

WHY IS THE ORDER TO COMPLETE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION AND EUCHARIST?

The ancient tradition of the Church was to celebrate Baptism with Confirmation and Eucharist. With the multiplication of Baptisms throughout the year and the growth of dioceses, Bishops were no longer able to be present at all baptismal celebrations. In the West the tradition developed that priests would baptise with water and anoint, with the bishop completing the action with the second anointing at Confirmation.

As the practice of receiving the Eucharist in physical form; i.e., through consuming bread and wine, fell away and in order to ensure that Catholics would be able to receive the Eucharist from a young age, in 1910 Pius X brought the age at which the Eucharist can be received back to the age of discretion (about seven years of age) and people were encouraged to receive at least once a year.

The age of the reception of Confirmation was not addressed at this time and various practices developed to support different understandings of the appropriate age to receive the sacrament. At one time it was felt that Confirmation was to be a transitional sacrament, when one left childhood behind and became 'soldiers of Christ', or an opportunity for the young person to accept the faith of their baptism as their own. The revision of the Confirmation rite now also shows more clearly the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation.

In Confirmation candidates receive the Holy Spirit, conforming them more perfectly to Christ and strengthening them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love.¹

Since the Second Vatican Council, a better understanding of the Eucharist completing initiation and that it must always be seen as the summit of the Church's life has developed.

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."²

The reception of the Eucharist completes Christian Initiation but is received regularly and continues to be transformative.

Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist³.

Therefore, the sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – lay the foundations of every Christian life. "The sharing in the divine nature, given through the grace of Christ, bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity."⁴

¹ Rite of Confirmation 1-2

² Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1322

⁴ RCIA introduction 1-2