

# Maciaszek, Paweł

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## Liturgy of the word in the sacrament of confirmation

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*ks. Paweł Maciaszek*

## Liturgy of the Word in the Sacrament of Confirmation

### STRESZCZENIE:

W ARTYKULE WYJAŚNIONE ZOSTAŁO WSKAZANIE, ABY „PRZYKŁADAĆ WIELKĄ WAGĘ DO NALEŻYTEGO ODPRAWIANIA LITURGII SŁOWA BOŻEGO, OD KTÓREJ ZACZYNAJĄ SIĘ OBRZĘDY BIERZMOWANIA”. TEKST JEST TAKŻE WYTLUMACZENIEM PRAWDY, ŻE „ZE SŁUCHANIA WYPŁYWA RÓŻNORAKIE DZIAŁANIE DUCHA ŚWIĘTEGO NA KOŚCIÓŁ I NA KAŻDEGO Z OCHRZCZONYCH KANDYDATÓW DO BIERZMOWANIA, A PRZEZ NIE OKAZUJE SIĘ WOLA BOŻA W ŻYCIU CHRZEŚCIANINA”. W CZYTANIACH PISMA ŚWIĘTEGO BÓG PRZEMAWIA DO SWEGO LUDU, OBJAWIA MU TAJEMNICĘ ODKUPIENIA. ON KIERUJE SVOJE SŁOWO, BY CORAZ PEŁNIEJ WŁĄCZAĆ CZŁOWIEKA W ZAWARTĘ – PRZEZ CHRYSTUSA – PRZYMIERZE. W TAKI SPOŚÓB GROMADZI SWOJ LUD I ROZMOWIA Z NIM, UMACNIA W WIERZE I JEDNOŚCI. WÓWCZAS PORUSZA LUDZKIE SUMIENIA, OCZYSZCZA JE I LECZY, OKAZUJE SWOJĄ POTĘGĘ I MOC DZIAŁANIA (J 15, 3). PRZYJMUJĄCY TEN SAKRAMENT ZOSTAJĄ ZACHĘCENI I UZDOLNIENI DO CODZIENNEGO PODEJMOWANIA TRUDU ŻYCIA W PRAWDZIE, UWIELBIENIU I DZIĘKZYNIENIU. W TAKI WŁAŚNIE SPOŚÓB URZECZYWIŚNIA SIĘ DAWANIE ODPOWIEDZI NA DZIAŁANIE BOGA W CZŁOWIEKU. MOCĄ DUCHA ŚWIĘTEGO WIERNI MOGĄ ŻYĆ OBJAWIONYM SŁOWEM NA CO DZIEŃ.

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

LITURGIA SŁOWA, BIERZMOWANIE, SŁOWO BOŻE

### ABSTRACT:

THE ARTICLE EXPLAINS THE INDICATION: “EMPHASIS SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD WHICH BEGINS THE RITE OF CONFIRMATION”. IT ALSO CLARIFIES THAT “IT IS FROM THE HEARING OF THE WORD OF GOD THAT THE MANY-SIDED POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FLOWS UPON THE CHURCH AND UPON EACH ONE OF THE BAPTIZED AND CONFIRMED, AND IT IS BY THIS WORD THAT GOD’S WILL IS MANIFEST IN THE LIFE OF CHRISTIANS”. GOD SPEAKS TO HIS PEOPLE, REVEALS TO THEM THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION THROUGH THE READINGS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES. HE DIRECTS HIS WORD IN ORDER TO FOSTER EVER DEEPER UNION INTO HIS COVENANT WITH US. THIS IS THE WAY IN WHICH CHRIST GATHERS HIS PEOPLE AND TALKS TO THEM. HE TOUCHES THE CONSCIENCES, PURIFIES AND HEALS THEM, SHOWS HIS POWER AND THE POWER OF HIS ACTIVITY (JN 15:3). EACH OF THE CONFIRMED HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED TO UNDERTAKE A DAILY ROAD OF TRUTH, ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING. IT IS THE CALL TO MAN TO RESPOND WITH THE APPROPRIATE ATTITUDE TO GOD’S ACTIVITY TOWARDS HIM. THROUGH THE ACTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE ENABLES THE FAITHFUL TO LIVE BY THE REVEALED WORD DAILY.

### KEYWORDS:

LITURGY OF THE WORD, THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION, THE WORD OF GOD

**L**iturgy of the Word is the integral part of all sacramental rites. The deepening union with God in a Christian's life results when closer analyses of the effects of the sacraments is undertaken, especially in that part relating to the Liturgy of the Word. We shall examine in the first part of this article the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit and how He reveals the will of God. The second part deals with the correct response expected from the recipient in consequence of having received the sacrament. The third part shows the types of help which God gives to those to whom He reveals His will and how His will can be fulfilled. This assistance – as described in the Word of God – is contained in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and the assistance God gives to the confirmed person is conditional on that person's willingness to submit to the will of God and to actively ask God for help. It is good to point out at this stage that the texts chosen and placed in the rite of Confirmation come from the Scriptures and the celebrant is free to choose which texts he will use.

The liturgy of the Word consists of readings from the Old and New Testament, responsorial psalm, Gospel reading, presentation of the confirmation candidates to the bishop (there is a dialogue between the celebrant of the sacrament, the priest presenting the candidates and the candidates themselves), homily and the renewal of the baptismal vows.

Analyzing the above texts it will be easier to present the contents and this in turn will allow better understanding of what the Sacrament of Confirmation gives its recipients. What we mean by "easier" is the clearer understanding of what Christ expects from His followers; how to give witness to Christ in all aspects of our life.

