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PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR THE SACRAMENTS



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PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR THE SACRAMENTS

By James P. Carroll

You say you can't teach your children about the sacraments? Nonsense. Matrimony gave you the grace you need. Matrimony equipped you to discharge your responsibilities toward your children, to teach them and guide them to eternal union with God.

In this pamphlet, we're going to try to show you how you can teach your children the great significance of the Baptism they have received and how you can help to prepare them for the sacraments to follow: Holy Communion, Penance, and Confirmation.

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But first, put yourself in the place of the catechism teacher in the Catholic school or the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program. You are kneeling in your parish church. In front of you is the First Communion class, a collection of frothy veils, white shoes, fresh haircuts and neckties that refuse to behave.

The church is filled with the radiant warmth of the Glorified Christ, inviting His children to the altar. Yet, there are moments when you are chilled by doubt.

"Are they ready?" you ask yourself. "Do they all understand? Do they realize what is happening to them today?"

You ask these things because you accepted the awesome responsibility of teaching these children. You remember that it wasn't easy. You recall the trials of teaching 35 little children, the products of 35 different homes, 35 sets of parents, 35 degrees of enthusiasm about their religion.

Not one child received the attention he deserved. Time was so limited. They learned their prayers and their catechism answers, you tell yourself. But how much did they learn to understand?

Join the Club

Then your thoughts turn to the parents. Wonderful, most of them. So sincere. So concerned. But so confounded trusting in

my ability as a teacher and so blind to my weaknesses.

As an experienced teacher of religion, you know there is nothing unique about the parents of this particular First Communion class. They are members of the club. They belong to that great group of American Catholic mothers and fathers who think their children are properly prepared for the sacraments simply because they attend a parochial school or a parish catechism class.

These are the parents who think their responsibilities end when they propel Sis or Junior through the classroom door. These parents are convinced that only Sister So-and-So or Miss Something, the lay catechist, can teach the truths of religion. The family and the classroom are kept completely separate.

As a result, generations of Catholics have been deprived of the riches that should be theirs. They enter adulthood with spiritual equipment that consists of a few prayers, a lot of memorized catechism answers and an assortment of pious legends. They think of religion in terms of the classroom and the textbook, not as a vital force working in their everyday lives.

This is not to say that we should abolish the formal teaching of religion. Sisters and lay catechists have their place. But only

in the home can a child learn the fullness of his life in Christ. Only in the home can the child come to appreciate the sacraments as channels carrying God's love from the Cross to the hearts of all who believe in Him.

"But I'm No Teacher!"

All parents have these responsibilities to serve as teachers of religion. And the responsibilities are as real as those that demand parents to keep their children fed, clothed and housed. How do they do it?

Ideally, you start teaching your children as soon as they are born. A parent teaches with every breath he draws. He teaches by what he says, by what he does and by what he is. Too often, his example is bad instead of good. Sometimes he can destroy the best efforts of the classroom teacher. Does it help a child to memorize the importance of frequent Communion when his parents go once a month or once a year?

Along with example, prayer is also a good teacher. In the early Church, the official prayer — the Liturgy — was the chief means of instruction. It can be an important means of teaching in your own home. Following the liturgical year, you can dramatize and illuminate mysteries that seem so dark and forbidding in the catechism.

But this is not our primary subject here; let it be enough for us to exhort you to teach your little children to speak to God from the depths of their believing hearts. Encourage them to chat with their loving Father who made them and who gives them every good thing. Remind them to speak to His Son who gave His life to bridge the gap between God and man.

This, you will recognize, is the basic pattern for all Christian beliefs: God our Father reached through Christ our Brother. Keep this basic pattern in mind. It is the foundation of all our knowledge of the sacraments. It shows us and our children how to understand and appreciate sacramental life.

Pattern Is Scriptural

Now let's take a closer look at this basic pattern in preparation for teaching the sacraments. Let's look at it through a readily available instrument — the Bible. This is a key instrument in the instruction of your children. Don't be afraid of it. Pick it up. Read it. Then start telling what you read to your children.

