

**A Confirmation Reader-Retreat:
Read-Aloud Lessons,
Stories and Poems
for Young Catholics**

**Compiled and Edited by
Janet P. McKenzie**

A RACE for Heaven Product

**Biblio Resource Publications
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The retreat lessons of this book were previously published in *Children's Retreats in Preparation for First Confession, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation* by Rev. P.A. Halpin, and published by Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1926. The following pertain to this 1926 text only:

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Introduction

This book is intended to supplement a young Catholic's preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation by providing a basic doctrinal review of the sacrament as well as prayer experiences—a nine-day read-aloud retreat/novena. Begin one week before the day of Confirmation, i.e., if Confirmation day is a Sunday, begin the Sunday before. Continue with one lesson each day (including Confirmation day), concluding the day after the sacrament is received.

Contained within this book are the chapters pertinent to the Sacrament of Confirmation from two excellent out-of-print Catholic books for children: *I Belong to God, Great Truths in Simple Stories for Children and Lovers of Children* by Lillian Clark; and *Children's Retreats in Preparation for First Confession, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation* by Rev. P.A. Halpin. Both books were written in the late 1920's and provide retreat material for young Catholics preparing for the Sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion, and Confirmation. The material excerpted from Lillian Clark's book comprises Lesson Six of this book. With the exception of Lesson Four, Rev. Halpin's lectures on the Sacrament of Confirmation have provided the lessons for the remaining chapters of this book.

As with all RACE for Heaven products, the aim is to teach the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church in a read-aloud format that encourages families to *live* our Faith on a practical level. Therefore, the older material has been supplemented with short stories and poems that provide insights in applying the doctrines of the Sacrament of Confirmation to daily life. Several discussion points have been provided to promote the holy habit of spiritual conversation within your family—to

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encourage family members to speak holy thoughts—and to help you grow together in holiness.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “*Preparation* for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit—his actions, his gifts, and his biddings—in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life” (no.1309). Towards this end, each lesson concludes with “I Talk with God”—a section that encourages readers (of all ages) to deepen their relationship with each of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Additionally, a traditional novena to the Holy Spirit is included to enrich the retreat experience of all family members. Please spend adequate time (individually and as a family) on these important sections.

A Confirmation Reader-Retreat is designed to not only prepare the confirmand but also to enhance the experience of this sacrament for the entire family. Please attempt, as best as possible, to make these nine days a time of retreat. Allow time for recollection, quiet meditation, and Eucharistic adoration. Cease as much as possible the frenzied activities of busy family life. Truly spend time getting to know the Holy Spirit and renewing each family member’s commitment to live as a holy, committed Christian—a perfect Christian.

May the Holy Spirit shower His seven-fold gift upon you and your family as you renew and deepen your relationship with Him in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Janet P. McKenzie
Feast Day of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
June 11, 2010

Making a Retreat*

WHY AM I MAKING this little retreat?—to learn to know God and myself better.

Of course, every day I must try to know and serve and love God; that is really why I am in this world, but while I am making my retreat I am at the school of God—studying Him and studying myself very earnestly.

Often in my life I will be left alone with God, and so I should know Him very, very well and should like to be with Him—then we will be like two loving friends when we are left alone together. . . . When I was born, it was just God and me; in my prayers it is just God and I—in my confession, with my eyes closed, no one but God and I—in Holy Communion, with my head bowed low, I am alone with God—when life is ending and I am dying, all will be left behind, and then, too, it will be just God and I—and again after death, when I am standing before the great white throne, waiting to be sent to heaven or to hell, most surely, I will be alone with God my Creator, and my Father, and the great Lover of my soul.

So I really want to know Him very well. During these days I must try to think as little as I can about everybody and everything else and as much as I can of Him.

Making my meditation means kneeling at His knee, with play and people put out of my mind, reading quietly and very slowly, word by word, what is written here and thinking and praying quietly about it and about what it means.

May God the Holy Spirit help me prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation worthily.

*From *I Belong to God, Great Truths in Simple Stories for Children and Lovers of Children* by Lillian Clark, Longmans, Green and Company, 1936.

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The Graces Bestowed in this Sacrament

YOU ARE TRYING to get a clear idea of the Sacrament of Confirmation in order to understand its importance as well as the necessity of being so well fitted for its reception, that there will be no hindrance to the Holy Spirit's entering and taking complete possession of your souls. You saw in the last instruction that the Holy Chrism signifies many of the effects of Confirmation, its strengthening power as well as the perfume of the many virtues which it produces, or sows the seeds of, in the soul. It is a sign of other results. It brings to our mind—this oil and this balsam—the fullness of divine grace “which flows from Christ, the head, through the Holy Spirit, like the precious ointment on the head of Aaron, whom God anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows.” Some say that balsam preserves whatever it embalms, and thus is a sign of the preservation of the soul from sin and its corruption.

