

First, let's begin by noting that when we were lost in sin, it was God who first reached out to us. The beginning, the first movement, is always God reaching out to us. Thus, faith is first and foremost a gift that we receive. Second, Christ often describes the gift of faith as a seed, not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is given to us to develop (c.f., no. 1253). Thus, the parables speak of seeds being planted and needing to grow to harvest, a tree needing tending to bear fruit, or money needing to be invested.

PART I of III

If sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace, what is that first visible sign by which Christ reaches out to plant the seed of faith? [Answer “baptism” and affirm] . In fact, the word baptism comes from the Greek and literally means, “to plunge” or “immerse.” It is called baptism because we are plunged or immersed into the mystery of Christ (c.f., Rom 6:3, Gal 3 :27). Thus, as the catechism says, being immersed in water is the best the best visible sign (cf., no. 1239).

Through the waters, Christ immerses us into the mystery of his cross and resurrection, and we rise up to a new life in him (cf., no. 1214). By the power of his cross, we are set free from the power of Satan and washed free from sin. From the waters of Baptism, we rise to a new life of grace, a member of Christ and coheirs to an imperishable life with him (Cf. 1 Cor 6: 15, 12:27; Rom 8:17).

Thus, we believe that when people faithfully adhere to Christ's command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, they are *truly* Christians, like we are. Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, or Episcopalians - we believe that they are united with Christ and they are our brothers and sisters in Christ, members of God's family.

But Baptism, which unites us with Christ's saving mystery, also unites us together with one another. In fact, Christ's will is that “they may be one, as we are one” (Jn 1 7:22). Thus, we also believe Christ established a Church as a visible sign of that unity with one another and that “full communion” with this Church includes (1) professing the same faith, (2) being joined together in the sacraments, and (3) accepting the authentic authority of the successors to the Apostles, especially Peter's successor, the Pope (no. 837; c. 205). So, while we believe we are united with other baptized Christians, we also believe that, sadly, we do not share the fullness of communion or unity with them that Christ intended.

PART II of III

As foretold by the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah was to live in total communion with the Spirit of God (Isa I 1 :2, 61:1). This fullness of the Spirit was also promised by the prophets to the whole messianic people (Ezek 36:25-27; Joel 3: 1-2). Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit, and rising from the waters of his own baptism, the Spirit descended upon him. His whole life and ministry

are lived in full communion with the Spirit (c.f., no. 1286); he fulfills the prophecies of old. Christ also promised his followers an outpouring the Spirit upon them (Lk 12:12; Jn 3:5,8, 7:36-39, 16: 7-15; Acts 1 :8). This occurred on that first Easter Sunday and more obviously at Pentecost (Jn 20:22, Acts 2: 1-4).

The visible sign by which Christ, through the Apostles, continued to pour out the fullness of the Spirit upon the baptized was the laying on of hands. So that, when the Apostles learned there was a group in Samaria who had been baptized but who had not yet received the Holy Spirit, they immediately sent Peter and John to lay hands upon them so that they might receive the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). This outpouring of the Spirit seals or strengthens or completes the gift of God's Spirit, which is first imparted in baptism. It helps us to imitate Christ more fully, that like Christ, our lives too are lived in total communion with God's Spirit. What do we call this "laying on of hands"? [confirmation].

PART III

Plunged into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection in the waters of Baptism and strengthened to live in total communion with God's Spirit like Christ in the laying on of hands at Confirmation, we are called to let Christ live in us wholly and completely. The invisible gift is unity with God and with one another as God's family, but it is made visible in three stages:

BAPTISM, by which, once and for all, we are born again into a life of grace as a member of God's family;

CONFIRMATION, by which, once and for all, we are strengthened to live a life of grace with one another in communion with God's Spirit of adoption; and the **EUCCHARIST**, by which Christ regularly make visible our unity with him and with one another in the Spirit.

As St. Paul says,

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor 10: 16-17). . . . For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12-13).

In short, there are three sacraments that make visible and complete our unity with Christ and with one another - Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist - a new life of grace by which the Spirit unites us together as Christ's body with Christ as the head.