Baptism gives us:

- freedom from sin;
- participation in Jesus death and resurrection;
- being born again into Jesus’ life;
- membership in the Body of Christ.

Theology of Baptism:
The cleansing with water by the power of the living word washes away every stain of sin, original and personal, makes us sharers in God’s own life as his adopted children (RCIA #5). Here are the main points in our theology:

- The Church calls the sacrament baptism. Why baptism? Sin is buried in water.
- Grace is the gift of God’s self.
- Anointing. Through baptism we are anointed priest [to serve God’s people], prophet [to proclaim God’s word through deeds and proclamation], and king [to lead people to Christ].
- Baptism is called Enlightenment—because baptism radiates the light of Christ in us.
- Baptism is called the garment of immortality as it veils or hides our shame/sin.
- Baptism is called the bath of rebirth as it washes and recreates us. The old self dies and the new self is born.
- Baptism is called a seal. It is our guard and the sign of God’s Lordship over our lives. It seals us into Christ’s life and mission—into the Paschal Mystery.
- Important: baptism seals a person with an indelible mark, forever baptized into Christ. Thus it cannot be repeated. That is why persons with a valid baptism in another Church tradition are not re-baptized.
- Water from the earth symbolizes life; water from the sea symbolizes death, thus representing the mystery of Jesus’ death. Those who are baptized are one with Christ who died on the cross—we too die with him in order to be resurrected and share new life.
- Jesus spoke of his death as a baptism.
- Blood and water that flowed from Jesus’ side is a prefiguring of Eucharist and baptism.
- Symbols associated with baptism: Water [water is both tomb and womb—we die to be reborn in Christ]; Garment [through Baptism we put on Christ]; Light [through baptism we are enlightened by Christ—we are to let our light shine for all to see].
- Baptism is referred to also as a washing of regeneration of the Holy Spirit; born of water and the Holy Spirit (CCC: 1215).
- We are washed clean and born again in the Holy Spirit as a new creation in Christ.
- Necessity of Baptism: Jesus himself said that baptism is necessary for salvation. John 3: 5
  - Those who suffer death for the sake of faith but are not baptized are saved and considered baptized by blood.
  - Those who desire baptism and die unbaptized are baptized by desire.
- Baptism forgives sins.
- Through baptism we are incorporated into the Church—the family of God.
We become adopted children of God.

There are three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

Valid baptism: What makes a valid baptism? The baptismal rite itself includes immersion or pouring water on the head while invoking the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Trinity.

Every time we make the sign of the cross we remember our baptism into his death.

Baptism challenges us to go out and baptize all nations—in other words, to bring people to Christ, to serve those people and to teach them about Jesus.

Every Lent we prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

  o Catholics renew their baptismal promises and commitment once a year at Easter time.
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Sacrament of Confirmation
Confession is one of three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

- Baptism offers life; it initiates us into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Baptism also incorporates us into the waters of new birth and rebirth.
- Confession strengthens life; it initiates us with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Confession confers the Holy Spirit. It strengthens Christ’s life within us.
- Eucharist initiates us into the Eucharistic community. It sustains us with Christ’s Body (present in community, word, and sacrament). “Ordinarily confirmation takes place within Mass in order to express more clearly the fundamental connection of this sacrament with the entirety of Christian initiation. The latter reaches its culmination in the communion of the body and blood of Christ” (RC 13).
- In summary, baptism offers life, confirmation strengthens life, and Eucharist sustains it. The three sacraments are intimately connected.

- The three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, celebrated in that order, are the normative means for initiating new members in the Church.
- Baptism. Through the waters of baptism, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ through the Spirit. We die to sin and become a new creation in Christ. We enter the waters of rebirth and are welcomed by the One who knows us best and loves us most.
- Confession. Confession is a special outpouring and strengthening of the Holy Spirit. Confession is the gift of the Holy Spirit through the sign of oil and the imposition of hands. The sacrament permanently seals us to Jesus Christ and commits us to live as a disciple.
- Eucharist. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist, we receive Christ, body, soul, and divinity, in each sacramental form of bread and wine. Eucharist completes our initiation. It is the fullest sign of our incorporation into the Eucharistic body of Christ. It is a sacrament that unites us as one body in Christ. That is why it is called an initiation sacrament. It is the most complete sign of our membership in the body of Christ. We become what we have received, the body of Christ.