There is no doubt that Confirmation is an exterior sign, and thus fulfills the first essential of every sacrament. St. Thomas teaches that Christ instituted this sacrament by His repeated promises to send the Holy Spirit down on His apostles. It was certainly administered as a sacrament in the time of the apostles. “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the holy Spirit, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit” (Acts 8: 14-17). This shows that Baptism was not enough to make

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one a perfect follower of Christ, but that the imposition of hands was also required by the apostles in order to finish what was begun in Baptism. Besides, the apostles themselves were confirmed, when the Holy Spirit came down upon them on Pentecost Sunday in the form of tongues of fire, and sat on the head of each. Here we find what may be considered as another sensible or outward sign—that is the imposition of hands. Christ, by the imposition of His hands, healed diseases. The Fathers of the Church tell us that when Christ imposed or laid His hands upon little children, He gave His apostles a figure of Christian Confirmation. We find also that since the very beginning, Confirmation was deemed a sacrament, so that, though Scripture does not mention one specific time when the sacrament was instituted, we cannot for a moment doubt that it was given to the Church by our Lord, just as He left to His Church the other sacraments which our holy faith professes to have been given for the salvation of mankind.

Confirmation then *is* a sacrament on these two counts. It is an outward sign, and Christ is its author.

Does it convey grace? This is the last question to be answered to determine that Confirmation is really a sacrament. The reply is easy. In this sacrament, the Holy Spirit is received, the Holy Spirit of God, who is the fountain of grace and the sanctifier of souls. One might say that this sacrament contains the fullness of grace, since all grace comes from Christ through the Holy Spirit.

What holiness
can there be
without grace?

Whoever says “Holy Spirit,” says “holiness,” and what holiness can there be without grace?

So you have arrived at the conclusion that Confirmation has everything necessary for a sacrament, and you are ready to make an act of faith, on the authority of the Church and of Scripture, that it is a sacrament.

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The doctrine of our holy faith in this matter is summed up in these words of St. Clement, a Father of the early Church: "All should hasten," he says, "without delay to be born again of God, and then to be sealed by the bishop, that is, to receive the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit; for as we have learned from St. Peter, and as the other apostles taught in obedience to the command of our Lord, he who through contempt and not from necessity, but voluntarily neglects to receive this sacrament cannot possibly become a perfect Christian."

You see how early the importance of Confirmation was impressed upon the minds of the faithful. All the grace of this sacrament finds expression in the words "perfect Christian." You are not expected to remain always children in the faith. The Church sees to it that in your very young days the Holy Spirit fashions you into more mature Christians. The fight for heaven begins with the dawn of your reason, and as soon as you are old enough (at some time after you have been admitted to Holy Communion), your Church sees to it that by another sacrament you are strengthened, and arms are placed in your possession. This strength and these weapons—weapons made for attack as well as defense—are manufactured in heaven and are put in your hands by the Divine Spirit. Your soul is in danger from the moment you are able to reason, and the sooner you are equipped for the great battle in which, your whole life long, you must stand up and combat for your salvation, the more courageous will your fighting be. The goodness of your religion is manifest in this, that not only are you taught how to fight, but everything is given you to make that fight a series of victories which end in your being crowned forever among the angels and the saints.

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Dangers will always trouble you. You will soon discover that you are never far away from the edge of the cliff. In fact, the dangers grow as you grow, for temptations become more violent and more numerous. Your Church does not forget her children. Confirmation will support your trembling steps. It affords you all the needed help. It gives you the courage to confess God, and whosoever confesses Him will necessarily practice virtue under all circumstances. For what is sin but the denial in some or other way of the Creator? It is rebellion against heaven. Now no perfect Christian denies the Creator, and no genuine soldier ever commits treason, and all rebellion is treason.

You must notice, dear children, that every idea which comes, as you consider the blessings of Confirmation, shows how you can never sufficiently appreciate it, and that these days of silence and thought and prayer are not lost time, since they are spent in preparing for an event which means so much for you, not only in this, but in the next, world as well. You have had put before you the signs with some idea of what is signified, some idea of the things of which they are the signs. You have reflected on the necessity of Confirmation. You have been told why it is called Confirmation; that it was instituted by Christ; that it can be received once only; that while in some respects it bears a resemblance to Baptism, it is a totally different sacrament, and given to the Church for another purpose altogether. It is not so necessary for salvation as is Baptism, but yet it might be said that in many cases Baptism without it would be of little use.