### **The Will of God as Revealed in the Liturgy of the Word**

The following instruction is found in the Introduction: "Emphasis should be given to the celebration of the word of God which begins the rite of Confirmation. It is from the hearing of the word of God that the many-sided power of the Holy Spirit flows upon the Church and upon each one of the baptized and confirmed, and it is by this word that God's will is manifest in the life of Christians"<sup>1</sup>. The above shows not only how the candidates should respond to the biblical readings, but also how they should implement the guidance contained there. By knowing the history of our redemption in its aspect of extraordinary activity and power of the Holy Spirit, the confirmed person should become open to the work of the Holy Spirit throughout his life. It is the Holy Spirit who gives understanding what Christ desires to teach his friends and it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to fulfill this teaching in our lives. This teaching is further exposed during the celebration of the Sacrament of Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

Through His word Christ is present in His Church. The time when Christ speaks to us is the time of reading the Holy Scripture. He is there as He promised: "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). He

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<sup>1</sup> *Rite of Confirmation: Introduction*, No. 13, <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/Confirmation.pdf>, 29.06.2010.

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is present everywhere where the faithful gather for prayer, worship. It is, therefore important that the proclamation of the Word needs to be done carefully and diligently, especially since the impact of the word has the redeeming action on the soul. The liturgical texts contained are divided into:

- First Reading outside the Easter Season (from Old Testament)<sup>2</sup>,
- First Reading during the Easter Season (from New Testament),
- Second Reading,
- Gospel Reading.

In order to choose the readings the priest should consult the bishop because the bishop gives the homily. In connection with the homily the rite says: "The bishop then gives a brief homily. He explains the readings and so leads the candidates, their sponsors and parents, and the whole assembly to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Confirmation"<sup>3</sup>. There is freedom to choose either all or some of the text of the liturgy of the day, or use the texts proposed in the rite for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. What the Church wants to say about the Sacrament of Confirmation is most fully expressed in the collection of biblical readings and proposed homily<sup>4</sup>.

God speaks to His people, reveals to them the mystery of salvation through the readings from the Sacred Scriptures, which are explained in the homily. He directs His word to us not to teach us facts and moralities, but in order to foster ever deeper union into His Covenant with us, that Covenant which was signed by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. The Word of God proclaims the Paschal Covenant and this is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The faithful receive spiritual food and Christ through this Word is present amongst the faithful. The gathered congregation listens, meditates and absorbs the Word. This Word becomes like bread, which the Church uses to feed the faithful setting it by richly provided table. Vatican II Council teaches the meaning of the word of God in the liturgy of the Holy Mass: "The two parts which, in a certain sense, go to make up the Mass, namely, the liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship"<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to stress here that the teaching of the Church forbids cutting down of given texts and the use of other texts outside the Bible. The biblical treasure chest is opened with love and widely by the Church. It is God's gift for Christ's disciples. The readings are read by someone present at the liturgy, often one of the candidates for confirmation. This person should read the inspired word with due solemnity, without

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<sup>2</sup> Outside the Easter season, when a selection of readings is being taken from among those indicated for the ritual Mass for Confirmation, the first reading is taken from the Old Testament if there are two readings before the Gospel. The first reading may be taken from the Old Testament or the New Testament if there is only one reading before the Gospel.

<sup>3</sup> *Rite of Confirmation Within Mass*, No. 22, cit. from: <http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/userfiles/RiteOfConfirmationWithinMass.pdf>, 25.01.2013.

<sup>4</sup> B. Mokrzycki, *Droga chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia*, Warszawa 1983, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy "Sacrosanctum Concilium"* (4.12.1963), No. 56.

hurrying and clearly. This is so because God speaks to His people, the ones gathered in Church and they respond with prayer, singing and proclamation of the Creed. And thus we witness the dialogue between God and man.

During the readings the faithful try to understand and meditate on God's words, they try to discover His intentions towards them individually and what response they are able to give Him. That's why Jesus says: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). The Holy Scripture is the main source of knowledge of the Father who is in Heaven. The more we are fed on His word, the more we come to know Him.

The proposed readings remind the faithful that Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples. This reminds us of the transformation the Apostles underwent in consequence of the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Comforter promised by Jesus leads on the road of salvation. He reveals the will of God to us and leads us to fulfil the will of God in our daily life. The grace of God strengthens Christians' faith and reminds him of the duty to respond to that grace so that the gifts which God gives can be multiplied, bring fruit.

The texts contained in the rite of confirmation refer to the mystery of faith and salvation history<sup>6</sup>:

*On him the spirit of the Lord rests (see: Isa 11:1-10),*

*Here is my servant... I have endowed him with my spirit (see: Isa 42:1-3),*

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me (see: Isa 61:1-3. 6. 8-9),*

*I shall put my spirit in you (see: Ezek 36: 24-28),*

*I will pour out my spirit on all mankind (see: Joel 2:23. 26-27. 3:1-3),*

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes and then you will be my witnesses (see: Acts 1:3-8),*

Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (see: Acts 8:1-4, 14-17)

The account of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (see: Acts 2:1-6, 14, 22-23, 32-33),

*The moment Paul had laid hands on them the Holy Spirit came down on them (see: Acts 19:1-6),*

*The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us (see: Rom 5:1-2. 5-8),*

*The Spirit himself and our spirit bear witness that we are children of God (see: Rom 8:14-17),*

*The Spirit comes to help us in our weakness (see: Rom 8:26-27),*

The parable of the talents (see: Mt 25:14-30),

*The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me (see: Lk 4:16-22)*

*The Spirit of truth is with you, he is in you (see: Jn 14: 15-17),*

*The Holy Spirit will teach you everything (see: Jn 14: 23-26).*

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<sup>6</sup> *Scripture Readings for the Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation*, <http://www.litmus.dub-lindiocese.ie/secmenudisp.php?MID=42>, 15.07.2010.

