

CONFIRMATION, A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS

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Welcome to the Bible Study Evangelista Show, Bible study spinach that tastes like cake. I'm Sonja Corbitt, your Bible Study Evangelista, and I hope to love and lift you today so you can love and lift all you've been given. We are in our Sacraments Series. Where are the sacraments in the Bible? We have looked at them in the order, typically, in the west, here in the Roman Church, sometimes called the Western Rite. Baptism, Eucharist, Confession, Confirmation, Holy Orders, Marriage, Anointing (or Last Rites). That's pretty much the order. It depends, of course, whether or not you've received the Sacraments of Initiation as a child or as an adult, as I did. I was kinda late coming to the whole Catholic thing, the whole sacramental thing. I never even heard the word *sacrament* as a non-Catholic.

Today we're talking about Confirmation and we're taking a biblical walk through the sacraments. Today we're going to look at where Confirmation is in the Scriptures and how the Bible talks about it. The first half of the show - the first two segments, we're gonna talk about the Old Testament roots and then we're gonna get into the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Church.

I'd like to just begin by pointing out that Confirmation has its roots in the Old Testament Feasts of First Fruits, pardon me, and Pentecost, sometimes called the Feast of Weeks. First Fruits was a foreshadowing of Jesus first and then us. Jesus is the first fruits of the Resurrection, the Bible says. First we really need to understand what first fruits are. The Feast of First Fruits is a harvest term. It's the produce that first arises from the ground. It's the very first part of the harvest. In Israel, that first fruit was to be dedicated to the Lord as an offering of thanksgiving.

In Leviticus 23, which outlines all of the feasts, the people of Israel were commanded to bring an offering of first fruits in a festival that followed Passover and then preceded Pentecost. So the feast, historically, that occurred on the day after the Sabbath, after the Passover, that corresponded to the day when Israel was brought out of Egypt as God's first born. That's where that first fruits idea kinda comes from.

The timing, then, indicates part of the significance of that festival and then the meaning, obviously, of first fruits. So the offering to God commemorated Israel's separation from the nations as a first fruits of redemption. Symbolically, it signified the consecration of Israel to God, as the first born unto Him from all the nations. It was the beginning of the world's great harvest.

In Israel's history, that feast was supposed to remind Israel of the Exodus. Really, all of them were, and how that event confirmed their status as the first born son of God, Exodus 4:22 says. That Jesus would be called the first fruits in 1 Corinthians 15:20, it corresponds to that idea. He is the Son of God, not only in His divinity, but in His humanity. His Resurrection designates Him the first born among many. We see that in Romans 1:3-4, 8, 29-30. In addition to that timing, though, the symbolism of the Feast of the First Fruits foreshadowed the Resurrection of Christ. We actually just mentioned that.

In Leviticus 23, the priest was supposed to lift up the offering and wave it before the Lord. If you imagine, for us, depending on if you've ever lived on a farm or perhaps had a little garden, and maybe you've had corn, or maybe at Halloween or fall, you like to gather the corn husks and make a haystack - not a haystack, but a corn stack. If you've seen that done, ever, then you sorta get the idea of what happened on that Feast of the First Fruits. The people would gather up a portion. It was the first portion and it was - well, it varied according to the amount. But that first portion was brought to the priest. It was actually - the priest kept it. It was part of his, we'll call it an *income*. But it was an offering to the Lord that was given to the priest. It came from the earth and it was lifted up before the Lord. The seeds had already died and were in the ground, and they had arisen into new life in that barley. It was actually the barley harvest. And then they were being presented to God as a first fruits. That's really where we get the idea of tithing from. This whole first fruits idea.

It's important, too, when I mention tithing - well, in anything, not just tithing as far as money goes. Your time, your talent, all of that, anything we give to God must be of our best. The first, it should come off the top when we're talking about tithes. That should come off the top. Your time, all of that that you give to God should come off the top. The very first part of your morning, the best part of your day, the best part of your week, your best clothing, your best effort. Everything that is your first fruit should go to God as an offering. I love offering. And why? Because God gives you the whole thing. He - we present those offerings back to Him as a thanksgiving. That's actually where the roots are.