The Bible provides the detailed information your children need for the sacraments. The Bible reveals God the Father through the story of creation and through His constant concern for the people of the Old



Testament. It shows God the Son as the Anointed One who died on the Cross, rose from the dead and will return again in glory. It shows the Holy Spirit as the Divine Love guiding and comforting the People of God.

The Bible is a marvelous teaching aid. But it has been neglected by Catholics because they doubt their ability to interpret difficult passages. Of course, there are such passages. But don't exaggerate the difficulty. Children aren't worried about theological speculation. They want simple stories told in their own words. They don't want to be confused by delicate questions of semantics and geography.

Start your Bible study with the story of creation. Emphasize to your children the goodness of God. Describe the creation of Adam and Eve. Make it clear that God gave Adam and Eve both human life and a share in God's own life. The catechism calls this God-life sanctifying grace. But don't concern yourself with catechism words and catechism definitions. Just stress the fact that God-life was the greatest of the many gifts that God gave to Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve rejected this gift. They preferred their way to God's way. This selfish decision is described by the catechism as original sin.

Without God-life, Adam and Eve had no hope of union with God. They lacked the power to do God's work just as a dog with his dog-life and a pig with his pig-life lack the power to do human work.

The children of Adam and Eve — and that includes Momma and Daddy, Brother and Sister and even Baby — were born without God-life. This gift was gone. Adam and Eve couldn't pass it along to future generations any more than a man who squanders his fortune can pass it along to his children.

But God the Father didn't abandon us. He promised to give mankind a second chance. And He kept His promise by sending to us His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. It was Jesus who enabled us to again share in God's life and love. Jesus did this by exchanging His life for the Church and the sacraments.

Method Is Casual

This is heady stuff. It can't be given to children in a sentence or two. It must be stretched out and developed. It must be fed in small pieces that can be digested. And the feeding must take place informally, almost casually. You haven't got a chance if you order Johnny to sit down for a half hour "because you and I are going to talk religion."

Bring up religion by asking questions. Do it at meal times or during trips in the car or while dishes are being washed. Hundreds of parents have learned that this method works no matter where their children go to school. Little children are vitally interested in God. They want to talk about Him and they want to learn about Him.

If questions don't come to you without a struggle, you may have to start by reading something from the Bible. Often, this works best at bedtime. But be sure you don't read something or tell something and then cut off the conversation. Always leave plenty of time for discussion. Let the questions of the children reveal what they do or do not understand.

At this point, you may be saying, "That's all well and good. But what if the discussion brings up some questions I can't answer?"

Certainly, this is a possibility. Children sometimes have a knack for cutting to the heart of the deepest philosophical problems. So it's up to you to be prepared. You have to do your homework. Much material is available in libraries, bookstores and the catalogues of Catholic publishing houses. And the priest in your parish rectory will be happy to answer questions for you.

When it comes to a teaching method, it's hard to do better than the one used by the Apostles. When they wanted to make a point, they used the words of Christ Himself. They relied on their memories. We can rely on the Gospels.

Check the Catechism

To make sure you are always on solid doctrinal ground, pick up a catechism. You'll be especially wise if you select the *Catholic Catechism* that was developed in Germany and that is published in this country by Herder and Herder. It costs more than the traditional nickel. But its arrangement and its Christ-centered approach make it worth its price.

One word of warning about any catechism: keep it away from your children. Keep it away and it will never become a crutch for them.

Let the catechists worry about the memorization of questions and answers. As a parent, you want to reach the heart and the intellect, not the memory. But even so, don't be afraid to repeat yourself. Preschool children and those in the early grades dote on repetition. They like familiar stories — Goldilocks, Three Little Pigs, Humpty Dumpty. They'll also like familiar stories about Adam and Abraham,

Moses and David. And they'll learn to love the story of the God-man who called Himself "the way, the truth and the life."

This knowledge, this understanding, prepares your children for the sacraments received by the young. Now let's look at these sacraments one by one:

TEACHING THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

Most Catholic parents see to it that their children are baptized a week or two after they are born. So it seems a bit strange to try to tell a child about a sacrament he received five, six or seven years earlier. But tell about the sacrament of Baptism we must.

