

GRACE ELEVATING NATURE

Liturgical Elements of the RCIA Catechumenate Period

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week Jesus came and stood among them
and said to them, "Peace be with you."*

~ John 20:19

The introductory article to this series (*To the Threshold and to the Fullness: What is the RCIA supposed to be?*) published in the October-December 2003 issue, included the following comment: "Because the entire catechumenate is ordered to leading catechumens and candidates to living a true liturgical life, permeated by prayer and worship within the Body of Christ and punctuated by regular participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession, it is vital that it be communicated that the liturgy *is* their means to achieve holiness. All knowledge of the Faith, practice of spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and obedience to the laws of the New Covenant flow from the liturgical life. In light of this fact, the presence of liturgical elements in the process of instructing those seeking to enter the Church not only becomes acceptable but, even more so, is crucial to the ends being sought."

The introduction of liturgical elements into the Christian initiation process form the matter for discussion in this article – specifically as they foster the work of conversion from the end of the precatechumenate period to the beginning of the period of purification and enlightenment. This timeframe is referred to in the guidelines to the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* as the catechumenate period. It is to be "an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life" (RCIA 75). The liturgical elements of this period are intended to lead participants "into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the people of God" (RCIA 76).

Articles following this present one will address other issues of the catechumenate period having to do with the catechetical and pastoral aspects. As noted in the first paragraph, the central place of the liturgy merits a certain primacy in our on-going series on the nature of the RCIA process.

The Christian initiation process is intended to be fundamentally liturgical. Participants need and have a right to the grace that flows from the font of the Church's liturgy as it is made available to them as catechumens and candidates prior to full communion. This grace is an indispensable aid to conversion and the means by which they enter into intimate union with Christ and his Church. The steps towards this intimate union can be referred to as the *major rites* of the RCIA process – the gateways through which participants knowingly and freely decide to pass in their journey towards the divine consummation of the holy Eucharist. Supporting these major rites are various *minor rites*, some belonging to the period of the catechumenate (discussed here) and others to the period of purification and enlightenment (discussed in a future article). These minor rites serve to make present all possible means of grace to enable the catechetical and pastoral work to achieve their goal: "conversion and faith...to become strong" (RCIA 76). In the paragraphs below, we will examine the two major rites that bookend the period of the catechumenate, and the minor rites that are to be made available between these gateways.

As a final introductory point, the catechetical and pastoral aspects of RCIA are always at the service of

the liturgical, but the liturgy teaches and forms on its own as well. The liturgy must be allowed to do so in the ways appropriate to it. Do not try to alter or manipulate rites and ceremonies. Becoming members of household of the faithful (cf. RCIA 47) entails familiarity with the authentically universal (catholic) experience of liturgy, accompanied by rich catechesis and the opportunity to watch and learn, so that the hollow ritualism prevalent among too many Catholics will be mitigated not multiplied by the presence of these new souls called to full communion.

The First Major Gateway: The Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming (RCIA 41-74; 411-433; 505-529)

“Assembling publicly for the first time, those who have completed the period of the pre-catechumenate declare their intention to the Church and the Church in turn, carrying out its apostolic mission, accepts them as persons who intend to become its members. God showers his grace on the candidates, since the celebration manifests their desire publicly and marks their reception and first consecration by the Church” (RCIA 41).

As stated in RCIA 42: “The prerequisite for making this first step is that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates”:

- ✠ Evidence of the first faith, initial conversion and intention to change
- ✠ Desire to enter into a relationship with God in Christ
- ✠ Evidence of the first stirrings of repentance
- ✠ Start to call upon God in prayer
- ✠ A sense of the Church
- ✠ Experience of the company and spirit of Christians by contact with a priest, members of the community
“Before the rite is celebrated, therefore, sufficient

and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates’ motives and dispositions” (RCIA 43).

For unbaptized inquirers, the Rite of Acceptance opens with a dialogue between the priest and the

participant (see RCIA 41-74). After calling the person’s name, the priest asks, “What do you ask of God’s Church?”, to which the inquirer responds, “Faith.” The priest continues, “And what does faith offer you?”, and the individual replies, “Eternal life” (RCIA 50). If participants are to answer these questions with authentic intent, the RCIA team must prepare them to do so. What does it mean to ask for faith *from the Church*, as opposed to from God directly? This implies teaching about what faith is as a theological virtue, why it is important, what eternal life means *within* the communion of saints, and how they can attain it through means that only the Church can give in the fullness intended by her divine founder.