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These texts show the power, action and distribution of the gifts of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. They point to those gifts which confirm the initial sacraments such as baptism and Holy Eucharist, so that the recipient desires and implements the received faith. The Holy Spirit likens man to Christ in His love for the Father and giving of Glory to God. All these graces become part of the faithful who follow the path mapped out by God, the path of His commandments. Once baptism has been received the gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessary to proclaim faith in Christ, to evangelize. The Christian then becomes a new creation. He possesses: as if a new internal organism in which the law of grace is visible: the law written into hearts rather than on stone tables or paragraphs on paper; the law called by St. Paul, the law of the Spirit who gives life in Christ Jesus (see: Rom 8:2)<sup>7</sup>.

„To understand the meaning of this sacrament – Pope John Paul II teaches – we need first of all to reflect on the function of all the Sacraments. They make the Gospel live again in us – that is to say, by them the figure, the life, the mysteries, the word, the events of Jesus’ life are brought into our own lives and become part of our own being. Jesus draws near, enters our personal story through these physical and visible sacramental signs. With these signs Jesus calls us, associates us with His mission, makes us share in all the mysteries of His life. The event of Pentecost is essential to Jesus’ mission since the gift of the Holy Spirit enables Christ’s disciples to grasp the whole truth about the Lord, and their spirits are reborn in their full participation in His supernatural life”<sup>8</sup>.

Through the seven gifts of the Lord and Animator the faithful can fulfil the direction in the words of confirmation: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24). Jesus desires to put into shape the community which will obey the will of God on earth. He does not only map out the conditions necessary to belong to the Kingdom of God, but Jesus Himself is the example of their perfect fulfilment, too. When the Christians imitate Jesus they show moral virtues befitting the disciples of the Teacher from Nazareth. They become blessed and joyful.

Jesus not only gives the conditions to obtain His Kingdom, but He places responsibilities on those who want to be true disciples of His. Every confirmed Christian should be ready to give his life for Christ, Good News and his neighbour. Mature faith should show an unceasing and unconditional willingness to follow Jesus in His Way of the Cross. This is also a participation in His full victory and glory. The necessity for sacrifice demands annihilation of self. Only this maturity of faith ensures salvation on the day of His second coming. “There are two realities to our experience, as Fr. Tadeusz Panuś writes, human reality and God’s reality. In these are found the sources of our faith and hope. The ideal situation would be the co-operation between these two realities, however there are moments and these are not too infrequent when they combat each other. (...) This is why it is necessary that we listen to the Holy Spirit inside us to differen-

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<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Duch Święty źródłem nowego życia i obfitości darów*, in: John Paul II, *Wierzę w Ducha Świętego*, Watykan 1992, p. 344.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, *Agenda for the Third Millennium*, trans. A. Neame, London 1996, p. 80.

tiate the source of our experiences and our direction (in spiritual life). To discern God's plan for us we need to listen to the voice of our heart. In order to follow God's plan the words of Jesus during His agony in Gethsemane present the trust which we ourselves need. We need to remember that the plan of God led Jesus to His death on the Cross, but equally this plan was fulfilled in His Resurrection"<sup>9</sup>.

An example confirming the connection between Christ's command to take one's cross and the sacrament of Confirmation is the witness of St. Therese of the Child Jesus: "Soon after my First Communion I started the retreat preparing for Confirmation. (...) Just as the Apostles I awaited with joy the promised Comforter, I was joyful with the thought that I would soon become a perfect Christian, and that I would have on my forehead this mysterious imprint of the unfathomable Sacrament for all eternity. On that day I received the strength to carry my pains, the strength so necessary because soon after I was to start the martyrdom of my soul"<sup>10</sup>.

The will of God is the call to those receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation (as shown by the analyses of biblical readings by Fr. Wojciech Danielski<sup>11</sup>):

- to fulfil the will of God with joy,
- just behaviour towards another (see: Isa 11, 1-4a),
- to be the sign of living God to others through our behaviour (see: Isa 42:1-3),
- to proclaim the Good News to the weak and poor, thus witness to the living God who is full of goodness (see: Isa 1-3a, 6a, 8b-9),
- to share with others our faith in consequence of power received at Confirmation,
- to become witnesses of Christ and His spiritual Kingdom in the world (see: Acts 1, 3-8),
- to be the witnesses to the Death and Resurrection of Christ (see: Acts 2, 1-6, 14, 22b-23, 32-33),
- to proclaim Christ not only when times are good but also in suffering and among obstacles (see: Acts 8, 124, 14-17),
- to believe in the witness of the Apostles which is the condition of the receipt of the Holy Spirit,
- to accept hope and access to grace (through God's Redemption) as shown in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (Rom 5:1-2, 5-8),
- to take on the likeness of Christ in the love of the Father and the road of the cross of Our Saviour,
- to turn to the Heavenly Father through prayer and acceptance of His Will (Rom 8:26-27),
- to undertake various duties in the building of communal good in the Church (1 Cor 12:4-13),
- to resist weaknesses, faults and rather obtain perfection according to the plan of God for each person (Gal 5:16-17, 22-23a, 24-25),

<sup>9</sup> T. Panuś (ed.), *Wypłyni na głębie.... Materiały dla katechety. Celebracje. Konferencje*, Kraków 2001, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Cit. from: K. Pielawski, *Bierzmowanie*, Poznań-Warszawa-Lublin (brw), p. 27-28.

