

Why I've Come to Love the Restored Order

By Deacon Bill Meagher

For many years, I taught Confirmation to junior high and high school students. I loved being part of that journey—watching young people grow, ask big questions, serve others, and begin to make the faith their own. I honestly thought Confirmation belonged at that stage of life. Like many people, I saw it as a kind of graduation from faith formation or a personal declaration of belief—a moment to say, “This is my faith now.”

That’s the story I held onto for a long time. But over time—and through prayer, study, and some hard conversations—I’ve come to see that the Church has always told a different story about this sacrament. And honestly, I had missed it.

The restored order—Baptism, then Confirmation, and finally First Eucharist—reflects the Church’s earliest tradition and deepest theology. It puts the emphasis where it belongs—not on age or accomplishment, but on God’s grace and His desire to strengthen us for the journey of faith.

This hasn’t been an easy shift for me. I used to worry about all the same things I hear others voicing now. I was convinced that if we confirmed kids earlier, they wouldn’t come back. I relied on Confirmation as a “carrot”—the last leverage point I had to keep them involved. In my mind, it was the one thing that kept families engaged past elementary school.

I get that mindset because I lived in it. I preached it. But eventually I had to ask: if the only thing keeping someone engaged is the threat of *not* receiving a sacrament, have we really formed them in faith?

That question challenged me deeply. Sacraments are not rewards. They are not tools to manage attendance. They are free gifts of grace. And if I believed that, I had to admit that I was using the sacraments in a way the Church never intended.

What helped me even more was learning the history. The truth is, the current practice of receiving First Eucharist before Confirmation only started about a hundred years ago. It wasn’t planned. Pope St. Pius X lowered the age for First Eucharist to seven, understanding that children needed to receive the graces of the Eucharist earlier. Still, he didn’t intend for Confirmation to be delayed. It just got left behind. Over time, we added meanings like “maturity” and “ownership” to Confirmation—but that’s not what the Church has ever taught.

The early Church—and still today in Eastern Catholic Churches—celebrated the sacraments in this order. Adults entering the Church at the Easter Vigil still receive them that way. What we’re doing now isn’t a new idea. It’s a return to the roots of our faith.

And what do those roots teach? That Confirmation completes Baptism. It strengthens us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and prepares us for the Eucharist—the source and summit of our life. It’s not about us choosing God. It’s about God choosing and equipping us for mission.

I used to think we had to hold onto Confirmation to keep kids in the pews. But that way of thinking puts more faith in my teaching than in God’s grace, but the sacraments are real encounters with Christ. They plant seeds that grow—quietly but powerfully—over time.

And no, we can’t stop forming kids after Confirmation. We must work even harder. The journey doesn’t end there—it begins. We need to build strong formation, prayer, and service opportunities that help our young people grow as disciples and live out the gifts they’ve received.

This change challenged me. But I’ve come to believe that giving young people the grace of this sacrament earlier allows the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide them right when the world starts pressing in. They need that help now—to face the noise, the pressure, and the lies—and to grow as faithful disciples of Jesus.