For little children — and for us, too — Baptism makes sense only when viewed in the light of Salvation History. Baptism is the sacrament that restores to us the God-life that was lost by the decision of Adam. Baptism repairs the God-to-man hookup torn apart by our first parents. Baptism doesn't just wash away original sin; it brings to our souls the light of God's love. This effect can best be understood by children through the baptismal ceremony itself.

In a properly conducted Baptism, the ceremony starts at the entrance to the

church building. This shows that without Baptism a person is not a member of the Church, not a part of Christ's Mystical Body. And a person isn't eligible for membership until he asks — by himself or through his Godparents — for the gift of Faith. Then the priest escorts him to the baptistry within the church.

In the baptistry, the priest pours the water and speaks the words commanded by Christ Himself. The water reminds us of Christ and His cousin John when they met at the River Jordan. The meeting was a turning point in Christ's life. It marked the start of His public career as king, teacher and rescuer of the world.

In our day, Baptism is a turning point for all of us. It gives us the credentials to continue Christ's work. This is made clear in many of the ceremonies connected with Baptism. A white robe is used to show the changes brought about by the sacrament. A lighted candle symbolizes the Christian's responsibility to carry the Light of the World to all mankind.

Liturgical Props

In recent years, there has been a revival of the ancient custom of individual baptismal robes and candles. Many parents make sure each child has his own robe and his own candle. These are used on the

day of Baptism. And they are used again on the anniversaries of the Baptism.

The baptismal robe and candle are more meaningful if they are made by the parents themselves. Mother can sew the robe and perhaps embroider it with simple pictures related to the sacrament. Father could design the pictures or symbols or he could decorate the candle with a cross or a fish or some other symbol of Christ.

All this activity shows a child that Baptism is important. It shows a child that there is something special about Baptism. It shows a child that Baptism has given him special power, that Baptism has restored to him the God-life lost by Adam.

Without this understanding of Baptism, a child cannot possibly be properly prepared for the other sacraments.

TEACHING THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

In 1910, Pius X, the modern saint of the Eucharist, said:

“A full and perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine is not necessary either for First Confession or First Communion. Afterwards, however, the child will be obliged to learn gradually the entire catechism according to his ability.

“The knowledge of religion which is re-

quired in a child in order to be properly prepared to receive First Communion is such that he will understand, according to his capacity, those mysteries of faith which are necessary as a means of salvation and that he can distinguish the Bread of the Eucharist and ordinary, material bread, and thus he may receive Holy Communion with a devotion becoming his years."

In other words, a child can receive the Eucharist without having a degree in theology. A child can receive as soon as he knows the basic truths — as outlined in the Apostles' Creed — and as soon as he understands the true nature of the Eucharist itself.

Understanding the truths of the Apostles' Creed isn't easy. But we've got to realize that a child's understanding doesn't have to be perfect. All a small child really needs to understand is that God is the Father of all of us and that He created all things. Then the small one must understand that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God who became man to die for our sins and to rise in glory from the tomb. This is the Christ who sent the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, to enlighten us. And this is the Christ who will return to the world to complete His kingdom.

Explained by Christ

All this is spelled out in the Bible. By direct command and by parable and example, Christ explained what we need to know about our religion. And He made it clear that the God-life in the soul of a Christian needs a special kind of nourishment. He said the person who eats His Flesh and drinks His Blood will live forever.

In His first miracle at Cana of Galilee, He refreshed His friends with water turned into wine. In the wilderness, He fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fishes. By this, He showed His willingness to care for our needs. But what He did in the wilderness was only a warm-up for the miracle of the Last Supper when He gave us His Body and Blood.

This is a mystery, one of the great mysteries of our Faith. We can't fully understand it. We can't expect full understanding from our children. But we can help them learn that the bread and wine were changed on that first Holy Thursday. They looked unchanged. Yet, after Christ spoke the words of consecration, the bread and the wine became Christ Himself.