Theological and historical context for confirmation
- It is important to understand the history of confirmation and what has happened to the sacrament.
- Most Catholics believe the above-mentioned misconceived theology. However, the sacrament of confirmation never expressed a “rite of passage” theology.
- Some elements of the former theology are true, but not primary. We do receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit but that is not the primary action of the rite; it is simply a result.
- Very well-intentioned folks who truly believed what they taught passed on erroneous confirmation theology. There is a reason for their belief.
- The belief in an adult acceptance of the faith, a sacrament of maturity, and a rite of passage was appropriated from Protestant traditions. Such theology embodies a Protestant understanding of the sacrament of confirmation. It is not Catholic theology.
- The Apostolic Constitution for the Rite of Confirmation expresses a very rich theology of the sacrament. “The body is washed, that the soul may be cleansed; the body is anointed, that the soul may be consecrated [made holy]; the body is signed, that the soul may be fortified; the body is overshadowed by the laying on of hands, that the soul too may be enlightened by the
Spirit; the body is fed on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul too should be nourished by God."\(^1\) The Apostolic Constitution affirms that the essence of this sacrament is the conferral of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful.

- Why have well-meaning instructors taught an incomplete, if not erroneous theology? It was a logical mistake and it has its roots in Church history.

- In the early Church, people were baptized, confirmed, and received Eucharist at the same celebration by the bishop. When the Church was small, this posed no problem. The bishop was able to preside at every person’s initiation.

- However, in the year 313 Constantine made Christianity legal alongside all other religions. It quickly became politically expedient to become a Christian. By 380 under Theodosius, Christianity was the official religion of the empire. The practice of wide-spread infant baptism coincided with these events as well. As a result, the catechumenate, a three-year process to form people in the faith, declined with the influx of large numbers of Christians. Quality was sacrificed in the name of expediency.

- As the Church grew, the bishop could no longer preside at the initiation of all the Church’s new members. The right to baptize was given to priests, but the bishop retained the right to confirm.

- That meant that confirmation, which was understood as part of the initiation rites for new members, became separated from baptism and Eucharist. In addition, Eucharist became separated from baptism with the emergence of infant baptism. As a result, the three sacraments of initiation became separated from each other.

- However, in spite of the many changes in the rite since the earliest days, one constant remained in relation to confirmation. It has always been understood as the conferral of the Holy Spirit.

- When confirmation was separated from baptism, it was also delayed. It was generally moved to later in a child’s life, usually around adolescence. Some places retained an early age for reception (the Rite of Confirmation affirms the age of reason) but placed its celebration after Eucharist. The practice most places in the United States has reception of the sacrament taking place approximately between ages 14 and 18.

- Standing by itself, the theology of confirmation was not readily observable as a sacrament of initiation. Some people jokingly say it has been a sacrament in search of a theology. Well, it always had a theology; it just became muddled and confused due to the pastoral practice surrounding it.

- People appropriated the common Protestant theology of the sacrament as a rite of adult passage because it made sense in light of practice.

- When parishes celebrate the sacrament of confirmation during adolescence, it does not require a huge leap to associate it with a rite of passage. Every culture and many religions celebrate rituals of adult passage. People logically placed confirmation in this context. Confirmation is not a sacrament of adult maturity or a rite of passage. When celebrated after Eucharist, it is out of

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\(^{1}\) Tertullian, De resurrectione mortuorum, VIII, 3: CCL, 2, 931.
its intended order. But that does not mean its place as a sacrament of initiation has been altered.²

- Vatican II insisted that we renew our sacraments and make them more observably express what they mean. There has been a concerted post-conciliar effort to renew all the sacraments and set forth their appropriate theology. Implementation and promulgation of such efforts have been slow, but certain.

- In summary, the sacraments of initiation incorporate us into the life of Christ. Baptism forgives sins, incorporates us into Christ’s death and resurrection and into his life. It makes us adopted children of God.

- Confirmation seals us with the Holy Spirit so we will be permanently configured to Christ.

- Confirmation helps us more perfectly grow in the image of Christ.

- It strengthens us to live the gospel and bear witness to Christ in the world.

- Eucharist fully initiates us into the Eucharistic community, the body of Christ. Through this sacrament of unity, we become fully initiated members of the Church through participation in Christ’s life and presence—body, soul, and divinity. All three sacraments invite us to take what we have received and offer it to others in the world.

