

## **Why Celebrate the Rites of Acceptance/Welcoming?**

### **The Parish Community is drawn into the conversion process!**

Every Catholic should be seeking conversion through a change of heart followed by a change of life. However, since we are creatures of habit, we need to be reminded often of the need to respond to God's grace, and to enter more deeply into a prayer relationship with Jesus, changing sinful patterns of life. What better way to draw a parish community into the conversion process than through a proper understanding and participation in the Major Rites of the RCIA process. For many parishes, the Rites of Acceptance (for the un-baptized) and Welcoming (for the baptized) will be celebrated during the Advent season. Below are a few suggestions offered to help the parish community understand what is being celebrated in these Rites:

- 1) The week before, give a simple explanation of the Rites and why they are happening.
- 2) Include information in the bulletin: inquirers are publicly declaring their intent to enter into a formal relationship with the Church; the inquirers receive actual grace from the Rite, which strengthens them on their path to full communion with the Church; now the Church will feed them richly on the Scriptures through celebrations of the Word (a full Liturgy of the Word should begin each catechetical session); they will receive blessings.
- 3) Provide a worship aide of the Rite of Acceptance/Welcoming.

In celebrating the combined rites for the un-baptized and baptized at Sunday Mass, there should be a distinct separation between the un-baptized and the baptized. This alone speaks to the community of the tremendous importance of the Sacrament of Baptism. "In the catechesis of the community and in the celebration of these rites, care must be taken to maintain the distinction between the catechumens and the baptized candidates" (RCIA 506).

In order to allow all present to be affected by these beautiful Rites, the inquirers should be invited to stand with their sponsors in a position so that the community is able to hear the questions - responses and witness the signing of the senses. While the senses are being signed by the sponsor, the priest says: "Receive the sign of the Cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord. Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God. Receive the sign of the Cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith. Receive the sign of the Cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do" (RCIA 56, 423, 514). This is a powerful moment for all Catholics present. These words touch the community to desire to hear Jesus more clearly, to see His glory and to enter more deeply into a relationship with Him.

The names of the catechumens and candidates are now made public and they are presented to the community for the first time. The Rite, in turn, asks the parish community to be a part of the process through their prayers, encouragement, and welcoming.

### **Liturgical Rites: Gateways and Sources of Grace for Conversion**

"The period of preparation is made holy by means of liturgical celebrations" (RCIA 405). The liturgical components of the Christian Initiation Process are the major and minor rites. The Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming are the major rites that are a gateway to the period of the Catechumenate. The minor rites in the period of the Catechumenate include: celebrations of the Word of God, minor exorcisms, blessings of the catechumens, anointing of the catechumens, blessings of the candidates. The Catholic Church has given us liturgical rites to lead people to deeper faith and conversion. The foundation of the Christian life is our receiving the grace of God to draw us to our first conversion and then to continue in daily on-going conversion. Through the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, actual grace is showered upon the inquirers and the mystery of God's Church is experienced. They are

given strength to continue on the path to enter the Church and receive the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Rites effect what they signify because they are drawn from the Rites of Initiation (ex. signing, anointing. The inquirer has been encouraged to respond to God's grace as the Sign of the Cross is made over the ears. He/she will now be able to better hear the voice of the Lord through Scripture etc.) The catechumens are unable to receive sanctifying grace but the Church gives them what St. Paul identifies as milk preceding solid food. They need and have a right to the grace that flows from the font of the Church's liturgy from the rites prior to full communion.

"The candidates should be instructed about the celebration of the liturgical rite of acceptance" (RCIA #42). People who are seeking the Sacrament of Baptism enter a formal relationship with the Church through this Rite. These are the first questions that the celebrant asks:

Celebrant: What do you ask of God's Church

Candidate's response: Faith

Celebrant: What does faith offer you?

Candidate's response: Eternal Life

Examples of teaching to the Rite: In order to properly prepare inquirers to celebrate this rite and give the appropriate responses, it is important for us to teach them what **Faith** is, how to get Faith, how Jesus Christ began the **Catholic Church**, what **eternal life** is, and why they would want it. These fundamental doctrines should be part of the catechesis leading to this Rite.

This gateway into the period of the Catechumenate is a powerful and prayerful event of grace. By their assent and obedience to Church teachings, they are entering into a relationship with the Church Who in turn feeds them richly on the Word of God and gives them blessings each week. These liturgical rites are the means by which the inquirers enter into intimate union with Christ and His Church. We cannot deprive them of this indispensable aid to conversion!

## **The Church Prays What She Believes**

The Liturgical Rites are at the heart of the Catechumenate. The Major and Minor Rites launch the inquirers into becoming liturgical people, sacramental people. Catechumenal Ministry is not about presenting information but delivering the Truths of our Faith in a way that should lead to prayer: Personal prayer but also liturgical prayer, the prayer of the Church community. Therefore, everything we teach needs to inform their liturgical practice.

Of course the inquirers need a systematic catechesis, pastoring, and help with developing a devotional life. However, the catechetical and pastoral aspects are at the service of the liturgy as all of this is necessary for a liturgical life. It is in the liturgy, more specifically in the sacraments and above all in the Holy Eucharist that we experience communion with Jesus Christ..

The rites express what the Church believes and therefore, every prayer, gesture, question and response, presentation, and intercessions are extremely important. We must not only give the catechumens and candidates the vocabulary and proper understanding to fully enter into the rites and live the authentic Catholic liturgical life, but we must also help our pew Catholics to grasp the full meaning of the Christian call to conversion.

"From this time on the Church embraces the catechumens as its own with a mother's love and concern. Joined to the Church, the catechumens are now part of the household of Christ, since the Church nourishes them with the Word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations. The catechumens should be eager, then, to take part in celebrations of the Word of God and to receive blessings and other sacramentals. When two catechumens marry or when a catechumen marries an unbaptized person, the appropriate rite is to be used. One who dies during the catechumenate receives a Christian burial" (RCIA 47). The Church should also surround the candidates with "special care and support as they prepare to be sealed with the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation and take their place at the banquet table of Christ's sacrifice" (RCIA 412). Catechumens and candidates have now entered into a truly serious relationship with the Catholic Church! Let us surround them with our prayers.