Next, Christ our Brother gave this same great power to His Apostles. He commanded them to say, "This is My Body"

and "This is My Blood." And the Apostles passed down their power from generation to generation. And now this same power rests with our own priests in our own parish churches.

We must make it clear that our priests use their power of consecration at the Mass. We must explain that the Mass is both Holy Thursday and Good Friday. We must show how we give ourselves at the Offertory; the bread and wine — the food we need to live — represents our lives. This is what we give to God: we offer our imperfect lives to a perfect God.

God doesn't need our offering. But He is a loving Father. So He accepts our gifts and He changes them into something He does need. He changes them into His own Son. Then, at the Communion, He shares the gift with us.

Vernacular Mass Helps

Thanks to the Vatican Council, all of the meaning of the Mass is a good deal easier to comprehend. We can see more clearly how Christ joins us and helps us in the worship of God the Father. We can join with enthusiasm the Mass prayers said in our own language. And in many parts of the country, the Offertory proces-

sion has been revived so that we can actively participate in the presentation of the gifts of bread and wine.

The Offertory procession is a tremendous teaching tool. Children see unconsecrated hosts deposited in the ciborium. Then they see laymen carry the ciborium to the altar. The offering of bread is no longer a matter of blind belief; it is a matter of reality.

The participation by laymen also underscores the family nature of the Mass, the fact that the Mass is a joyful exchange of gifts between our Father and His children, a great banquet that draws God's family into the unity of the table.

It wouldn't be out of place to explain to your children that the early Christians celebrated the Mass around their dining tables. The first altar linens were tablecloths. The first sacred vessels were picked from the best tableware. And our candles developed from the oil lamps that illuminated the table, the food and the happy faces of the diners.

Again and again in the Gospels, Christ is shown at the table sharing food with all manner of men. He talked with them and He laughed with them. Sometimes, He taught them with a story or a miracle. Always He was relaxed and at home, just

as we should be when we play a role in the banquet that is the Mass.

Guarding Against Scruples

Children will be more at ease if they are given a chance to familiarize themselves with altar bread. Many youngsters find it hard to understand that those strange-looking white circles really started out as bread. When they think of bread, they think of the kind you buy at the A & P. So they must have a chance to learn that even unconsecrated altar bread is different from the bread they use at home.

Ask your pastor for an unconsecrated host or two. Let your children touch, taste and smell. Let them find out for themselves that this is bread — different than most bread, but still bread. This familiarity won't decrease the reverence of a child. It will eliminate the worries that so often keep children from concentrating on the Eucharist itself.

Many children also are bothered by the mistaken idea that there's something sinful about touching the Sacred Host with the teeth. Such notions should be laid to rest immediately. The children should be told that Jesus commanded His Apostles to eat. He didn't say a thing about not chewing.

Sacrament of Unity

The eating of the "one bread," as St. Paul called the Eucharist, drew the Apostles together in unity. And this same unity should be the aim of Christians today. By our own participation in the Mass, we can teach our children that the reception of the Eucharist is not a private devotion. It is not a time for closed eyes and pious looks. It is not an excuse to shut out the world. Instead, the Communion of the Mass is the time when we walk in closest union with Christ *and* our brothers in Christ.

Encourage your children to think about this. Try to set aside a little time each day for prayer and thought by them. Even very young children can do this. The idea is to spend just a few minutes away from the noise of the transistor radio and the television set, a few minutes in quiet conversation with God. During this period of meditation, the children can praise God for His goodness and they can ask for the help they need to be worthy of receiving God's Son. Such thoughts are bound to produce better understanding and that, in turn, will tend to minimize the excitement that so often interferes with First Communion day.

It is a fact that some children become physically ill on the day they are to re-

ceive Communion for the first time. They become ill because they have been pulled and tugged with worries about the condition of their souls, the neatness of their garments and the order in which they are to approach the altar. Too often, these worries are communicated to children by eager but thoughtless catechism teachers. The only antidote is a parent who calmly works to soothe and reassure his child.