- Once again, baptism gives life, confirmation strengthens life, and Eucharist sustains life.

### Theology: Laying on of Hands

- The Church teaches that through the sign of oil and the laying on of hands the Holy Spirit is conferred.

- We are sealed with the Spirit at confirmation. We are sealed with an indelible mark, a permanent seal that cannot be repeated. Like baptism, confirmation is not repeated.

- The oil of confirmation configures us to Christ.

- Through the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit is invoked.

- When the priest or bishop imposes hands, it is called epiclesis, a Greek word that means invocation.

- Every sacrament includes the laying on of hands.

- When the priest extends hands over a person or object, he asks that the Holy Spirit transform the person or object into a new reality.

- The laying on of hands has always been part of the Rite of Confirmation.

- The primitive Church imposed hands to confer the Holy Spirit.

- A gesture evokes and represents the apostolic laying on of hands.

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² The bishops of the United States are presently studying this issue. Some bishops have already restored the appropriate order of the sacrament—baptism, confirmation, Eucharist.
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Biblical perspective of laying on of hands

- The power of the Holy Spirit is given to the Church today by the laying on of hands. It is a sign of the action of the Holy Spirit. The imposition of hands confers the gift of the Spirit in all sacraments.
- The imposition of hands was used ritually in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Hands were extended over offerings in response to the laws of sacrifice. (Ex. 29:10, Lev. 1:4; 4:4, 24, 29, 33, 8:14).
- The imposition of hands sets things apart for a sacred purpose.
- It is used as a gesture of blessing.
- Hands outstretched over an assembly, blesses the entire group (Lev. 9:22).
- The imposition of hands assigns power to another person. Leadership was passed on through the laying on of hands (Num. 27:23).
- In the New Testament, the hand was associated with power. Hands were imposed to heal people. Jesus was asked to heal Jairus’ daughter by laying his hands on her.
- The Holy Spirit was conferred at baptism through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19; 19:6).
- The laying on of hands was also a sign of mission. The apostles laid hands on the seven and they were assigned a special service (Acts 6:6).
- The laying on of hands was also associated with the installation of some office, either the office of presbyter or the office of apostle (2 Tim. 1:6).

Theological perspective of laying on of hands

- The imposition of hands is believed to be the origin of the sacrament of confirmation.
- Pope Paul VI affirmed that the sacrament of confirmation (laying on of hands) continues the grace of Pentecost (Divinae consortium naturae).
- The gesture means the same thing today as it did in antiquity: sign of power, installation of office, ministry, transfer of authority, healing, and blessing.
- It is a symbol of the ongoing life of the Holy Spirit, which continues in the Church today.
- Every liturgical action exercises the epicletic action of calling down the Spirit of God to bless, sanctify, transform, and effect the desired grace.
- Hands are laid on the elect as they are immersed in the life giving waters of baptism
- Hands are imposed on the confirmation candidates as they are anointed with the Spirit of God.
- Hands are imposed over bread and wine invoking the Holy Spirit to transform the elements into Christ’s body and blood.
- Hands are imposed over the community as the presider blesses and dismisses it to go forth and live the Good News.
- The bishop is the ordinary minister of confirmation but canon law and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults give permission to the pastor of the parish to confirm when people are coming into full communion with the Church.
- The Catholic Church accepts the baptism of individuals from other Christian traditions because it recognizes one baptism for the forgiveness of sins (provided the baptism is valid: done in the name of the Trinity and water is poured). However, the Church does not recognize confirmation of other traditions. First, our theology differs. Second, the primary minister is the bishop. For
confirmation to be valid in the Church, there must be an unbroken line of apostolic succession from St. Peter through to the bishops of today.
The Holy Spirit

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, *Dominum et vivificantem* (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World), invites reflection on the mystery of the Holy Spirit. In this encyclical, Pope John Paul II reminds us:

