

# THE SACRAMENT OF CATHOLIC ACTION

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OVER the heads of the kneeling young man and woman, the little boy and girl, the Bishop extends his hands tenderly. He lifts his eyes a trifle. He *pronounces* commanding *words*. And the wonderful thing has taken place.

The Holy Spirit has come. Soldiers have been consecrated to warfare under Christ, the Captain.

The Sacrament of Catholic Action has been conferred.

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The storm that broke over the ugly world on Good Friday died out and burned away in the angry red of the sunset sky. The people hurried back to their homes, glad that the whole mess was over. A few faithful souls carried to a borrowed grave the broken body of the Man Who had claimed to be leader and king of all the world. The earthquake subsided; the wind fell to a whisper, the whole pitiful thing was ended.

But the storm raged on in the souls of the eleven men who had been closest to the dead Leader and who knew that, at the moment when they could have been of some slight help, they had proved to be astounding cowards and paltrons. They hurried away down back streets to seek safety, praying that no one would recognise them for who they were, or rather had been. When they finally reassembled in the upper chamber where He had, on the preceding night, given them the Bread that was His body, they had nothing to say, nothing to do, nothing to look forward to.

## **Puzzled.**

And in that broken, bedraggled state they waited in the scarcely credited hope that perhaps those mysterious promises about a Resurrection might be more than another of His vain hopes.

But He did rise. He came to them. He had triumphed over death and His enemies, and the Apostles were agitatedly once more on their feet, wondering what next would happen. Certainly now was the time when they could count on His doing something spectacular and final. "Lord, is it now time to restore the Kingdom of Israel?"

Instead, they grew more puzzled. He came and went. He appeared in the dim light of the dawn on the shore of the lake. He walked into their presence through locked doors at sundown. He accompanied two of their less near associates on a mysterious walk to a small town called Emmaus. But they found His attitude more perplexing than ever, and their own status more undetermined. They even returned to their fishing, for, after all, one must have some sort of job to fall back on when or if the whole matter of His mission ended in an anti-climax to Calvary.

## **No Results.**

Though He came among them like glad flashes of light, warming as the coals over which He cooked the fish for them, they were ill at ease, especially so because the world was continuing in its own complacent way despite the fact of the Resurrection.. The priests have locked the mouths of the soldiers who guarded the tomb and locked those mouths with keys of gold.

Pilate had clearly put the whole unpleasant business out of his mind once and for all. After all, like a Roman, he could argue that prophets came thirteen a dozen in all these oriental countries. Why, then, should a governor worry if the processes of law crushed one of those prophets in its slow-grinding gears?

The Jews went back to the hard and reassuring realities of gold and trade and to the complacency of being the one chosen race who could, in consequence of God's predestined favour, do no harm, nor lose permanently God's election, whatever their crimes. The garrison of Jerusalem was strengthened against the possibility of another demonstration like that of ~ Palm Sunday. Business was normal again—except to the Apostles, who found the whole thing distressing, foggy, paralysing. The more so as Christ began to confer on them more and more almost embarrassing powers. The powers were sweet and gracious—the power to teach, to baptize, to forgive sins—but powers which the Apostles realised implied considerable activity and burdensome responsibility on their part.

### **Heavy Trusts.**

“Go into the whole world and teach every creature.” Fine indeed, except that the creatures clearly did not want to be taught, as shown by their recent attempt to kill truth. They had actually done to death the eternal Word of God made flesh. Would these creatures listen to His mere Apostles if they came teaching the very doctrines which they had nailed, with their Teacher, to a cross?

“Baptizing them.” Well, John the Baptist had baptized, and see what happened to him.

He ended in the terrible baptism of his blood as it flowed down from the silver platter carried to an incestuous woman by the dancing harlot who was her daughter. Baptism was surely no easy path these days.

### **And Commissions.**

Forgiving sins! Sweet and consoling admonition and command! But did the people want their sins forgiven? Truth to tell, they seemed pretty fond of them. They clung to their sins with a kind of feverish clutch in the fear that someone might take them away. They actually seemed to love their sins. And if the Apostles came to take away the sins from those who cherished them and hoarded them and counted them over with miserly joy and piled them up in gaudy collections, what would happen? Those who fought sin had a way of going down before it in defeat.

“Feed My lambs; feed My sheep.” There, against the calm lake shore, the gracious command seemed charming, reassuring. In the darkness that followed when He was gone, they could almost hear the howling of the wolves which encircled the sheepfold. He had given them a shepherd’s crook with which to beat back these wolves who came with bloody jaws and crafty stealth. The command was sweet, but how terrifying it seemed once the Good Shepherd had faded in a silvery mist!

### **Left Alone.**

Still, during those days, the Apostles continued to feel that some great manifestation would end all this uncertainty. Christ would, by a single, overwhelming miracle, sweep on to the throne of His Father. Israel would rise in one grand hosanna of acceptance. The legions of Rome would cower at His feet. Then they, the Apostles, could take their places in that kingdom, calm and unafraid. He would work out all the details. He would show them a clear way.

Instead, He rose into heaven in the glory of the Ascension, and they stood on the cold hill, chilled to the heart. Oh, truly the Ascension had proved once more that He was the Messiah! He was the Son of God, entering into that glory of which He had often spoken. From His place on high He would help them with His prayers and His intercession. They had only to lift their hands to Him seated at the right hand of His Father.