They were giving it, then, to God, well, to the priest, but through the priest to God. Because the land and all of its product was the gift of God to Israel. So in thankfulness of all of His gifts, those first fruits were offered to Him in their natural state, which could be the grains or the fruits from the trees, or it could also be after their preparation like a flour or dough. Then the Israelites, then, were free to use the rest for themselves. But they were also commanded to leave - to not harvest absolutely everything so that the people who were poor could also glean from that. It says in Leviticus 23:22, *When you reap the harvest of*

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the Lord, your God.

That's another principle for us that we should not spend every single dime that we make. Instead we should offer the tithe off the top, which means the gross, not the net, and then reserve some for charitable giving. That's just a really good principle. In fact - well, I wish I had time to get into that. You can't ever outgive God.

Both of these feasts, the Feast of First Fruits and the Feast of Weeks, were said to be for a - statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. Which means they have to continue. So when our non-Catholic brothers and sisters say that that stuff all ended with Jesus, well, forever means forever. It doesn't mean once Jesus comes it's over. It means that it must continue through Him, and we know that it does because He is the first fruits of redemption and resurrection.

Paul actually goes into this quite a bit. He calls Christ the First Fruits of God's Harvest. It's the harvest of living souls who will be raised to life with Christ because of that atoning death that He won for us on the cross. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, *For as by a man came death - and he means Adam - by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order. Christ the first fruits, then at His coming, those who belong to Him.* So in Adam, everyone died in Original Sin, which we looked at a little bit last week. And then because of his disobedience, Adam led the whole human race into death. And then Paul contrasts Jesus with Adam. Jesus is the *new Adam*. So everyone who is in Christ, the new Adam, will be made alive through resurrection. That begins, we saw, last - two weeks ago in Baptism. Then, it says in 1 Corinthians 15:45, *The last Adam became a life-giving spirit*, meaning Christ.

Jesus is the First Fruits. He's both the source of life and the guarantee that a harvest of blessed souls is coming. We could actually say that the harvest has already begun. Then we talk about Pentecost, which followed the Feast of the First Fruits. First Fruits was really just one day. The Feast of Pentecost - *pente* means 50 in Greek, and so it was 50 days. In the Old Testament, as that name indicates, it was the second of the great Jewish national feasts and it was observed on the fiftieth day, or seven weeks, from the Passover feast. In the Old Testament, it's often called the Feast of Weeks. Every male in Israel on that day was required to appear before the Lord at the sanctuary, the tabernacle first when it was portable, and then later when the permanent temple was built. It was the first of two, kinda, we could say *farm festivals* of Israel, and it signified the completion of their barley harvest, which began at the time of the waving of that first ripe sheaf on the First Fruits, which preceded it.

Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks then, fell on the fiftieth day after that Feast of the First Fruits. The wheat then was almost everywhere harvested at that point. The festival was - it was like a big harvest celebration. It was a Sabbath day which means there was no work. The people appeared before God at the tabernacle or the temple to express their thanksgiving. They presented two loaves of bread. They were salted - ooh, I wish I had time to go into the salt. The salt is a preservative and it actually is symbolic of eternity because it is a preservative. The size of that loaf was fixed. It had to be a tenth of an ephah, which is about three quarts and a half of the finest wheat flour of that new harvest. In fact, the Jewish writers later were very minute in their description of the preparation of those two loaves, Josephus and then in the Mishna. The length was about seven hand breadths. Its width was four and its depth was seven, so it was a big old loaf of bread. But it was a festival day, so there was lots of rejoicing and celebration and those free will offerings were to be made to the Lord. And, of course, it was also marked by this spirit of charity, or giving, toward the Levites, which were the priests, the strangers and the orphans and the widows, and the poor. More on that in a moment.

During the celebration, the Israelites were supposed to be remembering their bondage in Egypt on that day and consecrating themselves to the Lord, and then later on in the history of the Israelite people, it came to signify the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, or the birth of their national existence in the Old Testament. That's kinda where we get the birthday of the Church, or the new Pentecost in the New Testament.

That old Jewish festival, it came to garner a new significance for the Christian church because of this promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus made. And of course we know the history told in Acts where when the time had fully come, then the Holy Spirit fell on those that were gathered in the Upper Room. So all that happened on that first Pentecostal day after the Resurrection of Jesus, set it apart as a Christian festival. Instead of a Jewish festival, now it was a Christian festival because it had been fulfilled in Christ who was raised from the dead as the first fruits. Then it was given a new meaning. Jesus had promised the descent of the Holy Spirit. They were prayerfully waiting in the Upper Room for that fulfillment and *the Spirit came upon them*, it said, *as a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire, a power from on high*.