<sup>11</sup> W. Danielski, *Czytania biblijne o bierzmowaniu*, „Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” 28 (1975), p. 79-82.

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- to grow in faith, confirmation that we belong to God and are receiving eternal inheritance (Mt 5:1-12a),
- to accept the on-going demands which are placed on those who want to be true disciples of Christ (Mt 16:24-27),
- to be faithful to grace and this faithfulness bears fruit (Mt 25:14-30),
- to recognize in the gift of the Holy Spirit the sign that God loves people as much as His only Son (Mk 1:9-11),
- to share with Christ His mission as prophet, priest and King (Lk 4:16-22a, Is 11:1-4a),
- to ever more fruitful acceptance of the Word of God (Lk 8:4-10a, 11b-15),
- to accept the gift of a humble heart (Lk 10:21-24),
- to share the life of God with one's neighbour (Jn 7:37-39),
- to observe the commandments of God, even those that the world considers impossible to observe (Jn 14:15-17),
- to think like Christ in the context of Ten Commandments (Jn 14:23-26),
- to witness to the unchanging truth proclaimed by the disciples of Christ, in spite of lack of understanding in the world and persecutions (Jn 15:18, 21:26-27),
- to the conviction that the Lord directs the Church and that the life of the Church is constantly deepening (Jn 16:5a-7, 12-13a).

The liturgy of the Word shows the truth that there happens not only growth in faith but also its deepening as the above biblical calling shows. At the same time attentive participation in the liturgy becomes a fruitful answer to the Word of God heard in it. God's message teaches about the conditions of salvation and furthermore, deepens the trust in God's Word. The faith which is born and strengthened by the Holy Scriptures is necessary to understand the Holy Eucharist. The correct understanding of the Eucharist builds up and fosters growth of the Church. This is the way in which Christ gathers His people and talks to them. He touches the consciences, purifies and heals them, shows His Power and the power of His activity: "You are clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (Jn 15:3)<sup>12</sup>.

Benedict XVI says how the presence of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity helps us discern the Will of God: "God is with us in the reality of life, not the fantasy! It is embrace, not escape, that we seek! So the Holy Spirit gently but surely steers us back to what is real, what is lasting, what is true. It is the Spirit who leads us back into the communion of the Blessed Trinity!"<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> S. Czerwik, *Celebracja chrztu, bierzmowania i Eucharystii wychowaniem ku pełnej wolności*, in: S. Czerwik, *Eucharystia i wolność*, Kielce 1997, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, *Apostolic journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Sydney (Australia) on the occasion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Youth Day (July 12-21, 2008). Vigil with the young people*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080719\\_vigil\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080719_vigil_en.html), 25.01.2013.



## **The Answer of the Confirmed to the Word of God**

The bishop asks the priest who proposes the candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation the following question: "Have they been prepared and are they ready to receive this sacrament?". The bishop reminds through this question that it is not enough to listen to the Word of God, but one must understand why this sacrament is being given. It is then that each of the candidates can receive the grace of God. The priest then says that he is certain that everyone is well prepared, among other things through the listening to the Word of God, Sacrament of Reconciliation and community prayer. After this assurance of good preparation for the sacrament the bishop asks the candidates what sort of graces they are expecting from God. This question fosters the candidate's understanding that shortly they will be anointed by the Holy Spirit: "We desire the Holy Spirit to strengthen us for the valiant profession of faith and for behaviour by its principles"<sup>14</sup>. The above dialogue finishes with an affirmative «Amen». The candidates desire that the Holy Spirit would transform their weakness into strength, to make them capable to witness to their faith. They are, therefore, aware of the essence of the Sacrament of Confirmation: brave acceptance to witness their faith and defence of it. "They are more perfectly bound to the Church by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ"<sup>15</sup>.

This initial dialogue is not only the presentation of the candidates, but also reminds each candidate of the necessity to find his vocation in the Church anew. In the texts of the confirmation rite the gift of faith is mentioned. This was given at baptism, but will now blossom through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This blossoming aims to implement Christian life, evangelization, witnessing to Christ.

Everyone who receives the Holy Spirit is obliged to give witness to the Resurrected Christ. The confirmation of this truth can be found in the Apostles Peter and John. They were brought to face the Sanhedrin and showed courage to proclaim: "we cannot stop speaking about the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Witnessing to Christ in difficult situations such as in front of pagans, the Christian shows his maturity of faith and becomes a witness to the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit. It is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity in us who gives the strength to courageously witness to faith (see: Mt 10:20).

The book of homilies explains the precepts of our faith. It is stressed that in our times, the coming of the Holy Spirit does not give the gift of tongues, however, He comes through pouring out God's love in the hearts of the faithful, unites into one fold, distributes vocations and sanctifies and unites the Church. The bishop speaks directly to the candidates: "The gift of the Holy Spirit which you are to receive will be a spiritual sign and seal to make you more like Christ and more perfect members of his Church. At his

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<sup>14</sup> *Obrzędy bierzmowania według Pontyfikału Rzymskiego*, Katowice 1975, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium"* (21.11.1964), No. 11; see: *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church "Ad Gentes"* (7.12.1965), No. 11.

