

Choosing a Confirmation Name

Personal names are often taken for granted, yet parents often spend many hours deliberating when choosing a name for a newborn. Sometimes a child is named to honor a relative, and sometimes a child is named after a saint held in high esteem by the family. Sometimes a person has a special “nickname” used only by close relatives. Whatever the origin of our names, they become part of our history and our identity.

Names are important in our religious tradition as well. The prophet Isaiah, speaking in God’s name, proclaims to King Cyrus, “it is I, the Lord... who called you by your name” (Isaiah 45:3-4). After the Resurrection, it was only when Jesus called Mary Magdalene by name that she recognized him (John 20:16).

With that in mind then, some discernment should be put into one’s Confirmation name. The Sacrament of Confirmation is always seen in relationship to baptism (confirmation is seen as a “seal” of the faith and grace given in baptism). This is why, for example, the church recommends that the “sponsor” for Confirmation be the baptismal godparent, and the Rite of Confirmation includes a formal renewal of baptismal promises.

In that light, the Church presumes that those being confirmed will be addressed by their baptismal name. However, choosing a separate confirmation name has been a centuries old custom. All this reflects our understanding of the inter-relationship of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist as the three sacraments of Christian initiation. That is why our baptismal name is certainly the most appropriate for confirmation. Thus, there is no obligation to use a name at confirmation other than one’s baptismal name.

Taking new name can be symbolic of a new stage in life. There are numerous examples in the Bible of God changing a person’s name to match the mission He is giving them: Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter, and Saul to Paul. This was one reason why members of many religious orders chose “religious” names when pronouncing vows. But the celebration of confirmation is a time to reaffirm one’s baptism and thus should not be seen so much as a new stage of Christian life but as an opportunity to deepen the graces of baptism.

There may, however, be appropriate and pastoral reasons for someone to choose the name of a patron saint when being confirmed. This name, freely chosen and reflecting the candidate’s devotion to a saint, can be a sign of commitment to living as a Christian in today’s world under the patronage of someone they admire. Ideally, such a confirmation name would be used in addition to the baptismal name, not in place of it. Though, for many individuals, using the baptismal name alone can be a powerful reaffirmation of who they are as Christians.

But ultimately, this decision up to the candidate.