For those already baptized, there is a similar dialogue in the Rite of Welcoming (see RCIA 411-433). However, the candidate, already one with us in Baptism, does not ask for faith but “to be accepted as a candidate for catechetical instruction leading to Confirmation and Eucharist (or: reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church)” (RCIA 418). Following this answer, the candidate declares an

intention before the Church, either by affirming what the priest declares on his or her behalf or by offering a brief testimony to this intent. Like the catechumen, the candidate should be prepared to make an honest declaration of intent and to understand the obligations to Mother Church implied by the choice to go through this gateway.

For both the unbaptized and baptized participants,

“The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds, as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life.” (GDC 85)

this gateway signifies that the Church is formally accepting them into her midst as, respectively, catechumens and candidates for full communion. Though not fully initiated, they become truly the Church's own (part of Christ's household) (AG 14, RCIA 47). Thus they can expect help and support from Mother Church. Liturgically, this means they have a *right* to all the blessings, exorcisms, anointings, and other minor rites that are included in the section entitled, *Rites Belonging to the Period of the Catechumenate* (RCIA 81-117), which will be discussed below. Although these rites are specifically designed for catechumens, the guidelines for the candidates explain that "some of the rites belonging to the catechumenate, especially suited to the condition and spiritual needs of these baptized adults, can be used" for their advantage (RCIA 407, cf. 406).

Prior to the sacraments of initiation, this first major gateway is the most significant one for both catechumens and candidates. For many of them, standing up publicly before a Catholic priest, in the midst of a Catholic congregation, and stating their intention to enter into a formal relationship with the Catholic Church is a challenging, even frightening experience that may cost them dearly with their friends and family. Therefore, pastoral sensitivity to their situations is extremely important. Apart from the challenges they may face from the catechesis they are receiving during the period of catechumenate, personal situations and conflicts with family can present great problems and can even cause crisis. Not only teaching to the responses in this major gateway, but also reminding them of the grace they have received and continue to receive through the minor rites, can help focus them on God and foster confidence in his providence. He has led them to this point. Whatever problems they face, God is pouring out grace on them through this major rite and through the subsequent minor rites of the catechumenate.

Beginning during the catechumenate period, the catechumens and candidates are sustained by the graces dispensed by the Church through the means of:

- ✦ Celebrations of the Word (RCIA 81-89, 406)
- ✦ Blessings and Minor Exorcisms (RCIA 90-97)
- ✦ Anointings (RCIA 98-103)
- ✦ Presentations (under certain circumstances) (RCIA 104-105, 407)
- ✦ Other Sacramentals (CCC 1667-1680)

From now on catechumens and candidates receive blessings and are dismissed at Sunday Mass to go to what has become known in some regions as "Breaking Open the Word" (discussed below). The Church feeds them richly on the Word until they can come to the table of the Eucharist, and makes available to them grace mediated through sacramentals to deepen conversion.

The Minor Rites Proper to the Period of the Catechumenate

The catechumenal process is designed for and suited to the conversion process in the hearts of those adults

who come to seek the Lord and grow in faith through the working of the Holy Spirit. Between the major rites, the Church offers minor rites – rich liturgical fare that will strengthen and feed participants, bringing them great growth and development in the Spirit and in their

conversion to Christ. This liturgical food is extremely significant for them. To omit the minor rites is to deprive them of many and great actual graces of the sustenance for their journey to the sacraments. For catechumens, the minor rites are especially focused on preparation for Baptism; for candidates, they are intended to strengthen them in the Christian life through the working of baptismal grace already present in them (RCIA 400ff addresses the baptized).

