# Journey of Faith



**In Short:**

- Through confirmation, the Spirit empowers us as witnesses.
- Laying on of hands and anointing are actions that confer the sacrament.
- The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit help us live as Christ's disciples.

## The Sacrament of Confirmation

Many of us lack confidence when it comes to speaking to others about our faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus promised the apostles he would give them the courage needed to speak of him to others: "But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus kept his promise. When they received the Holy Spirit, the apostles immediately went out to preach the good news. If they had any reluctance or fear, it was forgotten.

> *"When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim."*
>
> *Acts 2:1–4*

Christ fulfills his promise to us as well through the sacrament of confirmation. In confirmation, we receive courage and other gifts of the Holy Spirit we need to be witnesses to Christ in our daily lives.

- *How comfortable are you with sharing your faith?*

## Confirmed for Witness

The word **confirmation** means "strengthening." The *Catechism* says the sacrament of confirmation "both confirms baptism and strengthens baptismal grace" (CCC 1289). Believers have the Spirit, our God-breath, from baptism. But the Spirit at confirmation is the breath behind speech, giving us the power to raise our voices in witness.

A *witness* testifies to what is known from personal experience. Christian witness is a believer's testimony to what they know: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is life and hope for all the world. Christians can witness in a variety of ways, from simple, everyday ways such as enthusiastic words or concern for others to dramatic ways such as dying for their faith as a martyr.

CCC 1285–1321

*"By the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."*

*CCC 1285*

*"Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

*Matthew 10:19–20*

## Other Confirmation Facts

"The effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost" (*CCC* 1302). The *Catechism* also points out that confirmation:

- "perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds" (*CCC* 1316).
- "imprints a spiritual mark or indelible character on the Christian's soul; for this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in one's life" (*CCC* 1317).
- "is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace" (*CCC* 1285).

## How Is the Sacrament Celebrated?

Confirmation is usually celebrated during Mass. Adults in the RCIA process are confirmed at the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday. It's normally the bishop who administers the sacrament, but a priest may do so under circumstances such as at the Easter Vigil Mass.

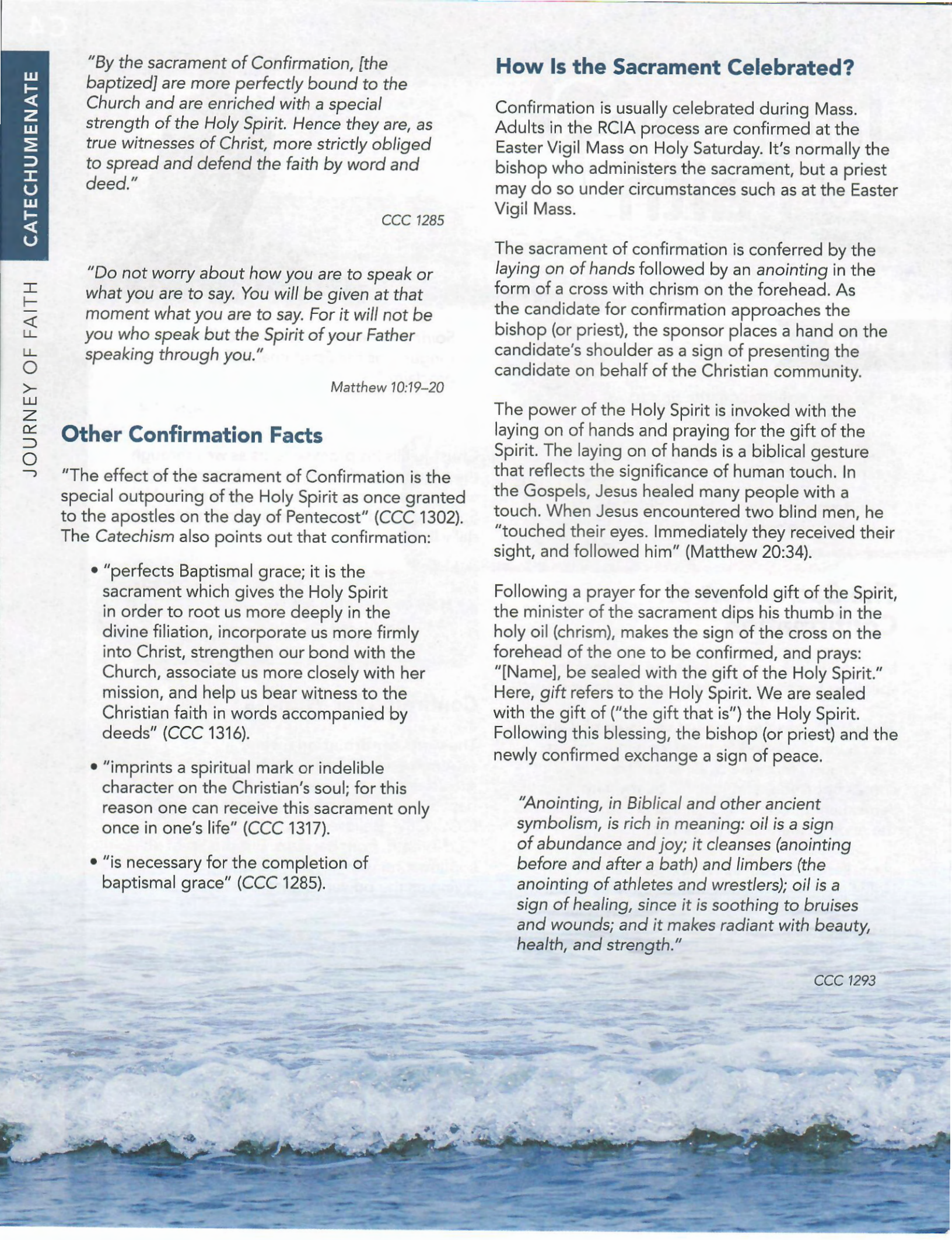
The sacrament of confirmation is conferred by the *laying on of hands* followed by an *anointing* in the form of a cross with chrism on the forehead. As the candidate for confirmation approaches the bishop (or priest), the sponsor places a hand on the candidate's shoulder as a sign of presenting the candidate on behalf of the Christian community.

The power of the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands and praying for the gift of the Spirit. The laying on of hands is a biblical gesture that reflects the significance of human touch. In the Gospels, Jesus healed many people with a touch. When Jesus encountered two blind men, he "touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight, and followed him" (Matthew 20:34).

Following a prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit, the minister of the sacrament dips his thumb in the holy oil (chrism), makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the one to be confirmed, and prays: "[Name], be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here, *gift* refers to the Holy Spirit. We are sealed with the gift of ("the gift that is") the Holy Spirit. Following this blessing, the bishop (or priest) and the newly confirmed exchange a sign of peace.

*"Anointing, in Biblical and other ancient symbolism, is rich in meaning: oil is a sign of abundance and joy; it cleanses (anointing before and after a bath) and limbers (the anointing of athletes and wrestlers); oil is a sign of healing, since it is soothing to bruises and wounds; and it makes radiant with beauty, health, and strength."*

*CCC 1293*



The Israelites anointed priests, and later kings, as a sign that they were chosen by God. Like these priests and kings, you're chosen by God. And like them, you are being anointed, chosen, for a purpose.

Anointing "signifies and imprints: a spiritual seal" that "marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service forever" (*CCC* 1293, 1296). Those confirmed "share more completely in the mission of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit...so that their lives may give off 'the aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:15)" (*CCC* 1294).

