

Saturday Catechism: Lesson 9

Here's the next section from *Love That Never Ends, a key to the Catechism*, by DiNoia, O'Donnell, Cesario, and Cameron, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians deepens this view.

Confirmation "After Baptism, the next sacramental 'moment' of initiation is that of Confirmation. In this sacrament, the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church. They are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit which ratifies the commitment of each Christian to witness to the faith of Christ, and to share in the work of evangelization by word and deed. Confirmation requires only that the person be already baptized, and be in the state of grace, i.e. free from mortal sin." 60

This sacrament initiates the person into adulthood in the Church. In this Mystical Body each person receiving Confirmation "grows up in Christ", Eph 4:15. St. Paul lovingly describes what Confirmation does in this epistle, so I will quote it extensively. Ephesians adds depth to the Catechism coverage. Start at the beginning; Ch1: 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Eph 1:3-6

As usual, Paul speaks from inspiration that packs every sentence with more meaning than we can extract. "Blessing us in the heavenly places in Christ" means that the risen Christ blesses us from heaven, giving us His life, then perfecting that life through a series of steps that we stumble through here below. One big step is Confirmation of our adulthood in Christ, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world". From all eternity the Trinity chose us, in Christ, Who revealed Trinity to us, and incorporates us into Trinity by His Mystical Body. We definitely want to be in His Body because: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth." Eph 1:7-10

Confirmation sums up enough of these heavenly riches to unite heaven and earth. At that moment, our earthly journey joins our heavenly destiny maturely. Then we stride forth as adults, taking bigger steps. As we cooperate with Confirmation more and more, our steps become bigger and bigger. Confirmation does not impose anything on us, but enables us to decide more maturely to claim our inheritance. "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. Eph 11-14

Scripture refers to Confirmation as the laying on of hands and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Both these events occur: the visible hand-laying, and the invisible sealing in Christ with the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of Confirmation. It enlivens the pledge of our inheritance: redemption from sin, and striding toward heaven, where we will praise His glory forever.

Paul prays: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection

under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Eph 17-23

This rhapsody of love for all that Christ’s gifts rehearses Confirmation’s benefits. Some of you have experienced the Spirit coming upon people you sponsored for this sacrament. As you reflect upon the flash of light, or tingling of feeling, you join Paul in his praise for Confirmation’s grace. In this spirit we move on to chapter 2, where Paul elaborates on initiation into the Mystical Body. He’s the first theologian to account for our union in that intimate way, and his expressions resonate with us, especially for Confirmation.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit”. Eph 2:19-22 This lovely description of our mature integration in the Mystical Body sings the glory of Confirmation.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” Eph 3:14-19 “Strengthened in the inner man” is a fine way to say what Confirmation does for us. This strength flows from Christ, our Lord and Savior by the riches of His glory. Therefore He dwells in our hearts through advanced faith, rooting and grounding us in love. As we grow up in Christ, we better comprehend with all the saints the size of Christ’s love. True, it surpasses knowledge, but we accept it, and Jesus fills us evermore with Love. It’s the Love That Never Ends.

“And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Eph 4:11-16 Here Paul sketches what we do because the Spirit strengthens us, to build up Christ’s body.

Above all, we are no longer children. No longer do emotions toss us here and there. No longer does our imagination carry us off with every wind of doctrine. No longer does men’s trickery trip us. Crafty schemes no longer appeal to us, nor does deceitful scheming intrigue us. Instead, we speak the truth in love, thereby growing up in all ways into Jesus. He is the Christ, resurrected as Head of the Mystical Body. Confirmation initiates our adulthood in that Body. First Baptism initiated us as babes in Christ. Now we emerge into fullness of Christ-life, or Love. Therefore, we should act differently, as Paul says next.

“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him, and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Eph 4:17-24

As we emerge from Baptism new creatures in Christ, so we emerge from Confirmation full members of Christ. “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Eph 4:25-32 That sounds like adult behavior to me, the visible result of Confirmation.