Ah, that was precisely it. At the right hand of His Father. Christ had gone, and He had left the conquest of the world, the completion of His mission, to them. They were pitifully alone. He had assigned them hard commissions to fulfil. How could they fulfil them? They stood dazed, bewildered, quite paralysed, looking up toward heaven, until an angel shook them from their bewilderment and sent them back reluctantly into Jerusalem.

### **Behind Locked Doors.**

There, in that upper room which they called the Cenacle, in the very room which He had filled with the sweet memory of the Eucharist and in which Mary lived on, cherishing all these things in her heart, they bolted the door, pulled the blinds tight over the windows, and flung themselves down in a perfect panic of loneliness and uncertainty. He had left them. This time the parting was definite. They had seen Him rise into heaven. He had given them clear commands, and then, as if in mockery, He had turned away to leave the execution of those commands to them.

In moments when the sorrow and befuddlement were less petrifying, they must have regarded themselves with something of bitter irony. They had been told to become world conquerors, and they were skulking behind locked doors. They had been given a commission that embraced the whole world, and they were afraid to leave the protection of a single room. They were to teach all men, and they hardly dared speak above a whisper. They were to face the kings and priests and armies of all the earth, and they quivered as some unexplained shadow swept from a corner and grew larger upon the ceiling.

## **What Can These Do?**

Had any of the priests seen them at that moment, or during the days that followed the return from Mount Olivet, the priests' own slightly uncertain courage would have been completely restored. The Nazarene was gone; where, did not matter. His followers were in a hide-out, afraid to leave it, even for food. The priests, had they known, would have breathed more freely.

Pilate, who sometimes looked back to the day of the trial with a sense of Roman justice miscarried and who could not shake off the memory of the soldier's wild tale of a resurrection or his own wife's assurance that this tale was more than likely true, would have put aside all misgivings could he have seen the huddled Apostles locked in that second story. That whole sorry affair, he could have concluded, was a closed book. The world would hear from none of its actors from this point on.

Could the historian of the future have glimpsed these eleven men leaning on the strength of one calm, sad-faced woman, and been told that these were the very men who would remake the world, he would have asked forgiveness for playing the sceptic. For clearly these were no world conquerors or world reformers.

The Apostles were still at sea about what Christ meant by this kingdom of His Father. Even at the moment of the Ascension they misunderstood that. Their tongues still faltered; their Greek was still bad; they were far from ready to step out and preach with the eloquence to which their world was accustomed. In the bent shoulders, the fear-struck eyes, the slightly trembling hands of these men who, from the moment of their Leader's first capture, had played humiliating parts there was to be seen none of that vaulting courage that sends men out to carry lost causes to triumph. There was none of that fiery glow about them that marks the zealot, the pioneer in any successful cause. If anything, they were notably cold to the task that lay ahead. and quite content to linger on in comparative safety. Letting their mission wait until some vague day which He had indicated.

## **Comforter.**

Mary was the force that, for the time, held them together. For she did not let them forget that her Son had made a mysterious promise. He would send them "another Paraclete." Paraclete? That was a reassuring word at least. "Paraclete" meant a "comforter," and surely, they told themselves, after the disappointment of Gethsemane and the collapse of Calvary, after the frustration of their reborn hopes in the Ascension, they needed a comforter.

Yet, if they had 'moments when they looked into the future and faced that mission for which He had instructed them, they must have wondered if a comforter was really what they most needed. Rather, they needed someone with force and vigour and driving power. They needed someone to pour wisdom into their minds, for they knew that their minds were untutored, except for Christ's three years of battling with their stubborn ignorance; and they felt their minds now dulled by disappointment and fear.

## **More Needed.**

They needed someone to change their cowardice to courage, and to pour into them a fighting spirit, a militant desire to raise the standard of their Leader once more and to charge into the camp of His enemies. But worst of all, there was a chill upon them that explained their chattering teeth, their inert dullness. Their very souls had been chilled by death and re-chilled by this recent, final parting. Warmth and fire were gone; and they were cold to the core of their being.

Yes, they had been promised a new spirit. That was what they needed—a new spirit to make up for their lack of spirit. A new Spirit that would give them wisdom and courage, vision and warmth of heart. What or who could that Spirit be? When and how would it or He come?

## **Dogging Fears.**

Slowly the days dragged on. A knock at the street door made them tremble. In a footstep halting outside they sensed the stealthy watchfulness of a spy. Judas had betrayed them and he had been one of their innermost twelve. What assurance had they that among the seventy-two there were not other Judases, weak in faith and eager to salvage something from the wreckage of that temporal kingdom which clearly was not to be? If a company of soldiers clat-

tered down the narrow, cobbled streets, the watchers paused in their breathing. Were these guards come to arrest them? A sudden shout from somewhere in the street was not the casual cry of a huckster, but the first warning of a mob drawing near to complete the extermination of all that He had stood for.

Day and night for a week or more they prayed and waited. What lay ahead? Death? Martyrdom? Exile? A mission hardly begun? A commission partly understood and hence at best incompletely executed? . How were they to know? To whom were they to turn?

### **The Tenth Day**

It was the tenth day. They still waited. It They prayed on in the tight clutch of uncertainty. A breath of air stirred in the upper room. It grew in volume. It became, with sharply rising crescendo, the rush of a gale. As if blown toward their hideaway by the force of the wind, they could hear the gathering of people outside. The wind had collected these people and deposited them like a drift of leaves before the Cenacle. The Apostles waited, looking at one another perplexed. Only Mary, to whom the coming of that Holy Spirit was an experience not new but renewed, knelt in calm expectancy.