The youngster who really understands the Eucharist and the Mass won't expect to be made deliriously happy by the reception of the Host. If he has attended Mass with his parents from his earliest years, he will know that the Eucharist creates a new level of spiritual maturity, a level built on the solid foundation of the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Glorified Christ.

TEACHING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

One of the unfortunate results of classroom preparation for the sacraments is the way so many Catholics weld together the ideas of Holy Communion and the sacrament of Penance. For these Catholics, there can be no Sunday morning Communion without a Saturday night trip to the confessional. They are unable to think about receiving Communion more than 12

or 14 hours after Confession. As a result, weekday Masses are less attractive and some Sunday Communions are skipped because there was no Saturday confession.

The confession-first notion got its start in the days prior to Pius X. Then First Communion was delayed until the youngsters were in their teens. It made sense for such children to confess before they received. Classroom training programs tended to freeze the order. And there was no thaw even after St. Pius urged the reception of Communion by little children.

In addition to reducing the number of Communions, the confession-first notion has tended to downgrade the sacrament of Penance. It has made Penance a sort of auxiliary to the Eucharist. It has prevented young and old from fully appreciating the special work Christ intended for Penance.

Now, in many parishes the parents have little choice about the timing of First Communion and First Confession. But still parents have an obligation to do all they can to teach the distinctness of the two sacraments. They have an obligation to teach their children that confession is not essential for Communion and that confession has its own special place in our spiritual life.

Rooted in Nature

Like all the sacraments, Penance is rooted in the nature of man and in the history of salvation: the creation and fall of our first parents, God's promise of a Redeemer and the appearance of that Redeemer in the Person of Jesus Christ.

It was Jesus Christ who provided the path to salvation for all men. It was He who gave us Baptism to restore the God-life rejected for all mankind by Adam. But in giving us Baptism, God did not want to take away our free will. He wanted us to remain free to love Him or to hate Him. Freedom is a wonderful gift. It gives meaning to our prayers to God. It makes our actions worthwhile.

But there also is a terrible aspect to freedom. It makes it possible for us to turn our backs on God, to do our will instead of God's will. And when we do this — when we reject God just as Adam rejected God — we banish from our souls the God-life we obtained at Baptism.

This rejection of God we call mortal sin. It is mortal because it drives divine life from our souls, leaving them as dead as they were before Baptism. A venial sin isn't as serious. It doesn't drive God-life from the soul. But it does weaken us and make us more likely to will the total rejection of God that is mortal sin.

Mortal sin involves complete, thoughtful rejection of God in some serious matter. Venial sin involves less complete or less thoughtful or less serious action.

Positive Approach

Now let's approach the subject of sin from the positive side. Let's do it by making use of a table lamp and a mirror. The lamp represents God; the mirror is man. After creation, man faced God and reflected the divine light as the mirror reflects the light of the lamp. Then man chose to do his will instead of God's will. Man turned away from God and man's soul was darkened just as the turned mirror is darkened. Through the sacrament of Baptism, Christ turned man back toward God and man's soul again was illuminated with God-life. But the mirror wasn't forced to reflect the lamp for an eternity. It can be turned away again and again just as man can turn away from God again and again after Baptism. It is through Penance that Christ swings men back to God. It is through Penance that the souls of men are brightened with God-life.

Because He was God, Christ knew men would misuse their free will, that they would prefer their way to God's way.

During His time on earth, Christ acknowledged the existence of sin and He demonstrated that He was eager to forgive. As God, He had the power to forgive sins and He gave this same power to His Apostles. The power now resides with the Bishops and the priests who follow in the footsteps of the Apostles.

The priest is the instrument that conveys the light of God's love to a soul darkened by sin. The priest throws the switch that connects the lifeless soul to the life-giving dynamo of the Crucified and Risen Christ. So when children — or grownups — confess to the priest, they really are confessing to God Himself.

Spiritual Witch Hunting

What does a child confess? Well, most authorities are agreed that it's nearly impossible for a small child to commit a mortal sin. But children do have faults and they should be encouraged to locate these faults through an examination of conscience.