It will be just as well to point out here that, as in Baptism, a sponsor, that is a godparent, is required. The Church very strongly disapproves of the practice of having a sponsor stand for more than one or two candidates, except in a case of absolute necessity. These sponsors

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take upon themselves, in a measure, the same obligations toward those who are confirmed as is the case in Baptism.

Nor must it be forgotten that each boy and each girl receives a name in Confirmation, just as in Baptism. The name is always that of some Christian who has, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, fought the good fight, and fought so valiantly as to be numbered among the saints whom it delights the Church to honor. The name you take ought to be very dear to you. It should cause you often to reflect upon the one who bears it now in heaven, to fly to that saint for protection, and to ask the grace that, as you are struggling under his patronage here, you may one day be a partner of his happiness in eternity.

The bounty of the Holy Spirit shines very brightly in Confirmation. Not only He gives Himself, and in giving Himself floods you with grace, but He places Himself at the disposal of all. It is not thus with all the sacraments. Holy Orders, for example, cannot be conferred upon all. Many are prevented and disqualified, but Confirmation is a world open to everyone who is able to grasp its significance, and is willing to enter it. The bounty of the Holy Spirit in this sacrament may be compared to the generosity of our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist, and you know now how boundless that generosity is. Christ holds back nothing from you in Communion. He gives Himself entirely. The Holy Spirit gives you all it is in His power to give, and only keeps back those spiritual favors which are destined for those who are called, as bishops and priests, to His special service.

The Holy Spirit
gives you all it is in
His power to give.

Everything about this more than excellent sacrament strikes one with an idea of his own unworthiness. In fact, like all the sacred mysteries of the Church, the

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more one thinks, the more one is awed to learn that he is allowed to approach it. Yet so it is. Not only are you admitted to partake of it, you are actually commanded to do so. If there is any explanation of this, it lies in the fact that God, while He loves us, knows even better than we do, how frail we are and how essential His assistance is, and in spite of our ingratitude comes to our rescue in so many marvelous ways.

How wisely and how beautiful the sacraments succeed each other! In the first of the sacraments, you are made children of God; you are reborn into His kingdom. When the real fight of life begins, you are armed, in Confirmation, from head to foot—armed to meet all the attacks of the devil and to drive them away. If you are wounded in the struggle, you have Reconciliation, a sacrament that, by the remission of sins, heals all wounds and removes all the scars of the soul. Lest you grow faint as the road becomes more and more difficult, and your enemies grow fiercer and fiercer, there is ready for you at almost any moment that splendid banquet at which you can restore your famished souls with divine food, with manna from heaven, in the adorable Eucharist. Then comes Holy Orders, a sacrament that furnishes the Church with its ministers, its priests, and its bishops. Matrimony blesses husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and enables them to love each other and to bring up their children in the affectionate fear of God. Lastly comes the Anointing of the Sick, which brings divine aid to the dying, and administers consolation and strength in that moment when the world and all its vanities are to be left forever and he is to appear to give an account of every instant of his existence to his Creator.

Can you think of anything that God could have done for us that He has not done? God is present in all His sacraments, and there is not a moment of our life in

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which we do not find Him ready to help us in any need or danger that may be ours. He is with us always, you have already met Him and how often! You met Him in Baptism, in Reconciliation, and in the Holy Eucharist. You may have neglected Him, but has He ever forsaken you? Do you think for one single second that He will ever abandon you, that you will look for Him and be unable to find Him? Now you are to receive Him and to meet Him in a new way. It will be the same God, but not the same divine Person. In Confirmation, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity will greet you, and enrich you with His favors. Let your prayer be: “Come, Holy Spirit—come and fill us with that grace without which we are and can do nothing.”

Can you think of anything that God could have done for us that He has not done?

I Talk with God

Below are three prayers—one addressed to each of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Please take time today to pray these prayers—before the Blessed Sacrament is best but if this is not possible, then find a quiet space where you may talk with God without being distracted. Pray slowly, taking time to listen to God’s response. Linger on the italicized phrases, pausing to consider what you know about that phrase and asking for guidance and inspiration. Remember that prayer cannot be rushed; listening is as important as speaking. Add your own thoughts and needs, tell God your concerns, ask Him your questions, and thank and praise

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Him for the shower of graces He gives to you in this sacrament. Remember that mediation is nothing more than thinking about God and the mysteries of our Faith.

1. “God, help me to consider how the *Sacrament of Confirmation* shows me each of the following aspects of a sacrament:
 - a. *An outward sign*
 - b. *Instituted by Christ*
 - c. *To give grace.*”
2. Meditate on this statement, “*Baptism* without Confirmation would be of little use.” Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what *graces this sacrament provides* and the ways in which it *completes the Sacrament of Baptism*. Memorize and recite often the following prayer: “Come, Holy Spirit—come and fill us with that grace without which we are and can do nothing.”
3. “My dear Jesus, I have *met You in Holy Communion*. I have received You into my heart. I have *talked with You* and grown ever closer to You. Help me to better know and understand that Person of the Holy Trinity Who will come to me in a special way in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Help me to *know Him*, to recognize *His gifts*, and to *ask Him often to help me* in the trials and joys of my life.”

(Parents and older children should pray the prayers for Day Two of the Novena to the Holy Spirit beginning on page 150.)

Lesson Two Read-aloud Stories and Poems

The following poem is written by Sr. Mary Josita and is from her book, *Sing a Song of Holy Things*, Tower Press, 1945.

"The Sacraments"

The sacraments are wonderful.
They do so many things.
Each one makes you holy,
And many graces brings.

Baptism turns a pagan child
To heaven's gift of love,
And angels kiss the baby sweet,
Now child of God above.

Confirmation makes us strong
As soldiers ought to be.
The Holy Spirit brings His gifts
To give us power, you see.

The greatest of these signs of love,
The one that gives most joys,
Is Jesus in His Sacrament
Come down to girls and boys.

Confession takes our sins away;
If we just tell them true,
And are real sorry in our hearts,
It makes us good as new.

The Last Anointing helps us, too,
When we are very sick.
It either helps us die a saint,
Or cures us very quick.

Holy Orders gives us priests
To help us save our soul,
To tell us how to serve our God,
And reach our heavenly goal.

Marriage is a sacrament
That helps our parents dear
To raise their children up for God,
And give each other cheer.

I love the seven sacraments
For they are stores of grace.
They light my soul
That I may see My Maker face to face.

This story, "Image of God," is from Fr. Lawrence G. Lovasik's *Catechism in Stories, Revised Edition*, Bruce Publishing Company, 1956, page 63.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA once saw in a vision a soul in a state of grace. It was so beautiful in its shining brightness that she could not even look at it for very long. She cried out, "If I did not know there is only one God, I should think this was another God!"

When she told her confessor about the vision, he asked her to describe it. She could only say this: "There is nothing in this world that can give you the smallest idea of what I have seen. If you could only see a soul in the state of grace, you would sacrifice your life a hundred times for its salvation."

After her vision, St. Catherine asked the angel who was with her what made that soul so beautiful. He an-

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swered, "It is the image and likeness of God dwelling in the soul by grace that makes the soul so beautiful."

APPLICATION: Sanctifying grace makes your soul holy and pleasing to God because God gives you His own divine life, and those virtues which make you more pleasing to Him. They are the virtues that you see in Jesus in His life on earth. By grace, God gives you some of His own beauty and goodness. That is the reason why you should always remain in the state of grace and rather die than lose it by mortal sin.

The following story, "The Cat in the Sun" is excerpted from Rev. Gerald T. Brennan's *The Ghost of Kingdom Come*, Bruce Publishing Company, 1941, pages 24-31.

THE GREAT BARON of Bagdad had said nothing about coming back. All day long I wondered if he would return. I half hoped that he might forget.

Eleven o'clock came. Midnight came. There was no Baron of Bagdad. Five minutes after twelve! A quarter after twelve! Half past twelve! No Baron of Bagdad!

"He's gone! He's gone!" I whispered to myself. "Now I can write my book in peace."

But I spoke too soon. The door opened. The great Baron—big black hat, big black cape, and shining sword—marched silently into the room.

"Please, forgive me, Father Gerald, for being late. I stopped in the cemetery to talk with friends. I quite forgot the time."

Of course, I told the Ghost-Baron that I did not mind. As soon as the mighty Baron was seated, I began another story.

“Poor little Henry Fenton!” That’s what people used to say. “Poor Henry Fenton! He won’t live very long.”

That’s the way everybody felt about Henry. I have known Henry since he was a little boy. I know him well. Many a day he had to remain away from school. He was sick so often. There always seemed to be a doctor at the Fenton home. No wonder people said that God wanted Henry for one of His angels!

It must have been very hard for Henry to be a boy. He could never go swimming. He could never play ball. He could never join the other children in their games. Other boys could ride bicycles. They could climb trees. They could run. The doctor had forbidden Henry to do all of these things.

How the people did clap the night Henry graduated from grammar school! Maybe they felt sorry for him. Henry did have friends—plenty of them—and they were all there to cheer him. It was a great night in Henry’s life, and I am certain that he will not forget it.

Henry went to high school. It was the same old story. First, it was the measles; then, it was scarlet fever. There was always something. Again, there was no baseball, no football, no basketball. The best part of any boy’s life—and Henry was denied it.

Yet, through it all, no one ever heard Henry complain. Never once did he talk against God. It must have taken a very fine boy to feel like that, and Henry was that very fine boy.

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Henry went to college. He wanted to study to be a doctor. It is hard to study when one is weak and sick, and Henry's friends at college admired him for trying.

Somehow or other, brave Henry finished his first year at college. When the year was ended, Henry had lost eight pounds. He decided to spend the summer in the country. There he could rest. There would be plenty of fresh air, milk, and eggs. Just the things that he needed! Three months in the country might help him.

It was his third day in the country. It was a warm day—a very, very warm day. Henry lay on the ground under a tree. He fell asleep. He slept for an hour. When Henry awoke, he had company.

Nearby on the ground lay a big cat sleeping in the sun. It was a beautiful cat. . . . A gray cat with big black eyes. . . . A cat with lovely fur . . . A mighty strong cat and the very picture of health.

Henry began to think. . . . What a blessing to look so well—to feel so well. If we could only change places! Wouldn't it be grand if I were strong like that cat! Then I could be such a fine doctor. I could do so much good. Then Henry saw something. Every time the sunshine would move and the tree would keep the sun from shining on the cat, the cat would move. He would stand up, crawl back into the sun and go to sleep again. The cat liked the warm sun. But why? Henry began to think.

“Maybe, it's the sun,” he said to himself. “Maybe, it's the sun that keeps the cat so well. The warm sunshine keeps the germs of sickness away from the cat's body. I wonder if the sunshine will make me strong too. Perhaps sunshine will drive the germs of sickness and disease from my body.”

Henry decided to find out for himself. He decided to imitate the cat. Every day Henry lay in the sun. He lay there for hours. After a month in the sun, Henry became stronger. Every day he became stronger. Three months in the sun made Henry a new man. Stronger, stronger, stronger, he became. The sun was Henry's medicine, and it was doing a fine job.

Henry became Doctor Henry Fenton. Henry told the whole world about the cat in the sun. That's why the doctor always tells us to get lots of sunshine.

When I had finished, the Baron of Bagdad stretched in his chair.

"The Cat in the Sun," he sang the words softly to himself, and I knew that he was pleased with my story.

"This is my favorite story, Baron," I told him.

"True stories are always the best," the Ghost-Baron replied.

"Yes, Baron, and here is something else that is even more true. Just as there are germs of poison that get into our bodies and make them sick and make them die, there are also germs which get into our souls—germs which make our souls sick and make them die."

"Germs in our soul? You mean our sins, Father Gerald?" The Baron seemed very interested.

"That's the idea, Baron," I continued. "God makes sunshine to drive sickness out of our bodies, and He also makes another kind of sunshine—His grace—to make our souls healthy. God's grace goes into our souls, drives away sin, and makes our souls strong."

The Baron lay back in his chair as if he were going to dream. . . . "God's sunshine and God's grace are the

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greatest things in the world—we cannot live without them!”

“God and I” by Sr. Mary Josita is from her book, *Sing a Song of Holy Things*, Tower Press, 1945, page 1.

As I go through this beautiful, wonderful world
Where the flowers and grasses all nod,
A soft little voice in my heart seems to say,
“I am a child of God.”

Yes, God is my Father, and I am His child,
My Father in heaven so high.
He made me to know Him, to love and to serve,
And be happy with Him when I die.

My Father in heaven is easy to know;
From nothing He made all I see.
Not a thing on the earth, not a light in the sky
Could have started its own self to be.

Now that I know God, I'll praise Him with joy.
And give him the best of my love.
I'll serve Him each day just as well as I can.
So I'll know how to live up above.



Reflection Questions

1. Spend several minutes thinking about each of the seven sacraments. What does each sacrament do for our soul? How does each sacrament show us how very much Jesus loves each one of us?

2. If God is light and love, imagine what He looks like. What would your soul in a state of perfect grace look like? Picture this soul inside you. Think about how beautiful God is and how He shows His love for you every day.
3. Imagine grace as sunshine that streams into your soul, healing and warming you. How is grace like sunshine? Sit out in the sunshine and talk to God.
4. What does it mean to be a “child of God”? Consider the birds, the flowers, the trees, the insects—all of God’s creation. What is the purpose of creation? Why did God make you?