The wind was now a hurricane. Above them the very ceiling seemed to explode in flames which did not quiver in the rush of the tempest. The Apostles bowed their heads. This was clearly what He had meant; the Spirit for which they had waited had at last come.

### **Wind and Fire.**

For even while those parted tongues of fire came upon them borne on the breast of a gale of wind, the mentally quicker among them must have seen the significance. "The Spirit," He had called this Comforter that was to come, and spirit was the very word which meant, in its first significance, the wind.

So this promised Spirit, this wind, had really come, not as a spring breeze, gentle and tentative, not as the debilitating zephyr of summer, lulling to sleep under a shady tree, not as the cold and biting blast of winter, cutting and corroding and reducing. to inert stillness. This Spirit had come with a mighty roar, with the tearing power of a gale that excited the city somewhat as the storm around Calvary had done. This. was no gentle, quiet Spirit. It was a Spirit of force and vigour, moving to action, arousing, stimulating, awakening. The Spirit which He had sent had actually shaken to its foundations the houses and the hearts of all Jerusalem.

Thus clearly the Spirit was speaking in force and exhilaration to those outside the Cenacle. Inside, that Blessed Spirit which He had promised was speaking with parted tongues of fire. Tongues? Yes, that was as it should be. Christ had commanded them to speak His truth; their own tongues were quivering and tied with fear and ignorance. The Spirit was giving them new tongues, the flaming tongues which have always been attributed to the great compelling orator. More. The tongues were parted, like two-edged swords that bit and cut, but healed as they fell.

There was no mistaking the flame-like quality of the tongues. Into the souls of the Apostles these flames sank. Suddenly, all that was cold grew warm; the chill of fear and apprehension and the remembrance of death and departure melted in the warmth that filled them. The flame was bright with a searing light that did not blind, warm with a burning love that did not destroy. It came as brightness and light and warmth and strength, the undying fire that the Apostles must, at Christ's command, cast upon the cold and darksome earth.

### **What Now?**

The Apostles knelt silently and the Holy Spirit filled the soul of the Woman who was His lovely spouse, the souls of the men who were to be His soldiers and ambassadors before all the world.

Outside the Cenacle the crowd was increasing. Why, they demanded one of the other, had this wind blown them together almost against their will? What did it mean? Mob-like, they grew clamorous. They demanded to know what they might expect now that the wind had died down. They waited, feeling a little foolish that they had permitted a chance gale to fling them in a sort of human heap before this unimportant building. Their cries grew louder. A Roman soldier, whose duty it was to watch all gatherings like this, tightened his belt and strolled about the outskirts of the mob, his hand gripping the hilt of the sword which was both paddle for unruly mobs and death for the violent disturber

of the peace.

The noise of the mob filtered into the upper room. A sound like that, just ten minutes ago, would have thrown the Apostles into a panic. They would have clung together dreading the death or at least the certain capture which it threatened. But now?

### **The Miracle Occurs.**

Not now. The miracle had taken place. The new Spirit had caught and held them.

The Comforter Christ had promised had come, but as so much more than just a Comforter. They held tight to Him and would never let Him go, this Spirit of Love, of Wisdom, of Strength, of unconquerable Courage, that would not let them rest.

Added to all this, there was a glowing and revivifying realisation in their hearts that they were no longer alone. They need not face the world on their own strength, or with their own small power. God's Spirit was in their souls. God's wisdom had united itself to their minds. God's own unconquerable strength had buttressed their weakness.

They had God with them, God aiding them, God on their side, God supplying for their imperfections and limitations. No wonder they lifted their heads in a sudden great and sustaining confidence. Since God was with them, what power on earth could possibly stop them?

### **They Appear.**

The crowd waited, but not for long. Of a sudden, the door of that little house opened. With calm certainty and a dignity strange enough in these men who were only yesterday fishermen and publicans, Peter and the others, even the newly-chosen Matthias, stepped out into the open. Into the full light of day, out into the public street they came. The Apostles faced that enormous crowd that milled about in the open spaces, that climbed up to neighbouring windows and leaned from the easy vantage of nearby roofs, faced it, as from that moment on they would face all men, friends or enemies, fellows in the love of Christ or persecutors come with drawn swords.

Astounded, the crowd first stirred with fresh curiosity and then lapsed into expectant silence. They knew these twelve. The story of Peter's denial had made sweet *gossip* in the taverns and in the shadows of shops and private houses. The flight of the others had excited storms of laughter. Could anything be funnier than these men who had insinuated to friends that they were chosen to lead the re-established kingdom of Israel, and then, at the first sign of swords and clubs, had taken to their heels with their loose robes flying behind them? They knew these fishermen and were prepared now for some incongruity, perhaps a fresh joke.

### **A New Peter.**

Peter lifted his hand for silence. Silence fell upon them all as if it was his right to command and their duty to obey.

Surely, thought some of those who knew of him best, this was a new Peter; calm, dignified, sure of himself, neither brusque and headstrong in untrained strength nor wavering in a sudden quiver of fear. A new Peter....

A new Peter, indeed. For there in the shadow of the Cenacle, with the serene, assured, confident backing of his fellow Apostles, he began to speak his first great message. The crowd listened. They were amazed. No man dared interrupt. They followed the sweep and flow of his eloquence. They were moved as they had scarcely been moved since a memorable day upon a mount, when the Man in whom they had hoped spoke long, beautifully, compellingly. Eloquence carved Peter's speech into strong sentences, convincing arguments. A love for these people, whom lately he feared and avoided, made him embrace them in a tender greeting, "Men, brethren." On and on his exhortation swept, and they followed. Here was eloquence that stormed their inner souls and smashed down with gentle blows the ugly barriers of their prejudices and preconceptions.

### **Wise and Unafraid.**

One cannot but wonder if perhaps Peter was not a little astonished at himself. Certainly, if, as the flood of his speech poured on and on, he paused to compare himself with the Peter of yesterday or a month ago, amazement might almost have struck him dumb. He was speaking with compelling force, he who had been trained in the long silences of

fishermen busied about their tasks. He was proclaiming before these people the name of the hunted, crucified outcast Messiah, Jesus Christ, though the priests had sworn, by all the oaths they knew, that neither He nor any of His followers should again trouble their secure priestly posts or disturb their financial relationships with Rome. He was speaking of the difficult doctrines of Jesus Christ, fluently, convincingly, with a serene mastery of their deepest meaning and a power to explain which made the crowd before him stand gaping in amazement, stirring in quick, responsive delight.

Even as he talked, he must have seen spies of the priests among his audience. Those spies were everywhere. The rumours of Christ's resurrection gave the priests no peace; and, Peter, glancing through the crowd, undoubtedly looked into the spies' furtive, angry eyes, and perhaps watched them as they scampered away to tell their masters in the temple that soon there would be need of more swords and clubs and another journey into Gethsemane. He may even have seen Roman soldiers lounging on the outskirts of the crowd; for those soldiers were everywhere, watching each little sign of incipient rebellion, ready to quench it in hot Jewish blood.

But spies and soldiers meant nothing now to Peter. He could look across the heads of the crowd and foresee his own Calvary.

Perhaps the foreshadowing of a cross fell full upon him as he spoke. What mattered in that? He had a mission. The new Spirit within him had given him eloquence, courage, strength. Come trial and martyrdom, his way lay clear before him. The Spirit of God and he could conquer the world for his beloved Saviour.

### **Results.**

Peter finished. Every man had heard Peter in his own tongue though the fisherman spoke only his native patois. The crowd was less amazed at this miracle of tongues, than at the fact that this man had emerged from the shadows to speak bravely and boldly of the Messiah they had crucified, and to compel their minds by the sheer beauty and power of the truth he spoke. Three thousand of that crowd flung themselves down in the dust and mud of the street. Their arms went out in glad surrender. Their voices were lifted in a shout for guidance: "What shall we do?" Peter and the Apostles moved among them, pouring out the waters of baptism, welcoming into the Kingdom of Christ these first-born converts of the Spirit that had come upon the wavering followers of the crucified God and transformed them.

From that day forward, the onward march of the Apostles was one long glorious triumph. Peter had had all the qualities which his Master found so difficult literally burned out of him. He was no longer the hotheaded, wilful, blundering man of alternate impetuosity and craven fear. He was now quiet, strong, resistless, sure of himself and his mission. It was almost as if the fire of the Holy Spirit had, like some volcanic action, welded the shifting sands of his soul into that firm rock on which the Church was to be built. He spoke in the powerful phrases of the Epistles. St. Mark captured for all future time the glorious preaching of his Gospel. He moved into prisons and out of them without a ruffling of his soul. He stood before the great end spoke with the compelling force of simplicity. He progressed steadily from Jerusalem to Antioch, to Rome itself, and on the ground where now stands St. Peter's he died in happy imitation of his Master on the cross.

### **The Rest**

John, unschooled, perhaps almost illiterate, the simple fisherman whose father had expected him to take over the leaky ships and broken nets that were their family tradition, began to write with the poetry and philosophy of the Fourth Gospel, sounded the heights of divine love and the depths of human love, and ascended to the very face of God to grasp the revelation of the Apocalypse.

Thomas, the doubter, doubted no more. Matthew, whose writing had hitherto been merely the records of taxes paid and debts dodged, lifted his pen to give us the great First Gospel. Philip preached fearlessly to the ambassador from Ethiopia; and as for the rest of the Apostles the world was all too small. No more skulking in shadows; they carried the name of Christ, the truth of His message, the glory of His cross to every section of the civilised world, though at the end of every journey lay the upraised hand of the executioner and the certainty of the martyr's grave.

## **Pentecost.**

All this came with Pentecost—Pentecost, which the Church regards as the greatest of its own particular feasts; Pentecost, that blessed day when the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, to insure forever the carrying forward of the work of God made man, began His special function in the world; Pentecost, the birthday of the Holy Catholic Church.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the change that came over the Apostles as they crossed that line marked clearly by the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were new men. They now knew clearly things which until that moment they had felt and hoped for and wished. They were courageous now; a moment before they had been desperately afraid.

The whole difference lay in the fact that the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God, was with them. Ahead lay the glorious battle of themselves and God against the world. Doubt was gone; they had the gift of divine wisdom. Martyrdom might come; they had the gift of divine strength and courage. Temptations might rise with sweet perfume and seductive charm; they had the overwhelming and all-persuasive love of the Spirit of God to keep them safe.

## **Spirit Over All.**

From the moment of Pentecost, the Acts of the Apostles might almost be called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. Over the whole glamorous story of the Apostles' first conversions, their first message of the truth to kings and people, their first sufferings for the name of Christ, we can constantly see the hands of Peter and Paul and the other Apostles stretched out to confer the Holy Spirit upon these newly-won followers of Christ. The Holy Spirit pervades every episode, dominates every adventure and achievement. The minds of those who yesterday were hardened in Jewish formalism or cold in pagan cynicism He fills with the almost blinding light of faith and knowledge. Eloquence overwhelms the most brilliant of his opponents, Stephen's courage is almost God-like. In the presence of unjust judges, the Apostles and their converts are unafraid and convincing in their eloquence. In the darkness of the subterranean dungeons they sing out in joy.