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baptism by John, Christ Himself was anointed by the Spirit and sent out on His public ministry to set the world on fire”<sup>16</sup>. This «to make you more like Christ» is the call to a fuller and more real love of Lord and Animator in their daily life. It is through this that the closer union with Christ and neighbour is fostered. “My dear candidates for Confirmation – Eusebius Beltran explains during liturgy of this sacrament – you are no longer little children. You are growing up. You are now young adults. Unlike little children who cannot yet think logically or judge critically, you are beginning to recognize that when you make good choices, you get good results. Likewise, when you make bad choices, you get bad results! (...)Tonight, in a very special way, God blesses all of us as He gifts you, candidates, with the fullness of His Holy Spirit. God loves you and knows how much you need Him. Therefore, He promises “I will send My Holy Spirit upon you and I will be with you always!” (...) it is true that in the days and weeks and years ahead, you will have many challenges and many opportunities. You will encounter difficulties and trials. At all times, think back to tonight. Tonight, Jesus, Who is our Lord and Saviour, is marking you, sealing you as one of His own chosen persons. He sends His Holy Spirit to accompany you, to assist you, to inspire you. Listen to Him. Love Him and follow Him with the assurance of faith”<sup>17</sup>.

Towards the end of the homily, the words of assurance are heard again reminding the candidates of the great graces being bestowed on them: “You have already been baptized into Christ and now you will receive the power of His Spirit and the sign of the cross on your forehead. You must be witnesses before all the world to His suffering, death, and resurrection; your way of life should at all times reflect the goodness of Christ. Christ gives varied gifts to His Church, and the Spirit distributes them among the member of Christ’s body to build up the holy people of God in unity and love. Be active members of the Church, alive in Jesus Christ. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit give your lives completely in the service of all, as did Christ, who came not to be served but to serve”<sup>18</sup>.

Each of the present has been encouraged to undertake a daily road of truth, adoration and thanksgiving. It is the call to man to respond with the appropriate attitude to God’s activity towards him. In other words, he has agreed to do God’s Will. God is not only present in the liturgy, but He also acts. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, He enables the faithful to live by the revealed Word daily. During the liturgy of the Word, the hearts of the listeners give birth to noble decisions, right intentions, desire to give witness to faith.

The Holy Spirit’s graces which lead to God's service are enumerated by the Apostle Paul: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God

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<sup>16</sup> *The New Confirmation Book*, Chawton 1976, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> E. J. Beltran, *Confirmation Homily 2007*, <http://www.catharchdioceseokc.org/sooner/Past%20Homilies/pasthomilies2007/conf2007.htm>, 17.07.2010.

<sup>18</sup> *The New Confirmation ...*, op. cit., p. 3-4.



The important moment during the liturgy is the proclamation of faith. This now forms the renewal of baptismal promises. At the same time it shows that as in faith the candidate was baptised, so now he will be confirmed in the same faith. It is important to stress that those who received baptism as children were not aware of the change taking place in them through this sacrament. The promises essential to religious life were then given by the parents and godparents. Renewal of these promises before confirmation shows that the candidates are aware of their own vocation and their aims in life.

works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4).

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This identification that one belongs to the Church is the foundation of understanding the duty to serve. That is why this sacrament is also called the sacrament of the apostolic mission. The Paraclete, the Comforter is the giver of gifts without which there is no possibility to fulfil any of the missions in the Church or through the order of the Church. Although the candidates are sent to the world, they are to draw from the gifts of

the Holy Spirit. These gifts guarantee the success of their mission<sup>19</sup>. “The sacrament of confirmation is the reality of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and at the same time inclusion of the baptised into Christ’s mission. Resurrection and Pentecost are events which cannot be separated either from the life of Christ or the Church as well as every member of it. It is thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit that baptism allows the faithful to become the disciples of Christ. The grace of the sacrament of confirmation allows the faithful to become witnesses, directs the faithful to their mission in life”<sup>20</sup>.

The confirmed are called to new life from the moment of the receipt of the chrism of the Holy Spirit, they are called to observe the obligations of baptism and the perfecting of those through the sacrament of confirmation. It is morality based on the commandment to love God and to love the neighbour as we love ourselves (see: Mt 22:34-40). In this way every one of the confirmed will fulfil the will of the Saviour to become the light of the world and salt of the earth (see: Mt 5: 13-16). To be the salt of the earth, as Vatican II teaches, is to “to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth”<sup>21</sup>.

The chrism of the Holy Spirit makes permanent changes in human soul. It is a stamp which leaves a permanent mark (see: 2 Cor 11:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; Col 2:11). The coming of the Holy Spirit manifests as an indestructible power. The confirmed, as St. Paul says, is distinguished with the marks akin to circumcision. That is why the confirmed is filled with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (see: Gal 5:16-17. 22-23)<sup>22</sup>. The confirmed person is then obliged to be directed by these in his daily life because it is the answer to the Word of God received in confirmation liturgy.

The confirmed person becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit (see: 1 Cor 3:16). From then on through the gift of the seven gifts of the Spirit he will be vulnerable and sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s teachings. Furthermore, he will receive the help of God to meet the demands of his life and the introduction by the Church of this sacrament was precisely for those very needs. St. Thomas of Aquinas explained the relation between the help and the demands of life as follows: “just as the sails are turned in the direction of the wind, so the gifts of the Holy Spirit orient the mind and heart of man in the direction of the inspirations and movements of the Holy Spirit”<sup>23</sup>. St. Thomas warns against neglect, against erroneous attitude towards favourable wind with sails down, when they should have been up.

The help of God, or in the other words grace flowing from the sacrament, strengthens the confirmed so that he proclaims his faith not only in an ordinary and private

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<sup>19</sup> A. Lewek, *Nowa ewangelizacja w duchu Soboru Watykańskiego II*, vol. II, Katowice 1995, p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> L. Lécuru, *Siedem darów Ducha Świętego*, trans. M. Foss-Kita, Kraków 2009, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution ...*, op. cit., No. 33.

<sup>22</sup> This text (Gal 5:16-17. 22-23. 24-25) can be read during the liturgy of Confirmation. It is titled: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit”.