The Holy Spirit gave them the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit - that's sort of a personal Pentecost. Those were wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (that would be a good series to do). They got those gifts in the descent of the Holy Spirit and it completely changed the apostles. It enabled them to become witnesses of the

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

Resurrection of Christ as *the* fundamental fact in historic Christianity. They were sent, then, through that power, to not only witness it in words, but also in their martyrdom if necessary.

St. Jerome does a really neat job of contrasting the old Pentecost feast with the new. He writes, *There is Sinai, here is Zion. There, the trembling mountain; here, the trembling house. There, the flaming mountain; here, the flaming tongues. There, the noisy thunders; here, the sounds of many tongues. There, the clanger of the ram's horn; here, the notes of the Gospel trumpet.* So he sort of draws this analogy between the Jewish and the Christian Pentecosts.

So now we have the foundation, then, of Confirmation as a sacrament. It is one of the Sacraments of Initiation. The Sacraments of Initiation being Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation. Together, those three sacraments incorporate us fully into the life and the family of God, the life of the Church and the family of God. We could say that we're actually baptized in order to be confirmed. Of course, if you were an adult who came into the Church into full communion, then you also - if you had already been baptized, then you also included Confession in that as I did. I was baptized at 9. When I came into the Church, I was already married. It was a sacramental marriage, and the Church recognized it as such because both of us - well, I'll get into that when we get into marriage. I had already been baptized, so I didn't have to do that. But I did receive Confession for quite a while because that was the only sacrament that I was allowed to receive. I put it off for a long time coming into the Church. Well, I could have come in at Christmas. My priest was going to allow me to come into the Church at Christmas, but I put it off until Easter vigil simply because I was *hoping* that my husband might come in with me. Of course that was a long shot; it took another five years.

I received the Sacrament of Confession all the way up to the Easter vigil because I had already been baptized and that was the only sacrament that I could receive. Honestly, I'm not sure - it did do me a lot of good. I was - I loved being able to receive the graces from that sacrament, but I came to depend on it. It took me a period of adjustment once I came into full communion and I was confirmed and I received my first Eucharist. At that point, then, I was fully incorporated into the life of the Church, and I had to adjust a little bit to receiving the Eucharist in the way that I had previously been receiving Confession, which was to, sort of, gather those graces. It wasn't really that I had all that much sin. I went every single week, but it was because I wanted to receive those graces. Of course, that's really what the Eucharist is supposed to do for us.

But, in any case, I digress somewhat. So, where is, then, the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Bible? Well, in the New Testament - we looked at the Old Testament roots in the Feasts of the First Fruits and Pentecost. In the New Testament, then, it was first called *the laying on of hands*. That's actually - that happens in quite a few places. It began happening first at the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room. When the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles there, and the tongues of fire and the rushing mighty wind, then they received that gift. They went out to preach and to witness to Christ's passion and death and Resurrection. Then they went on to also lay their hands on other people so that they could also receive the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 19:5-6, Paul laid his hands on the baptized and they received the Holy Spirit. They knew they received the gifts of the Holy Spirit because they spoke in tongues and they began witnessing, or preaching, the Gospel. In Acts 8:14-17, *they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit*. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, *He put His seal on us and He gave us the Holy Spirit in our hearts*. That's really what Confirmation does. It seals the soul. We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13, *You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*. I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself, but I wanna just give you the Scriptures here. Hebrews 6:2, we have some instruction about Baptism and laying on of hands. It was called *the laying on of hands* in the New Testament to begin with.

In Acts 8:14-17, I'm gonna read that whole thing. It says, *Now when the Apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who when they were come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet come upon any of them. But they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

In Ephesians 4:30, *And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you were sealed unto the day of redemption.*

So, sometimes Confirmation is called *chrismation*, which is that oil idea. Confirmation, it seals us to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it's called the Sacrament of the Seal because that seal is indelible, and it leaves a permanent mark on the soul. That's similar to Baptism and Holy Orders, actually. Those can all only be received one time. That *sealing* and that *chrismation* - the chrismation is when - I'm gettin' way ahead. The bishop dips his finger, his thumb, in the oil, the anointing oil, and he makes the sign of the cross on our foreheads and he says, "Be sealed with the Holy Spirit." That gives us the sanctifying grace to become mature Christians and real witnesses, real soldiers of Christ. We are armed to defend Christ as our king, His Mother as our queen, and the Church as His kingdom on earth. So God confirms us so that we can do spiritual battle. That's why we need those seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord.

