

Are you Ready to Move On?

An Exploration of the Period of Catechumentate

Opening Prayer

God gives light to everyone who comes into this world; though unseen, he reveals himself through the works of his hand so that all people may learn to give thanks to their Creator.

You have followed God's light and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you. Set your feet firmly on that path and acknowledge the living God, who truly speaks to everyone. Walk in the light of Christ and learn to trust in his wisdom. Commit your lives daily to his work, so that you may come to believe in him with all your heart.

This is the way of faith along which Christ will lead you in love towards eternal life.

From the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

Introduction

We have now come to the end of **Period 1 – The Period of Evangelisation and Precatechumenate aka The Period of Inquiry.**

During this phase you have been known as Inquirers.

The period of Inquiry has been a time for:

- Asking questions about the Catholic faith
- Building community within the group
- Developing a trusting atmosphere

More importantly, it is a time for:

- Examining God's presence in our lives, past and present
- Learning about prayer
- Fostering conversion
- Developing or improving our relationship with God
- