

ON CONFIRMATION.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFIRMATION.

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548. *A True Soldier of Christ.* -

By Confirmation, dear children, you know we become perfect Christians, and it imprints in us the indelible character of soldiers of Christ. Would you have an example of it? In the City of Caesarea, in Palestine, a soldier named Marinus was serving in the army of the Emperor Gallian; it was about the year 264. He was entitled to the rank of centurion, or captain of a hundred men, which was vacant at the time; he was even on the point of obtaining it when another presented himself at the tribunal and declared that, according to the laws, Marinus had no right to that position, because he was a Christian, and did not sacrifice to the emperor. "It is to me," he added, "that the place belongs of right, because I am the first in point of seniority." The governor, named Achea, asked Marinus what he thought of it, and the latter confessed publicly and constantly that he was a Christian.

The judge gave him three hours' time to reflect on what he was to do.

As he left the tribunal the Bishop Theotecue accosted him, took him by the hand and led him to the church. He brought him into the very sanctuary, and raising his large military

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cloak, took the sword he wore at his side, and at the same time presented him with the book of the holy Gospels, saying:

"Choose which you will, either an officer's sword or the book of the Gospels." Without hesitating, Marinus stretched out his right hand and took the sacred book. "Attach yourself, then, to God," said Theotecue; "He will strengthen you, and obtain for you that which you have chosen; go in peace!" As he left the church he was called by the public crier to appear before the judge. He presented himself at the tribunal, and, having given testimony to his faith still more boldly, he was immediately dragged to execution just as he was. Some moments after his head rolled on the ground, but his soul went straight to heaven; he proved that he was what may be called a valiant soldier of Christ.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 55.

549. *One Newly Confirmed Who Triumphs Over the Devil.* -

When we have the happiness, my friends, of being truly Christian, we are more powerful than the devil himself. The Emperor Julian, styled the apostate, having resolved publicly to profess idolatry, had caused great preparations to be made for a sacrifice he was to offer in a temple dedicated to the demon. He repaired thither with much pomp, attended by his whole court, to give to that impious action all the splendour possible. All being ready, the Emperor made a sign for them to commence. But what was the astonishment of the pagan priests, when they found themselves quite bewildered and unable,

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notwithstanding all their efforts, to proceed with that abominable ceremony? Their very knives, which they had taken care to sharpen well, would no longer enter the flesh of the victims; at last, the fire they had kindled on the altar was suddenly extinguished. The chief sacrificer then exclaimed: "Surely there is here a great unknown power that opposes our designs." He then besought Julian to allow a search to be made to ascertain whether there was not, amongst the spectators, some Christian who had been lately washed with water or anointed with chrism; you understand, dear friends, that by these expressions he meant to designate the Sacrament of Baptism and that of Confirmation.

There was, in fact, in the temple, a young page of the Emperor's who was a Christian, and who had received Confirmation but a few days before.

The Emperor having said aloud: *Let this search be made!* the page hesitated not to present himself and say: "Know that I am a Christian; I have been baptized, and it is not long since I was anointed with the chrism of Confirmation to strengthen me in the combat. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, who redeemed me by the cross; I acknowledge Him as my God, and glory in belonging to Him. It is I, or rather it is the Lord whom I serve, that has prevented the act of impiety you were about to perform. I invoked in my heart the sacred name of Jesus Christ and your demons had no longer any power. In the name of Jesus Christ, who is the true God, they have been put to flight."

The Emperor Julian, who had been

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a Christian, and was well instructed in the power of Our Lord, was seized with terror. He dreaded the effects of His vengeance and left the temple, covered with confusion and without saying a single word. The courageous soldier of Christ also went away and related to the Christians what had just happened; they gave glory to God therefore, and recognized how formidable to the demon are those in whom dwells the power of the Holy Ghost, by the Sacrament of Confirmation.

- LASSAUSSE, *Explic. du Cat. de l'Empire*, 478.

550. *Confirmation Given by St. Cuthbert.* -

Cities which have no bishops, as well as thousands of villages scattered throughout the provinces, can but rarely enjoy the privilege of seeing the chief pastor of their diocese. But what joy there is, for that very reason, when he goes thither to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation.

I have read that St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, in England, who lived in the seventh century, marked all his pastoral visits by miracles and benefits of every kind. He went through the smallest villages and did not disdain to enter even the poorest cabins.

His principal care was to administer to the newly-baptized the Sacrament of Confirmation, in order that they might receive the grace of the Holy Spirit by the imposition of hands. One day, having entered, with that intention, the house of an earl, whose wife was dangerously ill, this nobleman went to meet him, threw himself on his knees, and thanked God for his arrival. Having brought him into his house, where he treated

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him very kindly, he began to speak to him of the desperate malady of his wife, earnestly entreating him to bless water wherewith to sprinkle her. "I believe," said he, "that by that means she will either be restored to health, or if she must die, she will pass from death to life everlasting." The man of God acceded to his prayer, and having blessed the water they brought him, he gave it to the priest who accompanied him, telling him to sprinkle some of it over the sick person. The priest executed the holy bishop's order; he sprinkled the sick woman with the holy water, and even poured some drops thereof into her mouth. Immediately she felt herself entirely cured; she blessed and thanked God for that miraculous favour, rose on the instant, and had the happiness of entertaining the holy bishop herself.

- ST BEDE, *Life of St. Cuthbert*, Ch. XXIX.

551. *Two Possessed Persons Receiving Confirmation.* -

It is with the Sacrament of Confirmation as with all others, dear friends; it always does good to our soul when we receive it with holy dispositions; but it often exercises, too, a favourable influence on our body.

I read a striking instance of this kind in the life of St. Bont, Bishop of Clermont, the chief town of the department of Puy-de-Dome, in France; that holy bishop lived in the seventh century. One day, going through the mountains of Auvergne, he saw, at a distance, two men coming towards him in a supplicating posture, who addressing him besought him to impose hands

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on them and give them the Sacrament of Confirmation. At that period of faith and piety, my good friends, it was not with indifference that a favourable opportunity of receiving Confirmation was expected. On the contrary, each one made it a duty to seek it with eagerness, and to prepare for it with much fervour. The two persons of whom I have spoken were in a state of grace, but they had the misfortune of being possessed by the devil, who tormented them from time to time in a horrible manner. St. Bont, who was ignorant of the fact, questioned them a little to sound their dispositions, betook himself to prayer imposed hands upon them, and at length continued his way without any further delay. Some minutes after, his attendants, having the curiosity to follow with their eyes the two newly-confirmed persons, were not a little surprised to see them throwing up a great quantity of blood, and then leaping for joy; it was the devil delivering them of his presence, because he could no longer, of course, torment men who had just received the Holy Ghost with the plenitude of His graces.

- D. MABILLON, *A Third Century of Benedictine Saints.*

552. *The Holy Chrism Multiplied Miraculously.* -

None of you is ignorant that the matter of the sacrament of Confirmation is the holy chrism, composed of olive oil and balsam. There happened in the eighth century an astonishing miracle connected therewith; I am going to tell you how it was. St. Pirmin, founder of several monasteries, abbot and chorepiscopus (or monk's bishop) in Germany, was applying himself as

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usual to the functions of preaching. A crowd of persons, even from different countries, attracted by the odour of his sanctity, came unceasingly to hear his exhortations, and earnestly requested to receive the salutary imposition of hands and the unction of Confirmation. But because the place was narrow and shut in between two rivers, he went to a more convenient place for the performance of this sacred rite. God made known by a celebrated miracle how much He favoured it, for as that holy bishop was giving Confirmation to a great number of persons, it happened that there was not enough of the holy chrism to confirm all that presented themselves. St. Pirmin, seeing himself reduced to this extremity, said to one of his ministers: "Go, quickly, and bring the phials from the monastery, and fill them again, so that we may still make use of the holy unction." The minister, obeying the holy bishop's orders, took hold of the stocks; but scarcely had he looked at them, when he found them filled with miraculous oil. Seeing, then, such an evident miracle, the priest lost no time in going to manifest to the holy pontiff the singular favour which God had granted him. There was there a great assembly of people, who, struck with admiration at so great a miracle, could not sufficiently express their joy, or proclaim the praises of Jesus Christ.

The holy prelate, having likewise returned thanks to God, went on confirming all that came; for the people came in greater crowds, and with more devotion, knowing that the holy chrism wherewith they were

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to be confirmed had, as it were, come down from heaven, and St. Pirmin was kept all day giving Confirmation. Night being come, the holy bishop gave the people his blessing, and each one returned home, full of celestial joy, blessing and praising God for so great a marvel.

- D. MABILLON.

553. *Negligence of a Bishop in Administering Confirmation.* -

Confirmation is a sacrament so precious, dear children, that we should hasten to receive it, and bishops always make it a duty to administer it.

One day, a man, in deep affliction, went to St. Maurice, Bishop of Ghent, and earnestly besought him to come to his house, to confirm his child, who was very ill, and must soon die. It was the custom then to administer that sacrament even to children who had not yet the use of reason. The bishop acceded to his request, but his occupations not having permitted him to go immediately, the child died during that short interval. When the holy man learned the news, he was in such trouble that he bewailed, for several days, with copious and bitter tears, what he called his negligence. His grief at length reached such a point that he persuaded himself he was no longer worthy of being a bishop, and fled to England, where he took service as gardener in a prince's household, the better to conceal his former dignity. Long after, his friends succeeded in discovering the place of his retreat, and after much persuasion, prevailed upon him to return to Ghent, What a high esteem must not that holy bishop have

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had for the Sacrament of Confirmation, when he thought himself obliged to undergo so long a penance, for having been the involuntary cause of a child dying without receiving that sacrament! A great lesson for those who neglect to receive it, or to prepare for it.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 59.