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

It can only be received once, by one who is baptized. He must, or he should be in a state of grace, meaning not in a state of a mortal sin. Even if you are confirmed while you're not in a state of grace, it's still validly received. It's just that the fruits of the sacrament are gonna be delayed until you receive penance, or confession. So if that confirmand, which is the one to be confirmed, that's what they're called, has reached the age of reason, then also they should be very well catechized.

I want to just mention here - when I was reading about the miracles at Fatima, I believe it was Sister Lucia who said that in the last days the great deception that will come through the anti-Christ will come, in part, to the Church on - well I shouldn't say in part. It will come on the Church. The deception will be rampant throughout the Church and it will cause a lot of apostasy. It will do so in the Church, especially on those who have not been confirmed. That was striking when I read it. I thought, "Wow!" because the seal of the Holy Spirit protects us from those deceptions. That's why it's important. If you haven't been confirmed, you really need to get that done because it is an important sacrament. It roots us in the life of the Church. It gives us those graces to withstand the deceptions that come about in just daily life. But also, it gives us the strength to stand against the tide of worldliness and carnality and all the other things that really bombard us all the time in our day and time. So it's very important. That was a specific prophecy, that a lot of the apostasy will occur in the Church because of the people who have not been confirmed.

So the fruits of the sacrament are: (1) It deepens the grace of Baptism; (2) It incorporates us into Christ more fully - or most fully; (3) It strengthens the bond with the Church; (4) It gives us mission; (5) We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and (6) We become witnesses, even unto martyrdom if necessary, to Christ and the Church. More on the Sacrament of Confirmation when we get back, but for right now I want to thank my newest friends of the show, Tiffany S., Samantha C., and Julie C. Thank you so much for supporting me and my ministry by being Friends of the Show.

Throughout the series we've been talking about the sacraments in order, first of all, of their reception, their typical reception in the Roman Church, but we've also been looking at the ways in which they correspond to the natural life. Being born, and growing up, they're two different events, but they are very closely related. You can't grow up unless you're first born. Confirmation, then, is sort of a - it's the perfection of the birth in Baptism, the new birth in Baptism. It's a distinct and a complete sacrament in its own rite, but its purpose is to perfect in us what was begun in Baptism. That's why we say, sometimes, that we are baptized in order to be confirmed. We're born spiritually in the Sacrament of Baptism, we become sharers in the divine life, we begin to live a supernatural life, and then as we practice the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and we unite with Christ in His Church and offering that worship to God, we grow in graces and virtue and goodness. But that stage, really, is pretty self-centered, is it not? Like children?

We tend to be preoccupied with the needs of our own souls and we try to be good. We're not wholly self-centered, but we are mostly self-centered during that time. Then we're confirmed, and we receive this special grace and our faith is deepened and strengthened so it can be strong enough, not just for our own needs, but for the needs of others. That's really what Confirmation is meant to do, to start having us look outward. Not so much inward, but outward now. With adolescence, just like a child begins to assume more responsibilities of adulthood, he sees himself in the total family picture and then even in the community at large.

A confirmed Christian, then, begins to see his own responsibility to Christ and his neighbor. He becomes concerned, or he ought to, with the welfare of the church in the world, and his neighbor. In a sense, then, Confirmation is sometimes called a *spiritual growing up*. Just as that mark of Baptism, or the character of the mark of Baptism, makes us sharers with Christ in that role of priest, the character of Confirmation makes us sharers with Christ in His role of prophet, or teacher. So each of us, then, as a Christian, follows after Christ as prophet, priest, and king.

We're not - we're lay prophets, priests, and kings, and even female, some of us, so it's not an institutional prophet, priest, and king as Christ is, or our bishops and priests, those who are ordained are. But we do occupy a role in the Church as prophet, priest, and king. Confirmation gives us that character, or that character of the mark, that helps us share in those roles with Christ to the world. Not just to ourselves now, but to the whole world and to the Church.