- Our belief in the Holy Spirit comes directly from Jesus Christ in the gospels.
- We profess that the Holy Spirit is the “Lord and giver of life” in the Nicene Creed we pray at every Mass.
- Believers are able to profess faith in Christ because of the work of the Holy Spirit. In order to enter into communion with Jesus, we must first have been touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. In order to know the Father whom Jesus came to reveal to us, we must first be touched by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit, however, was revealed to us last.
- God the Father was powerfully revealed in the Old Testament. Jesus, on the other hand, was revealed more obscurely. He was foreshadowed and understood in terms of type, a future coming, an obscure though evident witness in the Old Testament. The New Testament, on the other hand, clearly reveals Jesus, and Jesus clearly reveals the Holy Spirit.
- We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism.
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit has spoken to us through the prophets.
- The Gospel of John provides us with the primary biblical source of our belief in the Holy Spirit.
- The evangelist affirms that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as life-giving water. This same image of Spirit as life-giving water was also used in Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman and with Nicodemus in which he spoke of new birth in water and the Holy Spirit.
- Our belief in the Spirit of Christ comes to us not only directly from Jesus but also from the witness of believers at Pentecost when the Spirit was given to the Church.
- The earliest Christian communities expressed faith in the Holy Spirit as the living presence of Christ, as the giver of new life, as the person of the Triune God who communicates to us the truth of the Trinity, that is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the One God and as the source of everlasting life.
- The Church invites us to more deeply reflect on the mystery of and power of the Holy Spirit in our life and times.
- What does that mean? Pope John Paul II tells us that we are to meditate on the mystery and plumb its depths. What is that mystery?
  - The Holy Spirit is the continued presence of Christ.
  - The Holy Spirit is the source of Christian unity.
  - The Holy Spirit is the source of Christian love and the energy, life, and dynamism of faith we experience.
- The Holy Spirit drives us in our quest to encounter Christ as Savior of the world; the primary role of the Spirit in the Church is to lead us in that quest.
  “She is compelled by the Holy Spirit to do her part towards the full realization of the will of God, who has established Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world” (*Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, n. 17*).
- The Holy Spirit continues today as the teacher of the good news Christ came to preach.
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- The Holy Spirit will help people understand what salvation means in the midst of “changing conditions and circumstances”. In other words, the Spirit will continue to teach the Church today just as Christ taught the Apostles.
- While Jesus is the primary witness of God to human beings, the Spirit guides the Church as Christ continues to reveal God to the world.
- The revelation of Christ requires faith. In other words, it takes faith to believe in Christ, the Son of God who died for the salvation of the world.
- That faith is given and nurtured by the Holy Spirit.
- An intimate bond exists between Jesus and the Holy Spirit since it is the Spirit who permanently ensures “the transmission and spreading of the Good News revealed by Jesus of Nazareth”.

Scriptural Testimony
- The Holy Spirit, and the Trinity itself, is attested to in Scripture.
- Testimony is corroborated by a “higher order, mentioned by all three Synoptics” (gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke). In other words, the voice of God himself testifies to the reality of the Trinity, to Christ his Son and to the Holy Spirit who came down upon Christ at his baptism in the Jordan.
- What greater authority could there be?
- John baptized Jesus in the Jordan. The heaven opened, a dove descended and rested upon Jesus. A voice from heaven proclaimed him “Son.”
- This event is referred to as a theophany, a manifestation of God, God revealing himself to human beings.
- This event not only underscores the truth of the Trinity and the role of the Holy Spirit, but it affirms Christ as the “Beloved Son of God.”
- Once Jesus returned to his Father at his ascension, the Spirit’s work was set in motion.
- The Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the first witnesses and helped them understand all that Jesus revealed to them. The Spirit continues that same work of clarity, understanding, and revelation for all generations.

Church testimony
- We know the Holy Spirit through our life in the Church. How do we know the Spirit in the Church?
  - Through Scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit.
  - Through Tradition and the Spirit-inspired witness of the apostles.
  - Through the Magisterium (teaching office) of the Church led and guided by the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy and sacraments, the signs, symbols, words, and sacramental actions through which the Holy Spirit makes Christ present to every age.
  - Through prayer, the prayer, as St. Paul reminded us, that the Spirit prays in and through us.
  - In the ministries and gifts given to the Church by the Holy Spirit that continue to strengthen and build up the Church to witness to Christ in the world.
  - In the ongoing apostolic mission of the Church. The Spirit is the initiator in every positive movement of change.
  - In the inspired lives of saints both past and present.
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Symbols of the Holy Spirit
(Refer to Catechism of the Catholic Church articles 694-701)