To properly make such an examination, children need the help of their parents. Little ones often are uncertain about their activities and a search for faults could turn into a spiritual witch hunt.

One way to avoid this is to spend a few minutes at bedtime reviewing the day with

each child. The review should include everything, good and bad. Then the child can see how many of the things he did were acts of love because they were in harmony with the will of God. Eating an ice cream cone, riding a bicycle, skipping rope can be prayers if they are done because God wanted them done.

Emphasizing the positive reduces the possibility of the child being harassed by the thought of sin. The positive approach should tend to make the child want to do more and more that God wants him to do. It should tend to erase the thought that a Catholic fulfills his obligation when he manages to avoid sin.

Of course, guiding children in their examination of conscience is ticklish business. But it also is very necessary business. Only the parents can keep their children on the safe middle ground between worrying too much about what they do and not worrying enough. At the same time, parents must be careful. They must never give the impression they want their children to tattle on themselves or on their friends.

Sorrow "in Own Words"

Parents must stress the importance of sorrow — not for the discomfort the sin might have caused Mama and Daddy but for the insult the sin was to God Him-

self. One of the best ways to stress sorrow is by emphasizing self-expression in making an act of contrition. Many children trained on the catechism have memorized an act of contrition. But ask them about it someday. Find out what they understand. You may be surprised to discover that many of these children have memorized words and nothing more. They say, "An act of contrition": then they mumble words that are meaningless to them.

To get around this, parents should insist that their children express their sorrow in their own words. This should be easy for little children who haven't learned to be embarrassed by vocabulary weaknesses and who haven't learned to hide their own feelings in a cut-and-dried formula. Tiny children can say, "God, I am sorry I was mean to my sister. I won't be mean ever again. I want to do what You want me to do. You've been so good to me."

An act of contrition spoken from the heart instead of the memory should be a part of the nightly routine. And it should be clear to the children that their request for pardon is all that is necessary for the forgiveness of minor sins.

The sacrament of Penance was instituted by a merciful God to take care of

our serious offenses, the offenses that separate us from active membership in the Body of Christ. This fact is clearer to us now that English has replaced Latin in the official prayers of the sacraments. We can hear the priest speaking the words that restore God-life in our souls. And it is fitting that we and our children should respond with a prayer for forgiveness framed in our own words.

The linking of Penance with serious sin shows why this sacrament should be kept as distinct as possible from the sacrament of the Eucharist. It also shows why it is possible for a small child to go to Communion long before his First Confession. In some parishes, a Communion-first policy has been adopted. The idea is to let children wait until they are older before they make their first trip to the confessional. Older children are more likely to understand their own actions and they are less likely to panic in the dark and forbidding confessional.

Making Penance Easier

For all children, the confessional is a frightening place. It is cramped and plain while the rest of the church is spacious and richly decorated. It seems too small a place for God to work His great power.

For these reasons, it is important for parents to take their children to church to visit the confessional. Pick a time when the confessional isn't in use and when no services are in progress. Let the children kneel in the proper place. Close the door and let them feel the darkness. Show them where Father sits. Work the slide for them. Let them see and hear and touch. Give them every opportunity to become familiar with the little space that someday could be of vital importance to them.

At home, you can help prepare for First Confession by letting your child confess a few made-up sins to you. He kneels down and you play the priest. You may be shocked by the number of bank robberies and axe murders confessed by your darling. But play it straight and ask any of the questions you think might be asked by a confessor.

By combining instruction and practice, parents can help their children understand the significance of Penance. They can understand why in times past penitents were met outside the confessional by their families. There was obvious joy as they welcomed with the kiss of peace a man or a woman who had come home to the Body of the Lord.

TEACHING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Real spiritual adulthood arrives with Confirmation. Unfortunately, this fact seldom is understood by practicing Catholics. Ask a Catholic school pupil about Confirmation and he's sure to say it makes us "soldiers of Jesus Christ." If you ask what this means, you'll be told "it makes us ready to die for our Faith."