So we participate with Him in the task of spreading the kingdom. We're adding new souls to the body. Our works, then, and our words, should be directed, not just to our own sanctification, but then those - the sanctification of those around us. The Catechism says that *Confirmation is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine affiliation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.*

The confirmed Christian, then, goes out into the world to fulfill his vocation, and he's strong in his faith, and he has a love for souls that comes from his love for Christ, and he feels a concern for the souls of his neighbors. As we saw in those passages in Acts, when the apostles in the Upper Room - and the disciples that were all gathered there with the Blessed Mother. When they

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

received the Holy Spirit, they went out. Confirmation is a complement to Baptism. It completes what has been begun in Baptism, but it's itself a distinct sacrament. The Samaritans had already been baptized, remember? But it was still necessary for them to receive the laying on of hands. We also saw in that passage, the way that the Confirmation was given. They placed their hands, or a hand, of the one who was confirming upon the head of the one to be confirmed with a prayer that he receive the Holy Spirit.

It's important in that passage that we see that it was the bishops, or the apostles, who did that confirming. Whoever it was who had baptized the Samaritans obviously didn't have the power to lay hands on them. So the two - two of the apostles Peter and John were sent. They travelled from Jerusalem to Samaria in order to give that Sacrament of Confirmation to those new Christians. That is why, in the Church, the ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop. That shows the tie of the bishops to the apostles. They are apostles in succession of the original apostles.

The extraordinary minister of Confirmation is not always, but it can be, the priest, then. The bishop gives the authority to the priest in his diocese to administer Confirmation to the confirmands. That is usually done because they're usually confirmed at Easter vigil and there are so many people that the bishop can't be at every parish. So he may do Confirmation at the cathedral, and then the priests in their own diocese, which is what happens in my own diocese. But it's important that we know that the bishop is the ordinary minister, and the priest is the extraordinary minister. He acts by permission and under the authority of the bishop.

Whoever administers the sacrament, the priest or the bishop, they only do it because it is Jesus acting through them. It is Jesus who confirms through the Holy Spirit. That's how we receive the Holy Spirit, they are *in persona Christi*, or in the person of Christ. From ancient times, the popes gave permission to priests of the Greek Catholic Church to administer Confirmation. In the Greek Catholic Church, the priest who baptizes the child also confirms them at the same time. It's just right immediately afterward, and of course they receive the Eucharist. Their Sacraments of Initiation are all at one time.

In the Latin Church, as we know, then, Confirmation is not usually given until after the child has made his first Holy Communion, and that used to be around seven. In some places it still is, but mostly it's in the eighth grade at this point.

Confirmation takes place within a Mass, typically, in order to show clearly the connection between the sacrament and the whole of Christian initiation, which is - it all occurs in the Church. The newly confirmed, then, participate in the Eucharist. That completes their Christian initiation. It could be in a different order, but either way, it doesn't matter. They are all the Sacraments of Initiation.

Those who will be confirmed are accompanied by a sponsor, which is hopefully, usually, a godparent. They stand before the bishop who questions them, and they offer their profession of faith. And then he says, "My dear friends, in Baptism, God our Father gave the new birth of eternal life to His chosen sons and daughters. Let us pray to our Father that He will pour out the Holy Spirit to strengthen His sons and daughters with His gifts, and anoint them to be more like Christ, the son of God." Then he prays silently and he stands facing those who are to be confirmed, and then with his hands extended, he prays the Holy Spirit upon them. He says, "All powerful God, father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit, you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be your helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe at your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."

And then - the essential part of the ceremony - each candidate is anointed with oil, or chrism, on the forehead with the laying on of the hand. Just as in the beginning he places his hand on the one to be confirmed. He traces with his thumb the sign of the cross, or the seal - right? - on the person's forehead after he has dipped his thumb in the holy oil. Then he says - he addresses the candidates by name, which is a new name. He says, "Be sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit." Then the person who has just been confirmed says, "Amen."

As Abram became Abraham, and Jacob became Israel, and Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul throughout the Old Testament - well, and the new, Peter and Paul. The confirmand takes on a new name. He receives a saint name when he is sealed with the Holy Spirit. The bishop uses that name - or the priest, whoever's doing the Confirmation. That's the traditional practice of the Church. It doesn't make you less confirmed, and it's not less valid, but it is traditional. That is - at that point, we receive that saint as a patron.

