an active way each and every day, how can we ever expect it of our children? If we are not truly being an

intentional missionary disciple, how can we expect that of others. Each of us as parents, and grandparents for that matter, should examine our homes and ask ourselves, “Is my home truly a domestic Church?” “am I truly living my life as a Disciple of Christ?” “Am I open to grow as a disciple?”

This does not mean that our homes have to be decorated with all kinds of statues and pictures of sacred images. Although it is good for us to have some of those items in our homes, but those images cannot be the only source of teaching for your children at home. One of the most effective ways that parents can hand on the faith is through acts of loving self-sacrifice or works of mercy. It is also important to lead your children in prayer, teach them a sincere love for Jesus and His Church and to model for them what it truly means to be a Disciple and grow as a Disciple of Christ.

Restoring the order of the sacraments of initiation will mean making some changes to how we hand on the faith to our children. But in the places where this is already being done, these changes are worth the extra effort and are bearing good fruit.

Over the next five or six years Ss. Peter and Paul parish will restore the order of the sacraments using a step-down process that will result in all children receiving Confirmation and First Eucharist in the third grade by 2024. Starting next school year (2018/2019) formation for Confirmation will begin with both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, resulting in both grades receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation in the winter or spring of 2019. Each year following, we will “step down” in at least two grade levels at a time until we get to third grade. In addition to our children

receiving this outpouring of Sacramental Grace earlier, this move will provide consistency with other parishes across the diocese who will be moving in this direction as well. The “step-down” process will be explained in detail as we move along. This decision will also mean that the size of our Confirmation classes will be larger than usual for the next several years.

The most important changes that we will notice in restoring the order of the Sacraments are not logistical or practical ..... but spiritual. This is very important to keep in mind, because we can get all caught up in the “how’s it all gonna work” questions. But we need to be more focused on the “who is it going to benefit” question. And the answer is, our children, our parents, our families, our parish and local community.

We live in a different moral and spiritual environment than our parents or grandparents

did. In many ways, the moral and spiritual conditions of a modern American culture highlights the need for children and families to receive this gift of Sacramental Grace at an earlier age.

Today we find a lot of what I call DIY Spirituality. This kind of “do-it-yourself”, “I’m Ok you’re OK” faith cannot stand, since it is not based on the truth of Jesus Christ or even the truth of who we are as human

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persons. The truth is that heaven is not earned; it is a gift of love and relationship with God. The truth is that real, lasting happiness only comes from living in accord with the gospel of Jesus Christ, His teachings and truly being the person that God has called us to be. And only Jesus Christ can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

#### Part 4 Moving Forward.

Once Confirmation is restored to its original place, it will no longer be “the sacrament of farewell,” as Pope Francis has called it, but an intense encounter with God and a great source of grace for children and families. In fact, the restored order has the potential for spiritual renewal beyond our imagining. For example, parents will have the chance to be more involved in the sacramental preparation of their children at a time when the children are more naturally open to the formation and the graces being given. It has been my experience over many years to find third-graders (and younger) to be very receptive and eager to learn about God, the Church and all things spiritual.

Their childlike trust and wonder is beautiful to see and in many ways is valuable to our own spiritual outlook as adults. Many times, their ability to see the truth and to trust God completely surpasses our own, and this allows them to receive the graces of the sacrament more deeply. And in turn they end up being the best examples of Christian Discipleship for all of us.

Because of their new spiritual identity and strength, the faith formation our children

receive after they are confirmed will need to be different, too. The Church teaches that the “indelible mark” they receive at Confirmation directs them toward a life-long proclamation of the faith, acts of charity, and a deeper relationship with Jesus. This means that the focus of the upper grades as well as high school youth group will shift to be more focused on discipleship formation, building community, fostering a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church, and preparing them to be witnesses to those in need through works of mercy.

In an increasingly materialistic and secular world, it seems at times that the souls of our children are “on the line”. As pastors, church leaders, teachers, parents and friends, we each must do our part to help one another and our children to win that battle.

Our secular culture might teach them to be nice, fair, and feel good about themselves, but it will neglect and even reject their true need for salvation and redemption and more importantly the need for the presence of God in their daily lives. The leading opinion of our society claims that if they are just accepting and tolerant, then everyone will be happy and the world will be a better place. But this approach is doomed to failure because it offers no help to those who fall short of being nice or good. It does not offer any true healing or forgiveness. And although some may speak of an eternal reward of some kind, God is reduced to a distant “concept” who is far from their daily lives, rather than an intimate person, a personal friend, who knows us better than we know ourselves.

This secular worldview does not truly satisfy our longing for lasting happiness. What truly satisfies that longing is an encounter with our

loving God, who is love itself. It is He who heals the brokenhearted and transforms our lives.

A few months before he died, St. John Paul II wrote to the young people who were planning to join him for the 2005 World Youth Day. His message was directed to the youth, but it applies to Catholics young and old, and is perfectly relevant for us today.

He wrote that “the Church needs genuine witnesses for the new evangelization: men and women whose lives have been transformed by meeting with Jesus, men and women who are capable of communicating this experience to others....” Sounds like Being, Growing and Making Disciples to me...

The world’s need for Intentional Missionary Disciples today is obvious to anyone who is “tuned in” to the news of the day. Many parents continue to share with me how they are worried about their children growing up in a culture that is increasingly less Christian and at times even anti-Christian. Raising disciples in this environment must start with parents and grandparents – those who are in a position to provide an example and help children grow into mature disciples.

This should prompt you to ask, “How well do I know the Lord? What sacrifices am I willing to make for him? Am I prepared to hand on the faith to my children or grandchildren and be their primary teacher in the faith? What can I do to make my family truly a domestic church?”

The gifts of the Holy Spirit received in the Sacrament of Confirmation, offer true healing to our wounded hearts and make our

faith real. Strengthened by these sacramental graces, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for us to proclaim as the Archangel Gabriel did to Mary, “nothing will be impossible for God.” With Mary we can become true disciples as we surrender ourselves to the will of God. With her, we can say to God, “Let it be done unto me according to your word.”

With the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the strengthening grace of Confirmation, and the lifelong spiritual food of the Holy Eucharist, I pray that ever greater numbers of disciples will fill our parish and our community.

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I ask each of you to prayerfully support this effort to form our children and all the faithful as courageous and Intentional, Missionary Disciples of Jesus Christ.

*Peace*  
*Deacon Jimmy*

*Come Holy Spirit....  
Enkindle in us the Fire of  
Your Love.*