This is true, of course. But it is truth tricked out in a suit of armor, fighting and falling in an infidel attack on some ancient and sacred basilica. The word "soldier" produces a distorted image of the confirmed Christian. The challenge of today, at least here in America, isn't dying for our Faith. It is living for it. It is trying to live a life that centers on God and not on man. It's working to overcome our American craving for material things. It's standing up for the oppressed with the courage used by Christ when He sat down with sinners. It's working and playing, eating and sleeping as members of Christ's Mystical Body.

Meaning for Today

These things always have been important. But seldom in history has the importance been so evident as it is today. The

Negro revolution of the 1960's has produced new stresses and pressures on our Christian attitudes. It has forced black men and white men to re-evaluate their feelings toward themselves and toward their brothers.

As Americans, we also have come to recognize the fact that not all families have shared fully in the wealth of the richest society in human history.

As Catholics, we have been brought face to face with the need for modernization to meet modern problems.

As members of the race of man, we have seen growing problems of ignorance, greed, disease, and despair.

The only hope is in the work of Jesus Christ. And this work must now be done by those of us who have been made full members in His Mystical Body. Confirmation is the sacrament that grants this full membership. It is the sacrament that gives us full authority to speak and act for Christ Himself. We are Christ's hands and Christ's tongue. We bear witness to Him by what we do and what we say. We have been commissioned by Him to bring His order, His peace and His love to all.

Spiritual Peace Corps

Confirmation brings to us the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of Love. This is

the Spirit who gives life to the Mystical Body of Christ much as the human soul gives life to the human body.

Many learned books have been written about the Mystical Body. None of these books can fully explain this great mystery. But we do have the Word of God that Christ lives in the world through us. He is the Head and we are the members. The world first saw this on the feast of Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit overcame the fear of the new Christians. They came out of hiding. And they started preaching the astounding truth that the crucified Christ rose from the dead and will come again to establish a kingdom that will have no end.

The Bishops who today administer Confirmation are the successors of the Apostles. This is deeply appropriate because the graces of Confirmation gave the Apostles the strength they needed to launch the first massive missionary effort. And Confirmation today can provide the fuel for the renewed missionary work so sorely needed to change every corner of the world.

Work in the missions is exciting to young people. They like to hear about the men and women who are sacrificing so much for Christ. Surely such information should be a part of every child's preparation for Confirmation. Don't limit the information to

stories of priests, Brothers and Sisters in the foreign missions. Remember the work of lay people in the Papal Volunteers and similar organizations. Describe the contributions being made each day by those who work with the poor in our city slums. And don't overlook the tremendous accomplishments of the young people who volunteered for duty in the Peace Corps.

Specially Anointed

By learning about the work of Christ in today's world, young people can come to understand the importance of Confirmation in Christ's plan for us. We can help this understanding by explaining the ceremony used in the administering of Confirmation. With your children, read the prayers of the ceremony. Explain how the use of holy chrism symbolizes the way Confirmation sets us aside as special instruments of God. We are marked for God's service. We are anointed with precious oil to show that we are ready to participate more fully in Christ's work as a priest.

Like all sacraments, Confirmation has both its outward sign and its inward grace. Like all sacraments, Confirmation was instituted by Christ. And He designed this sacrament to equip us and our children to carry His love to all men.

Making this fact clear to the children, requires a long-term effort. You can't explain Confirmation a week before the Bishop's visit and hope that your explanation will last a lifetime. The graces of Confirmation are available on call but our children may never make the call if we fail to remind them constantly of their new powers and their new responsibilities.

Confirmation creates adult Christians. It fits out our children for lives of service to God and to their neighbors. It prepares them for marriage or for life in religion.

Confirmation is such an important sacrament that its reception should be made an important event. There should be special recognition for the person to be confirmed, recognition by the family and in the home. In this way, even on the day of Confirmation the parents will be discharging their unending, God-given responsibility to teach their children the ways of Jesus Christ.

NIHIL OBSTAT—John L. Reedy, C.S.C.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR—✠ Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

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PREPARING YOUR
CHILD FOR THE
SACRAMENTS

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