That saint sort of accompanies us through the rest of our spiritual life. Typically, we say that the saints choose us, we don't choose them. So it's neat to kind of think of that and know that the saint has probably had his or her eye on you the whole time. That's especially cool for me, coming into the Church, and having read nothing but Carmelite writings, I had not made the connection at all, even after I received John of the Cross as my patron saint, I hadn't made the connection that most of my formation occurred under the Carmelite teaching until I was looking for a third order to sort of be involved in - that's a whole

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

different story. But man, it was very, very cool to realize that the Carmelites had really chosen me, and John of the Cross had chosen me, way before I ever even realized that they were doing so. It's a beautiful thing, the taking of that saint name because, as I said, they accompany us. They're a little bit like our guardian angels, really. They help us, the saints, in those ways and they know how to pray for us, better than even we do.

The chrism that is used for Confirmation is one of the three kinds of holy oil that a bishop blesses every year in the Holy Chrism Mass. It's on Holy Thursday. Of course the other two kinds of oil are the oil of catechumens and the oil of the sick, which we'll talk about in that last sacrament. More on Confirmation when we get back.

The holy oil, or chrism, is usually olive oil, and it was, even in the Old Testament. Oil is so symbolic of the Holy Spirit in so many ways. I wish I had the time to kinda go through that. That oil shows up everywhere throughout the Old Testament, especially in the tabernacle. One of the most beautiful ways it's used is to anoint all of the elements of the Old Testament, we'll say, we'll call it furniture. Everything in the tabernacle was anointed with holy oil and it had a very specific recipe of which a primary ingredient was myrrh. It could not be used for any other purpose. It had to be only used for the tabernacle. Once everything in the tabernacle was anointed, so were the priests. The priests were - we'll talk about that when we get to Holy Orders next week.

That oil was symbolic of the Holy Spirit, even in the Old Testament. I remember when I was confirmed, and the bishop, or actually it was my priest, traced that sign of the cross on my forehead. I hadn't thought about the oil having a smell, but it smelled glorious. It smelled a little bit like grapes I thought. But that's the sweet odor that the Old Testament gives to this anointing oil. It was supposed to have a sweet fragrance, or a sweet smell. That's because it's symbolic of those virtues, the spiritual fragrance, or that attractiveness that should characterize the life of those Confirmation recipients who put those graces to work. That cross on the forehead is traced as a really powerful symbol if you understand and act on what it's for. Basically we're saying we're allowing God to brand us. That is beautiful - in the eighth chapter of the Song of Solomon - we're gonna do a series on Song of Solomon shortly. I don't know how far down the line, but soon.

That's a beautiful symbolism in the Song of Solomon where we are branded with the brand of the Holy Spirit there. It is a consummation. It's presented in the context of a consummation, a relationship that has been consummated in the eighth chapter of Song of Solomon. It's that brand, that visible mark, on the soul, the indelible mark. That's obviously Baptism. Confirmation has its own special mark on the soul. That's where that sign of the cross comes from.

We're thinking, then, we should be, "Am I really Christ's man or woman? In my daily life, am I bearing witness to Christ, in my attitude toward others, in my treatment of those around me? In my actions in general, am I proclaiming" - this is what it means to be a Christian. This is what it means to live the Gospel. That's what we're receiving when we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. We're receiving the graces and the virtues of the Holy Spirit in order to live that kind of life. It strengthens us. It gives us that strengthening grace so that we can overcome our pettiness and our cowardice in the face of other people's opinions and their - our fears of sacrifice. We are pledging our loyalty to Christ in Confirmation. We're ready to suffer anything rather than betray Him.

It's not a - we're not merely passively suffering when we receive Confirmation, or at least proclaiming that willingness to do so. It's inevitable in life. In Confirmation, we're basically saying we're ready to suffer. The self-sacrifice that's involved in giving ourselves fully to Jesus and His service. In a way, we could say that Confirmation sort of corresponds to the Jewish Bar mitzvah because in the Latin Church, we confirm children after they reach the age of reason, while in the Eastern Church, they do it at the time of their Baptism.

Adults who have never been confirmed, whether they're converts or otherwise, they can be confirmed any time, which is why my priest was going to allow me to come in at Christmas rather than wait for the Easter vigil. It is customary for confirmations to occur at the Easter vigil.

So, to recap, Confirmation as a Christian sacrament has its roots in the Feast of First Fruits and the Feast of Pentecost in the Old Testament. Jesus is the first fruits of the Resurrection. Pentecost means *fifty* in Greek. It got its name from the fiftieth day from that Feast of First Fruits. That Pentecost feast, which is approaching now in the Church, was the birthday of the Church, the first fruits of the resurrection of souls after Christ, in the new birth of Baptism and Confirmation.

