

Confirmation is a lifetime 'yes' to God

The other day I went for a swim. When I finished my laps, I decided to treat myself to a relaxing five minutes in the hot tub. As I stepped down into the whirlpool, I cringed as an old knee problem flared up.

The woman seated in front of me asked me if my knee was bothering me. When I responded in the affirmative, she said, "You are going to think this is weird, but do you think that we could pray for your knee?" I was a little shocked, but I told myself to be open-minded.

She moved closer and put her hands on my knee. At this point it got kind of embarrassing because other people started entering the hot tub, just in time for the exorcism.

"Tendonitis, you are not welcome here. Leave this knee at once," she said, her voice growing louder with each sentence.

When the prayer was over, she asked me if I would consider asking Jesus Christ into my heart. "Do you know how to do that?" she asked me. I paused for a while, still fighting with myself to remain open-minded and nodded affirmatively. I grabbed my swim cap and goggles, thanked the woman and stepped out of the whirlpool.

For the next hour all I could think about was her last question. I asked my-



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Our turn

self over and over, "Do I know how to do that?"

I thought about the difference in language between Catholics and evangelical Christians, between Catholics and many types of Christian denominations. I have sometimes envied the precision with which my born-again evangelical friends remember their conversions: the exact date and time they accepted Jesus into their hearts. But I have grown to appreciate the seven sacraments Catholics celebrate, in which, at different times in our lives, we accept Jesus into our hearts.

When I hear a fellow Christian's tale of dramatic, datable rebirth, I often think of confirmation, the sacrament which most celebrates the 'yes' to Jesus that many other Christians describe in their conversions.

I was 14 when I celebrated my confirmation — old enough to know that this was an important decision

in my life, yet young enough not to fully understand it. I liked the fact that I was in charge of picking my own sponsor — a witness to the sacrament and, in the best scenario, a spiritual guide — unlike in baptism when my parents assigned two people with whom I had no real connection.

In the sacrament of confirmation, believers are anointed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit — wisdom, understanding, knowledge, piety, fortitude, counsel and fear of the Lord — so as to be able to continue Jesus' mission on earth. As I understand the sacrament of confirmation, that one day of anointing — that one day of agreeing to spread God's good news on earth — represents a lifetime of saying 'yes.'

The yeses that have come later in life have been just as important — possibly even more important — than the first one, because they were accompanied by a deeper understanding of what saying 'yes' to God entails. I am grateful to the woman in the whirlpool for reminding me that I agreed to be Jesus' advocate in this world 15 years ago, and that commitment remains today and tomorrow and the next day.

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Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

MORE LETTERS

my life.

I was a student of Mr. Russell's from 1972 to 1976. The man I came to know was volatile and cranky, but his passion for what he was doing was unmistakable. If you failed to appear to share his passion — nodded off or let your attention wander — he was apt to let fly with an eraser, or even a book, in your direction. I was one of the lucky ones who never had to shake chalk dust out of his hair. This man taught me to be a lover of great literature and a seeker of truth. He was also the first to recognize and nurture my own passion for writing. Other than my parents, he was perhaps the single most important adult in the shaping of my own adulthood.

My heart goes out to those he may have hurt, but when I pray for them, I must also pray for Ted Russell.

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Practice due?

To the editor:

While reading Father McBrien's essay on the *duty of the wealthy to give to the poor*, I couldn't help but think that given the relative opulent lives our bishops, cardinals and pope enjoy, perhaps a little "practice what you preach" is desperately needed here.

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