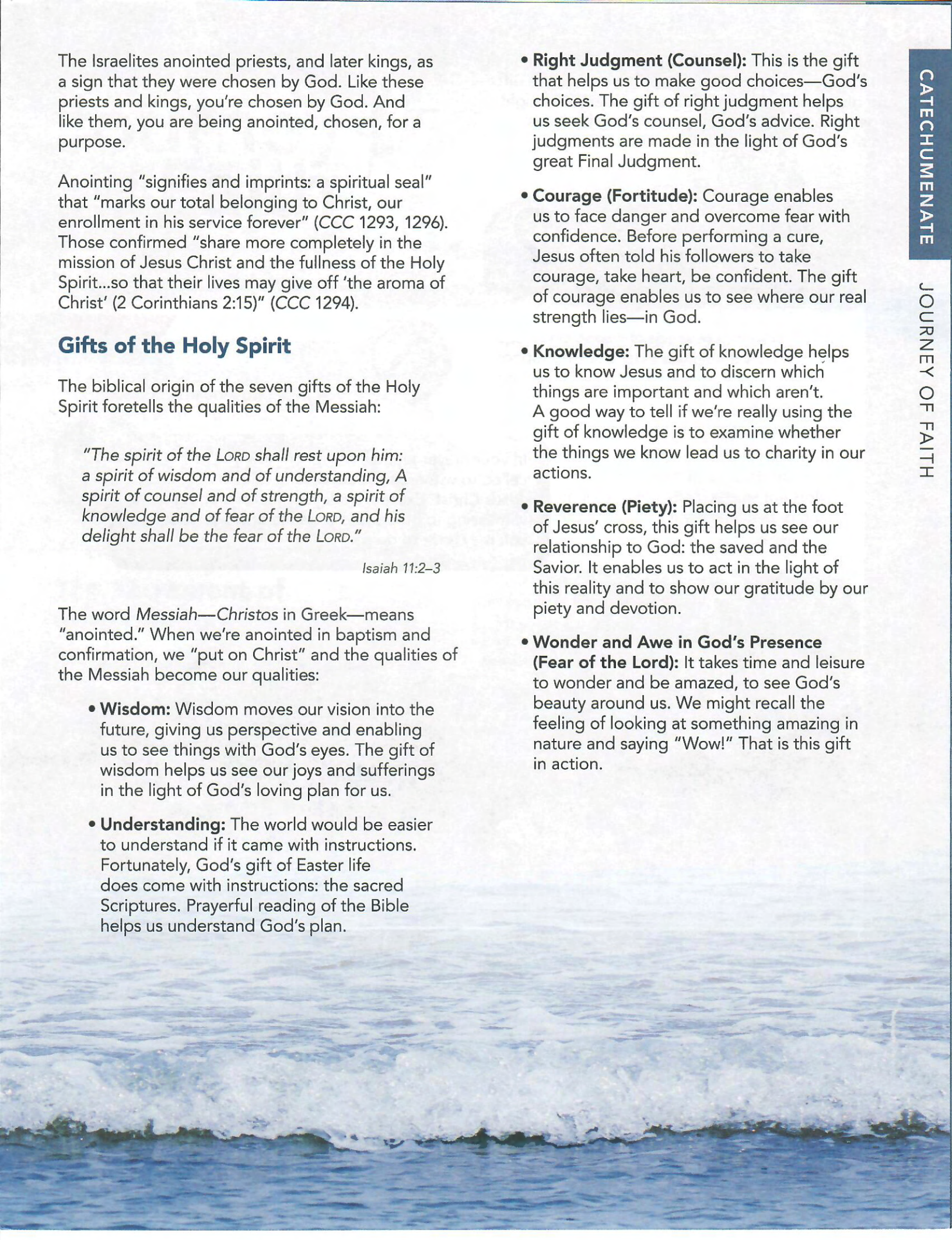
## Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The biblical origin of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit foretells the qualities of the Messiah:

> *"The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD."*
>
> *Isaiah 11:2–3*

The word *Messiah*—*Christos* in Greek—means "anointed." When we're anointed in baptism and confirmation, we "put on Christ" and the qualities of the Messiah become our qualities:

- **Wisdom:** Wisdom moves our vision into the future, giving us perspective and enabling us to see things with God's eyes. The gift of wisdom helps us see our joys and sufferings in the light of God's loving plan for us.
- **Understanding:** The world would be easier to understand if it came with instructions. Fortunately, God's gift of Easter life does come with instructions: the sacred Scriptures. Prayerful reading of the Bible helps us understand God's plan.
- **Right Judgment (Counsel):** This is the gift that helps us to make good choices—God's choices. The gift of right judgment helps us seek God's counsel, God's advice. Right judgments are made in the light of God's great Final Judgment.
- **Courage (Fortitude):** Courage enables us to face danger and overcome fear with confidence. Before performing a cure, Jesus often told his followers to take courage, take heart, be confident. The gift of courage enables us to see where our real strength lies—in God.
- **Knowledge:** The gift of knowledge helps us to know Jesus and to discern which things are important and which aren't. A good way to tell if we're really using the gift of knowledge is to examine whether the things we know lead us to charity in our actions.
- **Reverence (Piety):** Placing us at the foot of Jesus' cross, this gift helps us see our relationship to God: the saved and the Savior. It enables us to act in the light of this reality and to show our gratitude by our piety and devotion.
- **Wonder and Awe in God's Presence (Fear of the Lord):** It takes time and leisure to wonder and be amazed, to see God's beauty around us. We might recall the feeling of looking at something amazing in nature and saying "Wow!" That is this gift in action.



Think of how you feel when you give someone a gift. You're honored when the recipient uses the gift and disappointed if the gift goes unused. We might expect that God takes joy in our taking joy in his gifts.

- *Which of these gifts do you need most in your life right now? Why?*

In your prayer journal, reflect on how you're called to witness to your growing faith in Jesus Christ. Express both your feelings about witnessing to others and possible opportunities you may have to do so.

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