The Samaritans are converted; quickly Peter and John hasten to give them the Holy Spirit. Simon Magus is so struck with the effects that follow the coming of that Spirit of God that he offers his eternally infamous bribe for the power of Confirmation. The Holy Ghost comes down upon the head of the blinded Saul, and he rises to become the Apostle of the Gentiles. Upon the bowed heads of the Jewish converts the Holy Ghost descends, and they see clearly how Christ is the fulfilment of all their prophecies and history. The Romans, surrounded by the subtle influence of pagan power and philosophy, receive the Holy Spirit and live as saints and die as heroes.

## **But What of Us?**

We of modern days pause abashed.

All this response of the Apostles and of those first Christians seems terrifyingly remote. What has all this to do with us? Can it be that the Holy Spirit has forsaken us? Or is it the shameful truth that we have forgotten the Holy Spirit? Was the wisdom and the courage, the blazing light and warming love of the Spirit of God reserved for those who lived close to Pentecost? Or have we, by a strangely universal blindness, declined to see and use the God who is as truly present in our souls as He was in the souls of the Apostles when they flung open the door of the Cenacle and went out from the sheltering darkness to convert the world?

No answer really need be given. We knew the sad fact: We have, in the main, forgotten the Holy Spirit.

We accepted, in sheer casualness and stupid thoughtlessness, the coming of God's Spirit of Confirmation. And we forgot the God of Confirmation almost before the Bishop laid aside his robes.

Confirmation is truly, as Fr. Martindale has put it, the Cinderella of the Sacraments.

In an age when men need, as they never before needed, the strength and wisdom and love and divine guidance, we have forgotten that we carry about with us the very Person who transformed the Apostles and made of the first Christians the saints and martyrs who saved a tottering world, met and brought down a rotten paganism, established the Kingdom of Christ in every part of the known earth.

The Holy Ghost is the forgotten God.

Confirmation is the neglected, disregarded sacrament.

### **Our Pentecost.**

Undoubtedly, it is most important that right at this moment we go back in memory to our own Pentecost. For there was a Pentecost in our life as truly as there was in the lives of Peter and John and Mary, and later of Stephen and Paul and Agnes and Cecilia. For most of us, that day came early in our lives. The Church, knowing the overwhelming dangers with which we are surrounded, determined that we should not be without the wisdom and the strength and the love of God's blessed Spirit.

So we knelt at the altar rail. Our Bishop lifted his consecrated hands above us. Had we been thinking at that moment, we could have seen in him a replica of an Apostle lifting his hands above the early Christians to summon from on high and to communicate to them the Spirit of God. He anointed our foreheads with oil, soothing as only oil can be, strengthening as the oil that is rubbed into the limbs of young athletes. That sacred oil was more than a mere symbol of soothing strength. Kings are anointed with oil when they begin their responsible careers. Priests are consecrated with oil when they are dedicated to God. Sacramental oil is the sacred mark by which men are **set** aside for some high dignity or important responsibility.

So we were marked with a sign which, though a wisp of cotton could quickly wipe it from our brow, would remain forever on our souls. We were made God's consecrated soldiers and were, in a special way, assimilated to His royal priesthood.

Then from the Bishop's hand came a slight blow on our cheek. That was just a reminder of the blows the world strikes at those who follow Christ; but more than that, it was a joyous reminder that we were now strong enough to bear blows, whatever blows might come, in the battle for the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

### **God Comes To Us.**

It is all very simple, that Confirmation ceremony, as simple as the rushing wind, as the burning of small flames in the darkness of a closed room. Yet who can even begin to estimate what happened to each of us as the Bishop held out his hands, anointed, gently struck?

What happened? The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, took up His permanent abode in our hearts. The last act by which the Trinity bound us to itself was completed. By Baptism the Divine Father caught us up in the close embrace of adoption. In Holy Communion the Divine Son came to us in the intimate association which rounded out the union in His Mystical Body. And in Confirmation the Holy Spirit came as our permanent guest, our dear friend, our associate in the struggle of life, our consolation in worry and trial, our light in mental darkness, our strength in temptation, our courage in the warfare which lies ahead for each and all.

If we did not have the clear word of God Himself, the certain promise of Christ, and the explicit fulfilment of history, the whole Sacrament of Confirmation would seem too glorious to believe, too much to hope for. We think of the heavens as the proper abode of God the Father. We make our churches as beautiful as possible, and cover our ciboria and tabernacles with gold and rare stones in the hope that they may not be unworthy dwelling places for God the Son. Then comes Confirmation, and with abashed surprise we realise that God the Holy Ghost has chosen as His special dwelling place the soul and body that are ours. I can bend my head reverently before the realisation of my own tremendous responsibility. I am literally, and in very fact, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

### **But We Forget.**

Children that we were, we returned to the trivialities of childhood. We were busy with the imitation of that business which later was to become our most intense preoccupation. Still faltering and ignorant, we made stupid mistakes. Doubts rose up to harass our faith, and often the truths of Christ seem foggy, obscure, and annoying. Temptation grew stronger. We fought it with clenched teeth. We stretched out our hands to a God Whom we pictured as remote and distant, and we tried to draw down strength from the skies. We fell into sin and wondered why we had failed in so shameful, so cowardly a fashion.