<sup>23</sup> K. Romaniuk, *O siedmiu darach Ducha Świętego. Podręcznik dla przygotowujących do sakramentu bierzmowania*, Warszawa 1990, p. 38.

fashion, but as a witness sent by the Church (see: Acts 8:17. 19:6). Love flowing out of faith decides whether the Christian life is alive. Only that attitude to faith and love responds to the biblical instruction: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Vatican II teaches on this subject: “The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since He wills to continue His witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work. For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become «spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ». Together with the offering of the Lord's Body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God”<sup>24</sup>.

Fr. Stanisław Dziekoński points to three places of witness in Christian's life:

- a) family,
- b) place of work (or learning),
- c) parish community<sup>25</sup>.

a) Man is born into the world in the family unit, he learns how to live, love others, God and Church. It is of paramount importance that the family is the place of the true witness.

b) The Christian should give witness to faith in his place of work. The fulfilment of that calling happens when the mode of life meets the demands of faith; through honest attitude of every task, brotherly love, full awareness of one's role in building the society one lives in. The young people should be undaunted apostles among their age group.

c) The confirmed person is called to witness to faith in his parish and this is expressed in “four” signs:

- new way of “catholic” love,
- new form of brotherly cooperation,
- witness to the hope and salvation promise expressed in his own speech,
- celebration of life in its deep roots of the human heart.

The rite of the placing of hands and anointing of the chrism happens with the candidates adopting standing posture. This posture has important meaning. It expresses the readiness to change one's life, to become responsible for one's actions, to be vigilant

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<sup>24</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution ...*, op. cit., No. 34.

<sup>25</sup> S. Dziekoński, *Duchu Święty, przyjdź! Co powinniśmy wiedzieć przystępując do sakramentu bierzmowania?* Częstochowa 2004, s. 73, 76, 82.

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and in readiness. Everyone who adopts the standing position does not need to delay, he is ready to start his journey<sup>26</sup>.

When one speaks of the fulfilment of the vocation, doing the will of God and the change of life in order to achieve sainthood, one needs to return to the word of God. Listening to the living and fruitful word of God is necessary because it poses questions, points to the direction and has impact on one's life. Acceptance of the gift of the Holy Spirit renews the desire to fathom the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. When one comes to know the Good News, one sees in it the power of God. The confirmed needs this power daily.

To summarize, it can be said that the theological analyses of the liturgy of the word in the rite of confirmation leads to the following: "Love is the witness to the breath of the Holy Spirit. He is the light and power of the disciples of Christ. At the same time He is the source of the activity perceived in the creative apostolic mission, which is yet another aspect of love applied. (...) When we say «confirmation» we mean the Holy Spirit (the gift of Holy Spirit) and the consequence of it which is the apostolic mission"<sup>27</sup>.

### Various Kinds of God's Help Included in Confirmation

This part of the article will show how God ensures that the confirmed person becomes worthy and eager recipient of His love and help so that God's will can be realized. This assistance is clearly given in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Word of God (which is read during the celebration) presents new life for Christians who are marked with the spiritual sign. The grace of the Holy Spirit's Sacrament purifies, heals and unites with God. The confirmation brings the resurrection of the soul and the union with God. Our souls are resurrected to the life in the Spirit and He gives direction and everything the soul needs to obtain its final goal which is union with the Holy Trinity. Without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit there cannot be a resurrection and without the extraordinary action of the Holy Spirit in the resurrected soul there cannot be a perfect union. We are totally dependent on the graces given to us and the importance of every part, every word, every liturgical action, gesture cannot be overstated in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

We shall now look at the means by which the Holy Spirit can achieve God's goals for each soul. This happens through purification, healing and finally union with God.

### Purification

The grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation achieves purification in spiritual life of man. This purification takes effect

- by the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>26</sup> R. Guardini, *Znaki święte*, Wrocław 1982, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> W. Świerzawski, *Duch prawdy doprowadzi was do całej prawdy. Sakrament bierzmowania i obrzęd wtajemniczenia dorosłych*, Wrocław 1984<sup>2</sup>, p. 11.

- by act of giving ourselves to God,
- through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass by consuming with full understanding Christ's Body and Blood.

God wants to burn away the sin in human life. His purpose is to accomplish a complete and permanent purification of the Christian. Anything that makes us impure before the Father needs to be burned away. In Romans 8:10-11 St. Paul describes the Christian's body as being dead, but the Holy Spirit who dwells within the Christian will give them life: "But if Christ is in you, even if because of sin your body is mortal, your Spirit has life through righteousness". God - who gave Himself for us - might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (see: Titus 2:14). He will purify people as gold is purified in fire, all impurities will be consumed in Holy Spirit's fire. In this way "the Christian morality is not the morality of slaves, it does not consist of the ethical norms being imposed from outside, but is the action of the grace of God in a spiritually mature man, made by the Holy Spirit «second Christ», undertaking desires of Christ (Flp 2:5). That is why, the gift of the Holy Spirit is the seed of the harmoniously moral life, the Christian is invited to implement this life and the characteristic of this life is the animation by the Holy Spirit.

Many aspects of Christian's life are the outpouring of the initial and fundamental gift which is self-giving love. The Letter to the Galatians lists love as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)<sup>28</sup>. In papal teaching there is the example of evidence given earlier: "Purity is the virtue, that is, capacity, to «keep one's body in sanctity and honour». It is allied with the gift of piety, as fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the «temple» of the body. It actuates such a fullness of dignity in the body in interpersonal relations, that God Himself is glorified. Purity is the glory of human body in the sight of God. It is God's glory in the human body, through which masculinity and femininity are manifested. From purity arises that singular beauty which permeates every sphere of the lives of people together and permits expression of the simplicity and the profundity, the cordiality and the unrepeatable authenticity, of personal entrustment"<sup>29</sup>.