I wanna just read that passage since I have the time. It's coming up in the Church liturgical year. In Acts 2: *When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire, and one sat on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments

I've loved that passage for so many reasons, but I love the thought of the wind, the rushing wind. I love to imagine what that would have been like, to hear that sound, and to feel the rush of that wind on me. And the tongues of fire, what that would have looked like. I misspoke when I said that Pentecost was after the first fruits. It was actually after Passover. We talked about it being the Feast of Weeks.

During that celebration, the Jews brought to God, remember, the first fruits of their harvest for thanksgiving, expecting that God will give the rest of the harvest. That's really what we're doing in Confirmation, is we're receiving the first fruits of those gifts of the Holy Spirit in anticipation that they will continue throughout our lives unto the full end of our salvation, which will be in Heaven itself and all of our inheritance, all of our reward that we have merited in Christ while we've been here doing our suffering in this valley of tears and our good works.

So the characterization here in Acts - the symbolism was the wind and the tongues of fire. We see fire as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We also have the oil which is symbolic of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. Remember that each of the sacraments is of itself a covenant. So there's an exchange of commitment. The Holy Spirit gives Himself to me, I give myself fully to the Holy Spirit, whether that involves a cross of suffering, which it definitely will, self-denial, and a submission of my will to God's will.

Then there's an exchange of identity. I'm no longer just Sonja. I have a new name. I have a new identity. I have a new authority and a new role as a witness in the Church and for Christ. There's an exchange of resources. God gives me the Holy Spirit, the spiritual power and authority to conquer sin in myself, and to conquer territory for the kingdom for Him. We have that special power and authority in that final Sacrament of Initiation. We have the resources of Heaven. We have the saints - of course we do, we have that beginning, the seed of it in Baptism, but we are fully initiated into that and all of those resources and that identity and that commitment in the Sacrament of Confirmation, which is itself a covenant, a self-donation.

We also have an exchange of enemies. We say that, the confirmand says that in the actual sacrament. We make that profession of faith in solidifying ourselves into this sacrament, or this covenant with God. There is an exchange of life. There was a shedding of blood. Christ gave His blood as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I didn't mention this, but in the Feast of First Fruits, part of the sacrifices that were made there - of course the Passover was the Passover lamb. Even the first fruits of their flocks were given as part of that offering. We have the principles there of tithing, your time and your talent, the first, or the gross, and the best. All of those principles are in the Old Testament.

Then there's that exchange of a mark. In Confirmation we receive that mark of the Holy Spirit. In that chrism, the oil and the seal, the seal of the Holy Spirit, which we mentioned in the Song of Solomon. Then there is an exchange of a meal. We receive then, at that point, the Eucharist. If we are a convert coming into the Church for the first time, then we will receive it after Confirmation. If we are children when we are confirmed, then it all kinda happens together.

Notice, then, again, that the Sacrament of Confirmation is itself a covenant. A covenant - it can be violated, remember, but there are curses associated with the violation, but it cannot be broken. Once we are confirmed, we are always confirmed. The graces of this - the Sacraments of Initiation, make falling into - if we fall into serious sin, it makes the return to grace and return to communion in the Church much easier, spiritually speaking, but also corporally speaking.

So in Confirmation, when we receive the Eucharist - actually both of those things, when we do either of those things, we reaffirm and we renew our covenant vow with Christ and His Church. Remember that Jesus' body was marked when He was crucified. That is part of why, and how, we receive the character of the mark of Baptism, and Confirmation carries its own seal, or brand.

Confirmation is necessary. Every - in fact, I learned in my study this week, that Confirmation - we're obligated to be confirmed if we're baptized and we're in the Church. We're obligated. If we are able to receive it, we are obligated to do so.

So, it is important. Remember what Sister Lucia said about Confirmation. The lack of Confirmation being part of the reason that many fall - will fall away during the end, and I think we're seeing that. So it's very important. If you haven't been confirmed, please make your appointment and go be confirmed and go *out* and *live* in that Confirmation of your position and your authority and your power in Christ as one of His people, marked and guarded and confirmed in the Holy Spirit through the passion, the death, and the Resurrection of the first fruits of the Resurrection, Christ. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen*.

Until next week, I'm Sonja Corbitt, your Bible Study Evangelista.

05_Confirmation, A Biblical Walk Through the Sacraments