Life grew heavy. Work became oppressive. It seemed at times as if the world of evil was too, too strong and the armies of good and decency too, too weak and outnumbered. We weren't sure either of ourselves or of God. Heaven seemed remote; earth was perilously near and fascinating. We tested the limits of our courage and found them narrow

indeed. We read the story of martyrs and prayed silently that so searching a test *might never* come to us. It was too painfully evident that we should fail.

### **What Is Confirmation?**

Yet all the while, like the rhythm of some half-forgotten verse, rang in the back of our heads an ancient definition: "Confirmation is the sacrament in which we receive the Holy Ghost to make us strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ." To make us strong . . . perfect . . . soldiers? Clearly it did not. In our case it must have failed. Why?

Well, beyond all else, we may say that the Holy Spirit *is* a gentle *God*. He is the Consoler. Though He came as a spirit of flame and rushing wind, He waits upon those who entertain Him, waits *for them* to accept arid to use His *strength*. There were, in the case of our Confirmation, no miraculous manifestations Intense quiet filled the church .when *the* Bishop's hands were extended and *the* Holy Spirit came into our hearts. *No* tempest shook the building; no *flaming* tongues cut through the roof. We did *not* rise to speak in divers tongues intelligible to a modern League of Nations.

### **Like the Apostles.**

But eliminate those miraculous manifestations, and the fact remains that in our Confirmation all the other essential factors of Pentecost were repeated. Only one important condition was present in our case; *the* Holy Spirit's effect upon us and upon our lives was made to depend largely Upon our acknowledgment of His presence, our acceptance of His gifts and strength, *and* our co-operation with this new Spirit that physically, but unobtrusively filled our souls.

After Confirmation, if we dared to recognise the fact, we were really strong. The oil had been the external symbol of our strength. The new Spirit that we had received was the strong and mighty God whose limitless power was placed at our disposal. "God and I together," said a great philosopher, "are always a majority." "God and I together," says the saint, "can do all that God can do alone." The strength is there, divine strength, mighty power. It awaits my use.

### **My Neglect.**

Brutally I face the bitter truth: When have I, even by a quick prayer or a sudden, sharp appeal, so much as turned to draw upon that divine power?

I became, at the moment of Confirmation, a perfect Christian; my relationship to the Holy Trinity was complete. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost had now entered into personal association with me. The mutual love of the Father and Son, which is a Person, was now actually mine in intimate companionship. The God of heaven and earth could do nothing further or more complete to establish me in the fulness of dignity. I had been created, redeemed, and was now sanctified by the living presence of Divine Grace, actually with me, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Perfect? What more could I ask? The wisdom of God continues to dwell in my mind. The strength of God is in my will. The gifts of the Holy Ghost await my use. They are like blank cheques which I may draw without restriction or limitation. The Spirit of God awaits my decision as to how much and how far I shall use these gifts.

### **I Forget God.**

Again must I face the truth: How often. in the course of the years that have rolled by since my Pentecost, have I turned in moments of doubt, of mental perplexity, of uncertainty and indecision, to the Divine Wisdom which united itself with my mind? How often, when temptation rose up with sweet breaths or strong inducement, did I reach, not toward a remote heaven or a perhaps distant tabernacle, but to the strong God present in my heart, and with His strength beat back my peril? Or is it quite possible that, whatever the Holy Ghost did for me, He did it, not because I asked Him to, but despite my systematic neglect and almost callous and contemptuous ignoring of His presence? One cannot but feel that even the divinely patient Holy Spirit must grow weary of forcing His gifts upon the bored and listless and utterly forgetful Christian.

I am a soldier of Christ. With fresh hope and a surprising trust in me, Christ chose me for His army, the lovely army of peace that knows no weapon but the cross and no blows but such as heal and save. He consecrated me to a

royal service. I knelt in Confirmation for the anointing and the solemn, though invisible, accolade. Soldiers must dare; they must fight; they must not mind wounds; suffering and privations must come natural to them; they must live bravely and in the end must be ready, when their hour comes, to die for their standard and their cause.

### **I Fail Because—**

It was a soldier of Christ that I became at Confirmation; but, with terrifying stupidity, after Confirmation I seemed to act as if the struggle was mine alone, which I must fight single-handed and unaided. I was like a half-witted soldier who wandered off on to the battlefield to carry on his own particular guerilla warfare, sniping and then running, taking a quick blow at some unsuspecting or weak foe and then retreating like mad before the assault of an organised enemy. I fought with almost no reference to the Strong Spirit in my heart.

It would be surprising, indeed, in view of our dumbfounding neglect of the Spirit of God, if we did not often feel and often play the paltroon, the ignoramus, and the coward. With cocky self-assurance we draw upon our own wisdom and fall back upon our own strength. We are annoyed and often frightfully discouraged; we feel put out with ourselves and at odds with God when we fail Him because we have failed ourselves. We have failed ourselves because blindly, stupidly, and with more than a brush of egoism, we have failed to call upon the God within us.

What is frightfully needed is a society for the Proper Understanding of Confirmation.

What is pressingly wanted by the vast majority of the Catholic world is an apostle to cry out: "Turn to the God within your hearts."

Perhaps the prayer we most need when we are beset by the doubters who hate our faith and the rebels who have declared war upon the Kingdom of Christ is "Come, Holy Ghost."