Christ wants each Christian to fully understand the Most Holy Sacrifice. He has out of His Infinite Love offered Himself as the perfect Sacrifice to purify man from all sin. This Sacrifice can lead people into sanctification and into divinity; if they only realized how He is present in Body and Blood in which He has won an eternal redemption for human beings. During the Holy Mass the Saviour wants that the faithful to realize His desire to: allow the Holy Spirit to come to us as a roaring fire and purify us by burning all the dry plants (sins, bad habits) remaining in our souls and replace them with celestial seedlings and delightful vineyards (heavenly plants, virtues).

<sup>28</sup> J. Kudasiewicz, *Duch Święty i jego dary*, Kraków 2008, p. 47-48.

<sup>29</sup> P. C. J. van Lierde (ed.), *Prayers and Devotions from Pope John Paul II*, New York 1994, p. 265.

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The Holy Spirit sorts out the true from the false in human mind. He teaches the faithful to judge their every thought and their desires under the light of the Gospel, according to the Word of God. In this way the Kingdom of God is strengthened in Christians by the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. St. Augustine shows the importance of purification; he prayed: "Help me to purify my heart, because what I desire to see is pure but my means of seeing it, impure. Come to me, O God, and purify me by Your grace; purify my heart with Your aid and strength. If I receive You into my heart during this present life, after my death You will admit me into Your presence"<sup>30</sup>. In the Bible St. Paul writes about a purging fire that will purify our works "for the Day".

St. Peter reminds us that our faith will be refined and tested by fire. Elsewhere in the Bible, the action of the Holy Spirit is described as fire. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16). According to the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, the fire of Purgatory is God's Love purifying our soul in preparation for the final beatific vision - the heavenly union with God (see: Rev 22:3-5) "For indeed our God is a consuming fire" (see: Heb 12:29)<sup>31</sup>.

### Healing

Jesus' Presence among His people is still healing as He was healing the sick and raising the dead when He lived on earth. Christ has assured all who believe in Him that they will receive help from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in the Liturgy of Confirmation there is a cry:

"Holy Spirit, Lord of light (...)  
Heal our wounds, our strength renew"<sup>32</sup>,  
"Creator Spirit, by whose aid  
The world's foundations first were laid;  
Come, visit every pious mind;  
Come, pour Thy joys on human kind;  
From sin and sorrow set us free,  
and make Thy temples worthy Thee"<sup>33</sup>.

To ask God for healing is a request for love. Anyone who wants to enjoy health of soul and body must start to live in love. Otherwise his faith will be sterile and will not bring forth the right fruit (see: Gal 5:6). Love conquers always and although it may appear to us that it is different, love never loses: "It always

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<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine, *Haertfelt. Haertlook. A Place for Thoughts, Quotes, and the Hearts of Hopefully Angels*, <http://heartfeltheartlook.blogspot.com/search/label/St.%20Augustine>, 23.07.2010.

<sup>31</sup> *A Catholic Response. Purgatory: The Purifying Fire*, <http://users.binary.net/polycarp/fire.html>, 25.01.2013.

<sup>32</sup> *Holy Spirit, Lord of Light*, from: *The New Confirmation ...*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Creator Spirit, by whose aid*, from: *The New Confirmation ...*, op. cit.





Negative experience of man which are the result of lack or insufficient love can be healed by positive experiences or in other words by meeting True Love coming from God, its source. It is not enough to investigate the root of the problem, it is more important to heal the wound with the merciful love of the Saviour. The healing can only take place when the person accepts the merits flowing out of the death of Christ. The fruits of the death and resurrection of Christ are gifted to us so that we can daily rejoice in true peace. The healing performed by Jesus reaches deeply enough to untie the knot which lies at the root of all human suffering. It is a painful knot tied as a result of lack of love in our lives.

protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1Cor 13:7-8). Through the Sacrament of Confirmation the Holy Spirit convinces people to accept that there is interdependence between being healed and our daily giving of God’s love to others. The most important reason for lack of good health is rejection of love and refusal to forgive. Often human egoism is the basis of disorder and nervous tension. People tend to blame God or others that they have not received healing but they should instead examine their hearts: “The life of man changes and is transformed only when there is room for unconditional love, love always faithful. On the other hand, our heart desires constant love and only God’s love can meet this desire. It is correct what St. Augustine said: “God, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You”. And this is the deep healing that the Lord offers, the healing which transforms the human heart and causes it to seek the heavenly realities instead of the earthy ones”<sup>34</sup>.

However, the Lord will not transgress human will and therefore, the faithful need to ask the Holy Spirit for His gifts. When the bishop asks the persons awaiting con-

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<sup>34</sup> M. Parodi, E. Tardif, *Dary Duchy Świętego i Nowa Pięćdziesiątnica. Znaki, charyzmat uzdrawiania i cuda*, Warszawa 1998, p. 39.

firmation: "... tell the faithful gathered in this church what graces you expect from God in the Sacrament of Confirmation", he is pointing the way for the dialogue which is to happen throughout their life of faith. It is important that those seeking the sacrament of confirmation not only know the gifts they are seeking from God, but also that they continue the dialogue with God. In this framework of asking and receiving the Lord can begin to lead His faithful to the mystery of the Divine Truth.

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### **The Union with God**

Every one who dies to himself and becomes united to the Holy Trinity becomes joint-heir through the Holy Spirit (in a Divine Union). Holy Spirit then makes people into «gods by participation». It is at that time when one allows God to flow in them God's Divine Love. God can start to reign in that soul and the soul possesses God, while God possesses them. The will is important because it is our will that either allows the action of the Holy Spirit or it does not.

