Suggestions on How to Approach Common Misunderstandings Regarding the Sacrament of Confirmation

Sacramental preparation requires at least one year, if not two, to help candidates "catch up" on anything they missed in their formation.

Without taking anything away from the importance of the sacrament of Confirmation, it is important to note that Confirmation only requires a baptized Catholic to be in the state of grace upon reception, to be at least the age of reason, to have sufficient knowledge of what the Church offers in the sacrament, and to desire to receive the sacrament (cf. CCC 1319). Whereas catechesis ought to be life-long, preparation for the reception of a sacrament is intended to be relatively limited. Consequently, the focus is to *facilitate* sufficiently worthy reception of the sacraments in a timely manner and to *boost* active engagement in ongoing faith formation for all ages.

Confirmation is when a child "chooses" their faith for themselves, as an expression of their becoming an "adult" in the faith.

The "choice" to be Christian is made at baptism, be it by an adult catechumen or by the parents of a child. In addition, when the Church speaks of adulthood, it is not referring to "the adult age of natural growth" (CCC 1308). In fact, in the Latin Church to which we belong, the maturity required for the sacrament of Confirmation is the same as that of Holy Communion (cf. 1307). A separate thing is each person's *process of faith development*. Within that process there does come a time when a person takes ownership of, or rejects, the faith that is being handed on to them. It's important not to equate this moment in the process of faith development as synonymous to the decision to receive or not receive Confirmation, as is illustrated by the fact that someone who is confirmed could later on choose to reject the faith.

Keeping this in mind, two things are going on regarding the sacrament of Confirmation. On the one hand, the candidate is not choosing whether or not to *be* Catholic. They already *are* Catholic and will continue to be so independently if they choose to practice their faith or not. On the other hand, a candidate must freely choose to receive the sacrament. At the heart of Confirmation, what is taking place is freely chosen reception of a freely offered gift from God to enrich and fulfill our lives within the Church (cf. Acts 2:38, cf. CCC 1287-1289).

Once their child is confirmed, parents have fulfilled their role as the chief catechists of their child.

It is true that parents are the chief catechists of their children (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11; CCC 2223). It is also true that a parent's responsibility toward their child changes as the child reaches adulthood, and it is true that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation requires a certain spiritual maturity. However, developmental maturity and the spiritual maturity proper to Confirmation are not equivalent. Furthermore, because we are dealing with every Christian's responsibility to bear witness to the faith, a parent will always have the responsibility to bear

witness to the faith vis-à-vis their child. In other words, there will come a day when a parent cannot make their adult child go to Mass, but a parent will never be excused from being a living witness of the faith toward their children. When their child is confirmed, it is an opportunity for parents to recommit themselves to living out their apostolic witness, first and foremost to their children, who continue to watch and learn from them to varying degrees, throughout their lifetime (cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, 124, 228).

Regarding preparation and reception for the sacrament of Confirmation, parents and their children each have a role. Parents are responsible for assuring that their child receives preparation to receive the sacrament. However, their child, the Confirmation candidate, is responsible to choose if he or she is going to actually receive the sacrament in the moment.

After Confirmation, religious education is "optional."

We've heard it many times that Confirmation is not graduation from religious education, and that is true. At the same time, Confirmation does indeed mark the completion of something: namely, the reception of all of the sacraments of initiation. In addition, it signifies that sufficient formation is completed for our testimony to the narrative of salvation—including the Gospel—to be shared faithfully and fruitfully with the aid of the Holy Spirit (cf. CCC 1308-1309). It also completes our initiation into the common priesthood of the faithful, so that our personal sacrifices might be more acceptable to God before the altar at the Mass (cf. CCC 1305).

However, Christian discipleship is life-long, and the goal and tasks of catechesis continue throughout our entire lives, independently of receiving all of the sacraments of initiation. We are called to ongoing conversion and ever-growing conformity to Christ, and faith formation is a necessary element of that process. Moreover, the completion of the great gift of receiving the sacraments of initiation brings about increased responsibility: "to whom much is given, much is expected" (Lk 12:48; cf. CCC 1285, 1319).

"I didn't feel anything during my Confirmation, and I don't feel any different after. So it doesn't seem to have made a difference."

The effectiveness of the sacraments is not measured by our perceived experience of them. In fact, it would be an "extra" grace to actually "feel" a particular consolation when receiving a sacrament. More often, the efficacy of the sacrament of Confirmation is attested to through a person's growth in living out the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. In addition, Confirmation is a permanent gift of grace that empowers the faithful to boldly evangelize, to defend the faith in an otherwise hostile world, and to remain resistant to faltering or to apostasy (cf. CCC 1303, 1305; cf. *Conc. Plen. Balt. II*, 250). Furthermore, Confirmation renders our bond to the Church more perfect (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11) and completes of our "grafting" onto the shoot of the tree of David, wherein Christ can more effectively work within us through his Spirit and in our reception of Holy Communion (cf. Rom 11:23-24).

Confirmation is a one-and-done, static outpouring of grace.

Even though Confirmation is received only once and imprints an indelible mark on the Christian's soul, the grace received through the sacrament is not constrained to the moment of reception. Moreover, it is an outpouring of sacramental grace that expands and deepens the gifts received at baptism and impacts every facet of the life of the faithful from that point on (cf. CCC 1306, 1316-1317).

Confirmation automatically changes you as a person, leading to better behavior or noticeable relief from temptation and vice.

Although the sacrament does indeed bring about a real change in us by sealing us with a permanent, spiritual character, God's grace is not "magic." It does not simply make all of our fallen tendencies and disordered inclinations simply go away, although it does truly strengthen us in our struggle against them. God desires our collaboration with His grace for it to bear abundant fruit, and this collaboration usually takes place within a gradual process of ever-increasing conformity to Christ. In this sense, the sacrament of Confirmation is a necessary step in order that we might more fully "become partakers in the Divine Nature" (cf. 2 Pt 1:1-11), and it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us so that we might better grow in virtues of all manner, both human and theological (cf. CCC 1303).

Confirmation is little more than a box to check which is required to be married in the Church or to become a godparent.

While Confirmation is required in order to become a godparent or sponsor, as well as for Holy Orders, the sacrament is not required in order to be married within the Church. Regardless, Confirmation has a real effect on the way in which we live out our state of life within the Church. In fact, as it connects us more fully to the body of Christ, it aids us in both discerning and living out our vocation within the Church, as for example, within the sacraments at the service of communion: Matrimony and Holy Orders. (cf. CCC 1534, cf. *Ad Gentes*, 58)

Furthermore, in our pursuit of the heart of Christ, Confirmation: opens up greater depths of the interior life to our discovery; it amplifies our experience of the Eucharist in our communion with the mystical body of Christ; and it intensifies the Holy Spirit's constant efforts to conform us to the person of Christ (cf. *Divina Consortium*, par. 1)