### **Personal Matter.**

But without waiting for a society or an apostle or the relearning of a perhaps forgotten prayer, this campaign to enlist in our own behalf the help and wisdom and strength and love of our forgotten Divine Spirit may start with each individual person. The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the soul is an intensely personal one. It is the dear association of friend with friend. It is the gentle condescension of the strong to the weak, the wise to the ignorant, the pure to the tempted, a condescension without any tinge of humiliation on the part of the one who receives.

Everyone who has received the gift of Confirmation should recall in the secrecy of his own soul that if a transformation like (hat which came to the Apostles on Pentecost failed to follow the Pentecost that was his own, the fault lay in his neglect and disregard of the Holy Spirit through the long course of years.

Doubt, under one of its thousand modern aspects, rises to sneer at Christ's teaching or to mock at those who are simple enough to hold it. There is not, at that particular moment time to rush to the book which learnedly answers the doubt and flings the sneer back into the twisted face of the doubter. But one can turn immediately to the Spirit of Wisdom present in one's heart. One can recall that it is under the leadership of precisely that Spirit that the Church has walked its calm, triumphant way and seen the ghosts of a thousand doubters go down with their forgotten doubts to unhonoured graves. One can cry: "Holy Spirit teach me true wisdom." And with the answer will come true peace.

### **In Need.**

Temptation is strong and persuasive in these days, when clever men and beautiful women have taken over, with remarkable success, Lucifer's own task of dragging souls from the arms of Christ and the company of the pure Mary. There is no doubt about our weakness and surely no doubt that the temptation is hot and sweet and compelling. Can we win alone and unaided? Why need that question ever be put to the test? We reach out a hand, not to the remote heaven, but to the strong, pure Cod in our soul. "Holy Spirit, give me strength," A perfect miracle of strength pours through faltering limbs and trembling hands, and the immediate fight is won.

No man or woman has ever tried to lead a really Christlike life without feeling recurrently the pangs of loneliness. The world seems so smilingly strong. Sinners are so aggressive and self-assertive. God often lets saints seem unpleasant and unattractive. The armies of evil march and countermarch with a brash assertion of numbers and power and captured banners.

Yet “God and I are a majority.” In my heart the Spirit of God dwells, smiling just a little at the fanfares and parades and vaunted strength of the Lilliputians who hurry so because they are just a little bit afraid, and who mass such numbers because they know their own weakness. I walk not alone. I walk in the blessed companionship of the God who transformed fishermen into world conquerors and sent the first Christians, a pitiful handful if there ever was one, gaily and confidently to take the power from the Caesars, the basilicas from the lawyers and princes, the world from its pagan masters.

### **In All My Problems.**

This matter of restoring the Holy Spirit to His proper place is most of all a matter between myself and the God in my heart. I, the needy, call in every problem on God the near. I am puzzled in an examination; I call on the Holy Spirit for help. There is an important decision that I cannot make; I lay that decision before the Spirit of Wisdom. Shall I undertake this course or that? I let the Spirit who directed the feet of the Apostles guide my course as He guided theirs. This temptation seems overwhelming; I draw on the strength of His Spirit to crush it. I am weary with the monotony of life’s treadmill; the Holy Spirit walks the treadmill at my side. Passion is strong and persuasive; I have the Spirit of Love to teach me the meaning of pure and true love. Doubt sounds most convincing, but not when the brilliant light of God’s flame burns in my mind. I am a failure, but so were the Apostles until the coming of Pentecost. I am a weakling, but not weaker than Peter and Thomas as they cowered in the Cenacle. What good can I possibly do? Frankly, none. But I do not forget that it is not the matter of “I”; it is a glorious matter of “we”: God and I. And who dares to set himself to thwart or undo or hamper the work which has been undertaken by God and me?

There is in the secret soul of each one of us power enough and strength enough to make *him* a saint or a martyr, an apostle or a doctor. That power awaits our tapping. That Spirit merely asks for our co-operation. The power that changed the Apostles is also our power. The Spirit that struck three thousand converts to their knees in that first Pentecost is our Spirit, too.

### **Of Catholic Action.**

One question only remains for us to answer: Shall we use this power or shall we let it lie untouched in our souls?

But why call Confirmation the Sacrament of Catholic Action? That question can be briefly answered.

The Bishops, under the direct command of the Holy Father as the Vicar of Christ, have invited the laity to join them in the great and splendid task of advancing the Kingdom of God throughout the world. Catholic lay men and women are called upon to be apostles. They are to share in the work of the Hierarchy under the direction of their Bishops. They are, according to their abilities and opportunities, to teach the truths of Jesus Christ, to live lives that are flaming lights for all to see and use as guides, to carry into every form of human activity the principles by which Christ constantly remakes the world.

A great summons has gone forth. Let the laity, men and women, whatever their age, their class, their profession, take up the standard of the cross and march with it bravely before the world of friend and foe. They are to be soldiers, not in name only, but in fact and heroism, under the command of their captains, the Bishops.

### **No More Apathy.**

A transformation has come over the Catholic world. Apathy has now no place in Catholic lives. The spirit of “Leave the preaching of Christ’s truth to the priests” has given way to the command, “Help us, whoever you are, to proclaim that faith to every creature.” The uninterested or merely approving attitude with which once the laity watched the missionaries go out to convert the pagans (whether the pagans of Africa or the pagans of Park Avenue) has been supplanted by an earnest searching for souls to reach, converts to be made, works of zeal to be taken up and carried through. Priests and people together, at the Pope’s call to Catholic Action, take up the gallant warfare for Christ and His cause and cry out to their Bishops: “Lead us, and we follow.”