In the Divine Union, when the soul becomes «gods by participation» the soul begins to rule with (participate) in the rule of the Holy Trinity: "These features describe the Eastern outlook of the Christians. His or her goal is participation in the divine nature through communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In this view the Father's «monarchy» is outlined as well as the concept of salvation according to the divine plan, as it is presented by Eastern theology after Saint Irenaeus of Lyons and which spread among the Cappadocian Fathers. Participation in Trinitarian life takes place through the liturgy and in a special way through the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the glorified body of Christ, the seed of immortality. In divinization and particularly in the sacraments, Eastern theology attributes a very special role to the Holy Spirit: through the power of the Spirit who dwells in man deification already begins on earth; the creature is transfigured and God's Kingdom inaugurated. The teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on divinization passed into the tradition of all the Eastern Churches and is part of their common heritage. This can be summarized in the thought already expressed by Saint Irenaeus at the end of the second century: God passed into man so that man might pass over to God. This theology of divinization remains one of

the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought”<sup>35</sup>. The soul knows of the transformation because the person begins to see everything in God’s Light and this allows to overpower Satan’s temptations. Pope John Paul II explains this situation as follows: “On the first Pentecost our Saviour gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins when he poured into their hearts the gift of the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit comes to you today in the Sacrament of Confirmation, to involve you more completely in the Church’s fight against sin and in her mission of fostering holiness. He comes to dwell more fully in your hearts and to strengthen you for the struggle with evil”<sup>36</sup>.

The transformation of the soul (through the immaterial Fire) gives pain, but also joy. This then leads to obedience to the Law of Love and repentance. The soul feels the Presence of the Lord and it is the soul’s resurrection. It is in this way – Pope Paul VI teaches – that “the oxygen-rich breath of the Spirit came to arouse drowsy energies in the Church, to awaken charismata which were asleep to infuse that sense of vitality and joy which is at all times the mark of the Church being young and up to date, ready and happy to re-announce her eternal message to the new times”<sup>37</sup>. In this way the confirmed person can perform the command which they heard in the homily: “You must be witnesses before all the world to His [Christ’s] suffering, death, and resurrection (...) Be active members of the Church, alive in Jesus Christ”<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter “Orientale lumen” to Mark the Centenary of “Orientalium Dignitas” of Pope Leo XIII* (2.05. 1995), No. 6; see also: B. Krivocheine (ed.), *In the Light of Christ. Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022). Life - Spirituality - Doctrine*, New York 1986; N. Łoski, *Teologia mistyczna Kościoła Wschodniego*, Kraków 2007, s. 16. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 AD), monk and later abbot of the monastery of St Mamas, takes possession of the place among the first and perhaps greatest Byzantine mystics. Drawing on Scripture and certain traditions of the Early Church, Symeon explores the theory and practice of contemplation, culminating in a direct perception of the Divine Light. Always more the spiritual master than the systematic theologian, Symeon stresses the reality of his encounter with Christ and the Holy Spirit, the reality of a healing, inner light. Archbishop Basil Krivocheine (1900-1985; was a noted patristic scholar and theologian of the Russian Orthodox Church) teaches: “Divinization through grace, when we participate in God’s nature (2 P 1:4) and gods by adoption without losing the condition of the created being, is the ancient theme of Christian spirituality. For Symeon as for ancient Fathers such as Irenaeus, Athanasius from Alexandria and particularly Maximus the Confessor divinization was a higher spiritual state which man can achieve and to which all Christians are called to. Symeon often talks of this in his writings. The divinization was the aim of the Incarnation, or in other words, the Incarnation is the source of divinization: *God, the Word has borrowed our body which He did not have of His own nature. He became man which He was not. He gives His own divinity to those who believe in Him so that they can participate in It: divinity which neither angel nor man could ever achieve. And so people became gods though they had never been gods thanks to the adoption and grace (qe,sei kai. ca,riti). Through these He gifts He gives them power so that they can become sons of God. That is why they have become sons of God, and now are becoming the sons of God in the same way. They will never stop in this”* (Eth 1, 3. 37-44). B. Krivocheine, *Przebóstwienie w nauce św. Symeona Nowego Teologa*, trans. P. Trzopek, <http://www.teofil.dominikanie.pl/test/index.php/content/view/315/116/>, 4.08.2010.

<sup>36</sup> P. C. J. van Lierde (ed.), *Prayers and Devotions ...*, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> Cit. from: Eadem, p. 210.

<sup>38</sup> *The New Confirmation ...*, op. cit., p. 3-4.

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The above analysis of the Liturgy of the Word of God shows the spiritual richness of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the impact this has on the willing recipient. The recipient must be fully aware of every aspect of the Sacrament of Confirmation in order to receive at the time the necessary gifts of the Holy Spirit. The growth of his own sanctity will depend on it and through this he will be able to participate fully in the life of the Church. We can see that the gift of the Holy Spirit which the faithful are to receive will be a spiritual sign and seal to make them Christ-like and more perfect members of His Body, the Church. Thus the Sacrament of Confirmation is a key time and opportunity for people to deepen their relationship with Christ, and draw the Light of God into their souls and enter a path of dialogue and renewal which the Holy Spirit is eager to give them. It is also a real opportunity to engage with other members of the Church and to walk with them on their joint journey of faith. It is important that help is given to the confirmed persons within their parish both to draw them more fully into the life of the parish - this may be by building on a ministry that each person is already involved with or it may be something new. This will foster the ground on which their faith can grow (especially for young people). ■

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