Celebrations of the Word of God **(RCIA 81-89; 406)**

The Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming begin the period of the catechumenate. Now that the catechumens and candidates have declared their intention, and the Church has accepted and embraced them, she provides for their spiritual well-being and growth: "The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing" (RCIA 75.3). "By means of sacred rites celebrated at successive times they are led into the life of faith, worship, and charity belonging to the people of God" (RCIA 76). Through liturgical rites, those preparing for sacraments are purified and strengthened and are led into the life of the Church, the community of the Body of Christ. They are drawn into the life of love, into relationship with the living God. Of the rites that are provided during this time, "celebrations of the Word of God are foremost" (RCIA 79). Since neither the baptized nor the unbaptized can be nourished by the Eucharist as yet, it is clear that these celebrations of the Word can

***"When catechesis is permeated
by a climate of prayer,
the assimilation of the entire
Christian life reaches
its summit."*** (GDC 85)

be beneficial for candidates as well as catechumens, and thus the guidelines seem to imply their participation along with the catechumens (cf. RCIA 406).

Nourishment on the Word of God is one of the great spiritual helps the Church can give to those preparing for the sacraments. Special celebrations of the Word are a significant part of spiritual growth. As stated in RCIA 82, their purpose is fourfold:

1. To implant in their hearts the teachings they are receiving: for example, the morality characteristic of the New Testament, the forgiving of injuries and insults, a sense of sin and repentance, the duties Christians must carry out in the world
2. To give them instruction and experience in the different aspects and ways of prayer
3. To explain to them the signs, celebrations, and seasons of the liturgy
4. To prepare them gradually to enter the worship assembly of the entire community

This implantation of the teachings in their hearts happens through the power of the Word of God, “which is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Here the teachings they receive are alive, permeating their hearts and minds. Here this Word of God is given in the context of liturgy, where God meets man, and in the context of prayer, communion with God. Through explanation followed by experience, the participants learn prayer, liturgy, and worship, as they enter into a deeper relationship with God through his Word. Gradually they are prepared to enter the worshipping assembly. Gradually, by receiving Christ in Word, they are prepared to receive the Word made flesh in the Eucharist.

These celebrations include: “first, celebrations held specially for the catechumens; second, participation in the Liturgy of the Word at the Sunday Mass; third, celebrations held in connection with catechetical instruction” (RCIA 81). The second of these begins already at the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, as catechumens and candidates participate in the Liturgy of the Word at Mass and are dismissed.

At the conclusion of this first major gateway, when the Eucharist is to be celebrated, there is a *Dismissal of the Catechumens*: “The celebrant recalls briefly the great joy with which the catechumens have just been received and urges them to live according to the Word of God

they have just heard. After the dismissal formulary, the group of catechumens goes out but does not disperse. With the help of some of the faithful, the catechumens remain together to share their joy and spiritual experiences” (RCIA 67A). This is an important part of participants’ spiritual growth. The catechumens are to go out but remain as a group with some of the faithful. This is an opportune time to discuss the scriptures just proclaimed, not as an additional catechetical session, but as an *extension of the liturgy*. This opportunity, often referred to as “Breaking Open the Word”, has in view the Church’s desire to allow a deeper reflection on the lectionary readings and homily. They are dismissed not because the Church does not want them to be at the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but rather because she wants

them to be fed more richly on the Word. Here they can be fed on the Word of God, until that time when they can be fed on the Eucharist. The Church shows that it is preferred that they be dismissed: “If for serious reasons the catechumens cannot leave...” (RCIA 67C, cf. 75.3). It may be the case that some participants are embarrassed to a degree when they are called

forward in front of everyone for a liturgical dismissal at Mass. For this reason, it is a great help if sponsors are present to escort them to the front for the dismissal rite and perhaps join them for the session that follows. Eventually, usually quickly, participants become comfortable with this practice, and will look forward to Sunday when they can share about the power of God’s Word in their lives and be edified and supported by the thoughts and reflections of others.

Understanding the value of this liturgical participation and deeper nourishment on the Word, it is then no surprise that other celebrations of the Word of God can and should be held for catechumens and candidates for their spiritual well-being. Celebrations held specially for them not only witness to them the honor in which we hold Scripture as God’s word, but also draw them into prayer and the experience of the living God that comes from entering into and being permeated by his voice and deeds as recorded in scripture. It places everything in, as it were, an envelope of prayer, which is the context in which catechetical instruction should be held (cf. RCIA 84). Thus, what we believe and do is founded on and driven by God’s Word. Even the other minor rites are intended to be celebrated within the context of a celebration of the Word, which further

***“So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish
that which I purpose,
and prosper in the thing
for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)***

indicates its primacy among the minor rites during the period of the catechumenate.

