

The Restored Order: The Historical and Theological Vision

What is the restored order of the Sacraments?

Several dioceses in the United States have restored the order of the celebration of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. This means that Catholics who were baptized in infancy receive Confirmation *before* First Holy Communion, *not after*. The two Sacraments are most often celebrated at the same Mass. Confirmation is celebrated after the homily.

This restored order emphasizes the integral unity of the Sacraments of Initiation, with Eucharist as the culmination of Christian initiation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1212, 1275, and 1322).

Why do they call it restored order?

During the first five hundred years or so of the history of the Roman Catholic Church (and still today in the Christian churches of the East), the Sacraments of Christian Initiation were celebrated in an invariable sequence: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. And it was almost always the case that all three Sacraments were celebrated together at the same time, even with infants.

In 1910 Pope Pius X invited young children to Holy Communion with the one requirement: that they be able to distinguish ordinary bread from the consecrated bread at Mass. This change had one drawback: Confirmation as a Sacrament of Initiation was lost.

Isn't Confirmation a Sacrament of maturity that should come after First Holy Communion as a child grows older?

Although this is what many Catholics understand the Sacrament of Confirmation to be, Confirmation is actually the completion of Baptism through the fullness of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Celebrating Confirmation after Baptism but before Eucharist better expresses its role as the completion of Baptism.

It is also good to note that the maturity level required for receiving any of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation is only what is age-appropriate.

When we are used to a different practice after more than a thousand years, why is the Church now going back to the original sequence?

Restored order is more than just a fascination with the way it used to be. In fact, there are some very significant theological and liturgical reasons for restoring the integrity of the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation—all celebrated in proper order, even at the same time.

The RCIA (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*) requires that children and adults in the catechumenate receive all three Sacraments together, even if the children are younger than the age at which the Catholic children of the parish are routinely confirmed.

Putting the celebration of Confirmation between Baptism and Eucharist better expresses its role as the completion of Baptism. As a matter of fact, the Sacrament that is the culmination of a person's Christian initiation is the Eucharist, not Confirmation.

Theologically, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit given in all its fullness at Confirmation that best prepares one to receive Eucharist, and thus to be most fully joined to the Body of Christ.

Is it wrong, then, to be confirmed after receiving Eucharist?

No. The Church has many ways of celebrating the mysteries of God's love in the Sacraments. However, the *National Directory for Catechesis* 36A states: "Christian initiation is celebrated in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist."