

Trinity 5
Christ the King Grover Beach

I once wrote a dissertation at Oxford. I then had to face an oral examination and defense of it. It's called a *viva voce*. The Latin means "living voice" as in oral defense. The examiners are experts in the subject of the student's dissertation. It is typically a document of 80-100 thousand words, roughly 300 double spaced pages. The examiners read, evaluate, and conclude several things before passing or failing the student. For one, they thoroughly examine the dissertation for accuracy and originality. They meticulously check the footnotes. They grade everything from typos, content, and the thesis of the document. Most of all, they offer their expert view as to whether the dissertation makes an original contribution to the field of study.

At the oral defense, they may challenge anything and everything. It's mostly a friendly exchange. But it can become adversarial if the student's work is not deemed worthy. Then at times the examiners can begin to argue among themselves. That's the most fun for the student. One argument in my examination took

up almost one third of the time. Inwardly I was saying, "Yes!"

There is perhaps the most important aspect of this examination process. The requirements for this kind of examination call internal and external examiners. One examiner must be from the faculty of the university. The other is to be from outside of the university.

The student is allowed to choose his internal examiner. He cannot determine his external examiner. He can make suggestions or recommendations. But the royal crown charter for accrediting all universities makes the final determination. It's the combination of the local, the university of the student, and the universal, a universal system representing all the universities in the British Isles. At the universal level, the authorities consider the student's recommendations. They will consider them. They may or may not take them. They can pick any scholar from any British university in the field of the student. It's somewhat scary. In the examination, both examiners must agree for the student to pass his oral defense of the dissertation. Though scary, the process of oral

defense and examination has been used for a thousand years at Oxford to produce some of the finest scholars. It is time proven quality control to confirm that a student has produced an accurate, truthful, original piece of work. It's a process for a student to ratify his work before local and universal authorities. He is confirmed by those who represent not only the local but the universal. And when he is, he is admitted into the "community of scholars" as it is called at Oxford. It is a community not only local but part of the entire university system in Britain.

Today, the same principles have taken place in the sacrament of confirmation. This sacramental process is based on the Biblical pattern in the early Church of the Book of Acts. The specific passage from Acts 8 has been read in our service. In this Scriptural situation, many came to Christ through the preaching of Deacon Philip. They were baptized and instructed at the local level. However, they needed to be confirmed by the universal Church we call catholic. The word comes from a Greek preposition phrase, "according to the whole." The representatives of the catholic church were the apostles Peter and John. They came from Jerusalem to confirm by the laying on

of hands. It's was a kind of ordination of the laity. Scripture speaks of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:9). If all believers are a royal priesthood, where would their ordination take place? It has to be the kind of confirmation performed by the apostles with the laying on hands. They represent the whole, or the catholic church. They are the only ones who can confirm and ordain for the whole church. The ordination to the priesthood of all believers is not only for the local; it is for the universal. It's the same requirement for representatives of the universal in ordinations to the special or servant priesthood of ministers at the altar. They like the laity's priesthood serve the whole as well as the local. All of these Biblical principles involved in the sacrament of the first confirmations in the church have been witnessed today at Christ the King.

First, the local authority in the priest has been represented. If you remember, he presented the candidates for confirmation. At this local level of the parish, those presented for confirmation have been baptized, confessed faith, catechized and trained at the local church level.

Second, the local priest presented the confirmands to a bishop. He is the representative of the whole. When the apostles reached the end of their ministries, they appointed successors like Timothy and Titus. The early church called the bishops. The Greek word means overseer as in overseeing local presbyters and churches.

Third, the universal or catholic representative of the whole in the person of the bishop examined the candidates for confirmation. He asked them to ratify and confirm their covenant with God. This kind of ratification before a local representative is also a Biblical pattern. For example, before the people of God entered the Promised Land, they appeared before Moses. The text says that they ratified their covenant before this universal representative (Deuteronomy 27).

Finally, the bishop following the model of the apostles laid on hands to confirm those who ratified their covenant. But this was no mere formality. When the apostles laid on hands the Holy Spirit came in greater measure on the baptized. They had already received the Holy Spirit at their baptism. But ordained to

serve in the priesthood of all believers, they need extra empowering and gifting. This is what has happened today. Those confirmed have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit to serve as a royal priesthood.

The local and the universal authorities have come together to confirm what has been ratified. It is powerful system of God's quality control. It should also be a great comfort. Our confirmands have been confirmed by a bishop who represents the entire catholic Church. May you be encouraged. You are not alone. From this day forward the entire catholic Church of the priesthood of all believers is with you. We will not forsake. God is with you more than ever before. Amen!