- **Water.** The Holy Spirit is given to us in the water of baptism. Water is the effective sign of new birth in Christ. We were born once of water in the womb, so too are we born again of water in the Holy Spirit.
- **Anointing.** Pope Paul VI affirmed that the Holy Spirit is to the oil of confirmation, what Christ is to bread and wine in the Eucharist. The oil and anointing with oil convey, gift, and manifest the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- **Fire.** Fire is a sign of the “transforming energy” of the Holy Spirit’s work (CCC 696). The Holy Spirit revitalizes and transforms all who are touched by the Spirit’s power. It is fascinating to note that in the big redwood forests, fire is required for new trees to sprout. Fire energy gives birth to new seedlings. What a wonderful metaphor for the working of the Holy Spirit. The fire of the Spirit is present in every transformative, life-giving event in the lives of believers.
- **Cloud and Light.** Whenever cloud and light appear in Scripture it means a theophany has occurred. God’s revelation to the people is taking place. Moses on Mount Sinai, the tent meeting, the wanderings in the desert, the overshadowing of Mary; the cloud that overshadowed Jesus at his transfiguration, and the voice from the clouds at Jesus’ baptism, were all moments of manifestation.
- **Seal.** The seal illustrates the indelible effect of anointing with the Spirit. The Spirit imprints his “indelible character” upon those who are anointed. That is why confirmation is not repeated. A forever seal has been placed upon the anointed one, a seal that cannot be broken.
- **Hand.** The hand is a sign of Jesus’ healing and reconciling mission. He placed hands on people and they were healed and saved. The early tradition of the Church attests to hands being laid upon people thus conferring the Holy Spirit upon them. Thus, the Spirit is present and active in the laying on of hands (Greek: epiclesis).
- **Finger.** The hymn Veni Creator refers to the Spirit as the finger of God’s right hand.
- **Dove.** A dove is sent at the end of the flood in the book of Genesis, understood as an image of baptism. Baptism is the conferral of the Holy Spirit. A dove comes down at Jesus’ baptism and is understood as the Holy Spirit. Christian art very often depicts the Spirit as a dove.

Holy Spirit Is God’s Gift

- We have been gifted with God’s forgiving love through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We are all sinners; yet, we are forgiven. The Holy Spirit restores us to the fullness of life with God.
- We know the Holy Spirit has been given because we know and have experienced God’s love for us. There is no way we can know that love except through the power of the Spirit.
- The Spirit empowers us to manifest the love and gifts we have been given. We are gifted with fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- When we take up our cross and follow Jesus, when we renounce the self and live for God, we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit showers us with gifts so that we can more perfectly enter into communion with God.
- What gifts have we been given by the Holy Spirit so that we can more fully know, love, and serve the living God?
  - Wisdom: We have been given the gift of wisdom so that we can experience the work of God in our everyday lives.
  - Understanding: We have been given the gift of understanding so we can learn to be better disciples and follow Christ more earnestly. The gift of understanding helps us not be swept away by conflicting ideologies; it helps us know the truth when placed before us.
  - Right judgment: The gift of right judgment helps us understand the difference between right and wrong. When gifted with right judgment the person is able to make appropriate choices to follow Christ and his teachings.
  - Courage: The gift of courage helps us overcome fear and to be zealous in our will to follow Christ, no matter what the cost. The gift of courage helps us stand up for what is right, regardless of what we might suffer for doing so.
  - Knowledge: The gift of knowledge helps us understand God’s revelation to us. Knowledge helps us believe in God’s revelation about Christ and his saving mission. It also compels us to learn more about Scripture and Tradition.
  - Reverence: The gift of reverence instills in us a deep respect for God and for the Church. The gift of reverence helps us be ever-mindful of our absolute need for God. Through the gift of reverence, the believer is empowered to worship and serve God to the fullest.
  - Fear (awe) of the Lord: The fear of the Lord allows us to approach God with utmost awe and majesty—to truly see ourselves as creature in relation to God the Creator. A person with this gift understands that God is the object of all his or her desires. God is the perfection of all the gifts we desire. God is perfect goodness, God is perfect understanding, God is perfect love. A person with this gift fears alienating himself or herself from God who is the object and end of life’s meaning and existence.
- Thomas Aquinas divided the gifts as follows: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel are directed toward the mind and intellect. The gifts of fortitude, reverence, and fear of the Lord direct the will, the heart, and the spirit toward God.