A model for a celebration of the Word of God is provided in RCIA 85-89. This model indicates the use of an opening song, readings and responsorial psalm, a homily, and concluding rites which may be one of the other minor rites for the period. This celebration is in fact a true liturgical function, as can be seen by the format, and so should be celebrated appropriately, with responses and gestures native to that done during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. A sacred space, with the scriptures enthroned, and perhaps candles and a crucifix or other image is certainly appropriate here.

Introducing and Celebrating Sacramentals

After the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, catechumens and candidates have the right to blessings, minor exorcisms and anointings.

Do not omit these. They are sacramentals and so are occasions of grace and encounter with Christ (cf. RCIA 94, 97, 102, 203). They should be administered by a deacon or priest if one is present (refer to RCIA 16 if a cleric cannot be present). Each catechetical session is enriched in the encounter with Christ by use of these sacramentals.

Minor Exorcisms (RCIA 90-94)

The Church is battling against evil, and so prays and petitions God on behalf of the catechumens. "Minor exorcisms draw the attention of the catechumens to the real nature of the Christian life, the struggle between flesh and spirit, the importance of self denial for reaching the blessedness of God's kingdom, and the unending need for God's help" (RCIA 90). These minor exorcisms are to prepare the catechumens for baptism. Minor exorcisms ordinarily take place within a celebration of the Word. When needed, they may also be prayed privately for an individual (RCIA 92).

Prayers against sin and the power of evil may be prayed for the baptized as well, but it is important that a priest or deacon use a prayer appropriate to those who are already baptized (the minor exorcisms are specifically for those not baptized). The baptized and the non-baptized are in very different situations because of the significance of the grace of the sacrament of Baptism; therefore, the two groups should be clearly distinguished from one another, and their differing sacramental situations must be reflected in the prayers for them.

Blessings and Anointings (RCIA 95-102)

Blessings and anointings are usually given within the same context as described for minor exorcisms above.

"The blessings of the catechumens are a sign of God's love and of the Church's tender care. They are bestowed on the catechumens so that, even though they do not as yet have the grace of the sacraments, they may still receive from the Church courage, joy, and peace as they proceed along the difficult journey they have begun" (RCIA 95).

Blessings may also be given to the baptized, but the blessing given should reflect the fact that they have received the sacrament of Baptism and that their baptismal graces are active, stirring them to conversion and to a deeper relationship with the Lord. The baptized should be aware of the profound significance of their baptismal grace in their lives and should seek to make use of these graces given by God. The baptized and the non-baptized should therefore receive very different blessings, according to their situation.

"During the period of the catechumenate, a rite of anointing the catechumens, through use of the oil of catechumens, may be celebrated wherever this seems beneficial or desirable" (RCIA 98). The Church also provides for the unbaptized a

rite of anointing of the catechumens, which is celebrated by a priest or deacon. This rite is for catechumens only, using the Oil of Catechumens, and "symbolizes their need for God's help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unfalteringly throughout their lives" (RCIA 99).

The minor exorcisms, blessings, and anointings may be celebrated numerous times throughout the catechumenate. These are all very significant liturgical rites and should never be downplayed or rushed. Liturgy, here in the form of sacramentals, remains ever central to participants' growing intimacy with God.

Place Catechesis within a "Liturgical Envelope"

It is always beneficial to start catechetical sessions within the context of prayer. Never let prayer be routine but instead planned to "disengage" the participants from a sole focus on this life by inviting them into a deeper awareness of the presence of God and the call to eternal life. Do not contrive prayer so as to "teach" in a prayer. We teach people *how* to pray first by inviting them to be with us, to watch and to pray, and we teach *about* prayer many times in the conversion process, but it is a different matter to manipulate prayer to get in additional doctrinal points. Extemporaneous prayers from the heart remain greatly valuable alongside an ever-increasing use of formal and liturgical prayer forms. Conclude each catechetical session by closing the "liturgical envelope."

Do not neglect or rush through a final prayer time. Plan it to reflect the catechesis: for example, the Litany of the Sacred Heart after a session on the Incarnation. Special prayers, hymns, and readings can be chosen to assist participants in reflecting upon the truths which they have learned. Use them as the Church does, to celebrate and apply those truths.

Look for Other Opportunities

Gradually other sacramentals can be introduced, always accompanied by the proper catechesis, being careful to connect them to the sacraments: for example, distribution of holy water with instructions for use in anticipation of or in light of Baptism. The blessing and use of an Advent wreath can be added to a celebration of the Word. As conversion progresses, more time ought to be spent in prayer. Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, preceded by explanation and instruction, can be a fitting addition when catechesis on the Eucharist is given. Praying a scriptural rosary together with intercessions for the needs of the group is a good accompaniment to instruction on Mary's role in the Church.

Every opportunity to celebrate and participate in the liturgical year ought to be used, including special focus

Ideas for this period:

- ✦ Read and meditate on Scripture
- ✦ Explain and use sacramentals (the crucifix, holy water, blessed candles, the Advent wreath, etc.)
- ✦ Explain the liturgical year, Sunday and feast days, as they occur
- ✦ Explain and use grace before and after meals
- ✦ Offer a booklet of "Basic Catholic Prayers" and explain them
- ✦ The Liturgy of the Hours (the simpler hours, like Night Prayer, could be prayed at first)
- ✦ Spontaneous prayer, prayers of thanksgiving or intercessions for needs
- ✦ Sing songs that help put words to the journey they are undertaking
- ✦ Parish prayer gatherings, missions, vespers, etc.
- ✦ Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hours
- ✦ Attend sacramental celebrations: Baptisms, Weddings, Ordinations, etc. when possible
- ✦ Devotions to the Sacred Heart, Mary and the saints, the Rosary, litanies, novenas
- ✦ Spiritual reading, the lives of the saints
- ✦ Special retreat days for catechumens and candidates

on the patronal feast of the parish or local ethnic feasts. Penitential prayers and fasting should be explained as they apply, and catechumens and candidates should be invited to participate. The Prayer of the Church (Liturgy of the Hours) can be used here to great benefit, as well as *Lectio Divina* (an ancient form of praying with and meditation on scripture). If the RCIA team is consistent and organized in the way these traditions and prayer forms are introduced, participants will eventually delight in them. "Consistent" means developing a *ritual* of how to pray so that participants are not continually distracted by the novelty of what is being done. "Organized" means that when introducing a new piece or element, it is first explained and always facilitated (perhaps with a handout) so that they can easily follow along. In this way, participants will gradually become comfortable with doing liturgical things and desire to do them.

The Second Major Gateway: The Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion (RCIA 118-137; 446-458; 547-561), preceded by the Rite of Sending (RCIA 106-117; 434-445; 530-546)

At the end of the period of the catechumenate, a parish may celebrate the optional Rite of Sending. There is a Rite of Sending for catechumens, and one for candidates. When the Rite of Election takes place in the parish, this rite is not used. In the Rite of Sending of the Catechumens for Election, the local congregation sends the catechumens to the bishop for election. To send someone to the bishop means that they have discerned that the person is ready. The process of discernment has been going on for all this time, following the guidelines given by the Church, and the catechumens should be aware that this is, in fact, a time of discernment of their readiness. "As the focal point of the Church's concern for the catechumens, admission to election belongs to the bishop who is usually its presiding celebrant. It is within the parish community, however, that the preliminary judgment is made concerning participants' state of formation and progress. This rite offers the local community the opportunity to express its approval of the catechumens and to send them forth to the celebration of election assured of the parish's care and support" (RCIA 107).

