

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The Easter Vigil is the highpoint of our liturgical celebration! As a “cradle” Catholic I took for granted my Catholic Faith and traditions.

For me as a child singing in the church choir, the Easter Vigil was long and almost endless. Today, some 30 years later, I envy those Catechumens and Candidates who begin their journey to Easter through the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process. Each year I hear their stories. Each year God never ceases to amaze me by his gentle prodding that helps folks make that first contact with the Catholic Church. So often the stories are the same. David Coyne, a member of Sacred Heart Parish, sums up many inquirers’ comments: “I enrolled in RCIA about t10 years ago while I was in my early 30s. I was at a point in my life where I felt I had accomplished much in the secular world including a successful career, a wonderful wife and two beautiful children but something was missing. After some soul searching, I realized that although I had been attending Mass with my “cradle Catholic” wife for the duration of our marriage, I longed for a deeper commitment to the Catholic Faith.”

The Christian Initiation of Adults begins with their entry into the catechumenate and reaches its culmination in a single celebration of the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. For me, as a companion to these catechumens and candidates, it is inspiring to celebrate with them their commitment to God and the Church during the various liturgical rites and the Easter Vigil.

There are several stages in the RCIA process. Formative instruction in the faith is necessary throughout the entire process. The first stage is the pre-catechumenate –the period of welcoming, listening and sharing. It provides an opportunity for inquirers to examine their own willingness to enter into the ongoing conversion process of making the values of Jesus their own.

The second stage is the catechumenate, whereby, the interested persons, who are now called catechumens (those who thoroughly sound out something), begin the process of making a decision. This is a period of formation. Catechumens state their desire to begin formally the process of belonging to the family of Catholic believers.

Through word, worship, service and community building, the catechumens come to know more deeply the revealing presence of God in their lives.

The third period or stage is the period of purification and enlightenment. This stage coincides with Lent and is the period for catechumens to deepen their commitment. On the first Sunday of Lent, those who have decided to become full members of the church are presented to the community by their sponsors. This is called the Rite of Election. On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, the scrutinies weave gospel themes through prayers and the community asks that the catechumens may turn away from sin and commit themselves fully to God.

The immediate preparation for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation takes place at the Easter Vigil. At the Vigil the candidates are baptized, confirmed and receive the Eucharist for the first time. They are officially welcomed into the community as full members. We celebrate what God has done in their lives and will continue to do, and we celebrate the gift of community that God has given to us.

The last stage of the Rite is mystagogia, meaning “learning the mysteries.” During the period from Easter to Pentecost, the newly initiated and all parishioners unfold the mysteries of their faith to understand them more fully.

David Coyne says that many may view the completion of RCIA as the end but I feel it is the beginning of new opportunities and responsibilities to live the faith that you professed at the Easter Vigil.

As “cradle Catholics” we recognize that to be “evangelized” means that we accept God’s Word and attempt to live it out in our lives. To be evangelized means we share our faith stories and welcome others into our faith journey. How conscious are we of our call to bring others to Christ? How can we more fully recognize that we are called to share our personal faith in Jesus, to reject sin, to live gospel values, to evangelize, to catechize and to enter more deeply into the paschal mystery of Jesus?