We are at the beginning of an era of transition. The faithful have, so to speak, moved from the pews into the forefront of the struggle for Christ against His enemies in every field of human activity: finance, business, the professions, the world of entertainment, literature, the arts, sport. They have left the safe and cloistered seclusion of

their own little private Cenacles to lead lives of startlingly dear and emphatic Christianity. Christ must be advanced into factory and executive offices. The principles of Christ must be applied to politics and government. Christ cannot be excluded any longer from even the theatre and the playing field. The Kingdom of Christ is to be as extensive as all forms of human activity. Priests alone cannot make This a reality. So the Holy Father has called upon lay men and women to help them. And the laity....

### **Before They Start.**

Before they plunge into this magnificent conflict for the conquest of The world, the laity must turn inward to their own hearts. For many a long and painful year the attitude of even the good Catholic has been one very much like That of the Apostles as They cowered behind the locked doors of the upper room. "We dare not face the world which so hates Christ. We dare not go out to do battle with the cleverness, wealth, and power that are enlisted on the side of Christ's enemies." The strangely familiar cry of Cain became almost a motto among even those who prided themselves on being devoted followers of Christ. "Am I my brother's keeper? Priests are set aside to bring him the faith and the grace of God. That work is not mine."

### **Apathy Ends.**

This type of Catholic, while admitting that he was a follower of Christ, believed that one did not parade one's Catholicity in the stock market, the board room, the law court, the alderman's office, the ballroom, on the baseball diamond, in the hospital, the classroom, the shop, the factory. These things were over here; Christ was over there. The two could hardly be expected to meet.

Let us confess it to our shame. Apathy toward the world at large was a characteristic of many a good Catholic. Let the world go to pot, so long as he saved his own soul. Let pagans perish in their dull stupidity; his job was to make sure of his own salvation. True, the world was slipping far from the things which made for its happiness and its peace; still, the priests and religious were the professionals whose task it was to meet that situation and deal with it. Lay Catholics held their religion close to their heart and were almost affronted if anyone asked them what that precious thing was which they so carefully secreted in the shadows of their private lives.

Isn't it sadly and frighteningly true? While Communists and atheists filled the world with their clamour, Catholics murmured their prayers behind closed doors. All the avenues of human enterprise seethed with the activities of those who hated Christ or knew Him simply as a hazy figure Who had lived and died and, for some strangely inexplicable reason, had not altogether been swallowed up in the humiliating death that should have ended forever His effect on the world. But the followers of that same Christ, though loving Him, believing in Him, sure that His way was the way to the world's happiness and salvation even in this present time, asked chiefly that they be allowed to pass their days in obscurity, unnoticed by those who, if they observed the number of Christ's followers, might be aroused to another persecution. In the midst of clamorous enemies of Christ we have lived as timid and retiring as the Apostles before Pentecost.

### **Turn to the Spirit.**

Yet the very Holy Spirit who ended forever the Apostles' apathy is in the heart of every Christian. The Spirit of God Who turned hesitant, uncertain, cowardly men into world conquerors was given to every Catholic in his own beautiful Pentecost of Confirmation. All that he need do is to give that divine Spirit within him the slightest intimation that he wishes to preach Christ by his conduct and his word, and the Spirit of Wisdom will, in surprising measure, be at his command. Were the Catholic to show any real desire to carry Christ to the world that does not realise how much it needs Him, that burning Spirit of love and strength would flame up in his soul and send him forth to set the world on fire.

Yes, the Pope has called upon Catholics to bring Christ and His kingdom to the world of mankind. Bishops have looked with eager eyes for volunteers. Priests have felt the reassurance that reinforcements to help them in the fight were near at hand. The laity have experienced the strong impulse to respond, if only.

### **If Only.**

Yes, if only they knew a little more of Christ's truth; had just a little more courage. If only it were not safer to keep their faith behind sure walls; if only they need not face the laughter of the cynics and the raised eyebrows of even good friends. If only they would not arouse, by any slight show of activity, fresh assaults by the tireless enemies of Christ.

So precisely the Apostles felt before Pentecost. But with the coming of the Holy Spirit all that was ended. They knew that God was with them, for they felt His spirit in their souls. They flung open the doors and faced the mob. Some three thousand of the people, who, after all, had been waiting only for someone to speak to them of Christ and of His persuasive truth and sweet law, flung themselves down before the Apostles begging for admission to citizenship in His kingdom.

The parallel is obvious. Catholic Action now waits for the turning of lay apostles to the wisdom and strength and love and power of the Holy Spirit Who came to them in the almost forgotten Sacrament of Confirmation.

### **From the Bishops.**

It was, we must remember, the Bishops who administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to those whom they later summoned to work and fight with them. Now the Bishops ask that these Catholics use the Spirit that is in them, that they "stir up the Spirit in their hearts." Once that Spirit has begun to act or has been permitted to manifest His effects upon the soul, the transformation which went on in the Apostles in the brief moments of Pentecost morning, will, in measure, be seen in the faces, the actions, the words, the deeds, the fine purity and resistless zeal, the Catholic citizenship and unselfish charity, the persuasive eloquence and convincing argument, the honourable careers and honest businesses, the pure marriages and noble homes of Catholic men and women everywhere.

The Pope has called us to Catholic Action.

The Bishops have raised their hands in supplication and command.

The priests have waited eagerly to welcome their allies.

What shall the laity do?

Let the laity decide as they kneel and permit the Holy Spirit, Who came to them long ago in the half-forgotten Sacrament of Confirmation, to work the great transformation of Pentecost.

We have a new battle cry: **"Come, Holy Ghost."**

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