Throughout the period of the catechumenate, the RCIA participants should have become increasingly involved with the local community. The community will wholeheartedly acclaim their readiness because they know them. The participants know that this rite marks a key moment. It is appropriate that the bishop to recognize them because he is the sign of unity of the particular Church, but it is the parish community's responsibility

to bring those in RCIA into the fullness of the life of the Church. In this rite, a priest, deacon, catechist, or representative of the community presents the catechumens to the celebrant, asking that they be recognized for their progress and be sent with the parish's blessings and prayers to election by the bishop. The godparents give public testimony about the catechumens. The godparent's role is very significant; they represent the community and are asked here to make serious statements about the catechumens. The celebrant then represents the entire community in recommending them. The Book of the Elect may be signed at this rite, unless it is to be signed in the presence of the Bishop at the Rite of Election (RCIA 113). Intercessions are prayed for the catechumens, and the celebrant prays a prayer of blessing over them.

Like the catechumens, the candidates have been involved with the local community, so the community knows them and supports them. In the rite, they are presented to the celebrant by a priest, deacon, catechist, or representative of the community, who asks that the candidates be recognized for their progress and be sent with the community's blessings and prayers to the bishop for recognition. The sponsors, who, like the godparents, represent the community, give testimony about these candidates. Their role and the statements they make are also very serious. The celebrant affirms and sends them to the bishop. Because the candidates are already baptized, they do not sign the Book of the Elect. Intercessions are prayed for them, and the celebrant prays a prayer of blessing over them. There is a combined Rite of Sending, found in Appendix I of the RCIA text (RCIA 530ff).

Next the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion take place with the bishop, and the catechumens are now called elect and both they and the candidates move into the period of purification and enlightenment. The decision of a person to go through this gateway means that the discernment (of both the participant and the parish) of whether to enter the Catholic Church has now ended. As stated in RCIA 120, before the Rites of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion, participants should manifest:

- ✘ Conversion in mind and in action
- ✘ Sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching
- ✘ Sufficient acquaintance with faith and charity
- ✘ An intention to receive the sacraments of the Church

For the catechumens this gesture signifies that they have been called by Christ and attests to the reality that only those mystically claimed by Christ will enter heaven. St. John writes, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of

fire" (Rev 20:15) From this point forward, they are no longer catechumens but are called the elect. They have been chosen to enter into the final period of preparation for initiation, and called by their shepherd to the holy mysteries to be celebrated that Easter.

For the candidates, like all who have been baptized, this reality of being chosen and claimed by Christ took place at Baptism. Therefore the Rite of Election is inappropriate for them; they are *already* among the elect in Christ. Instead, the candidates are called to continuing conversion, and thus their intention to be fully initiated and share in the Eucharist is recognized, and the bishop exhorts them: "Hear the Lord's call to conversion and be faithful to your baptismal covenant" (RCIA 454). Together with the elect, the candidates are moved by this gateway into a period of intense spiritual preparation.

As participants then move into the final period of preparation for the sacraments, they do so having been diligently and profoundly nourished by the graces of the major and minor rites, genuinely assisting them in embracing the call that will be brought to its full measure through the purifying and enlightening graces of Lent.

Called to Holiness in Christ's Saving Work: Allowing Christ to Work through the Liturgy

As this discussion of the liturgical aspects of the catechumenate period concludes, it is worth recalling the end to which all this effort points. Liturgy is "the participation of the People of God in the work of God" (CCC 1069). It is in the liturgy that communion between God and his human creatures is made real because "as the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church" (CCC 1071). Communion is the goal of authentic liturgy. It is the *prime* means of insertion into the mystery of Christ. It is the "summit and source" of the Christian life (cf. SC 10), especially at its apex, the Eucharist, for it is there that Christ comes to dwell in us and we are drawn into the sharing of his divine life. "Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present" (CCC 1104; cf. CCC 1085; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5).

The liturgical rites of the Christian initiation process are foundational in the formation of RCIA participants, for in these rites they encounter Christ and are transformed by his grace. As Lent then opens up before the elect and candidates, the role of clergy, catechists, team and sponsors continues to be that of modeling, explaining, and inviting an ever more full participation in the sacred rites that crescendo towards the night that shines like the day: the Vigil of the Resurrection.

Abbreviations for Magisterial Documents used in the article:

AG *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, Decree on Missionary Activity in the Church, Second Vatican Council, December 7, 1965.

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, second edition, 1997.

GDC *General Directory for Catechesis*, Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1997.

RCIA *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), Editio Typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972.

SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council, December 4, 1963.

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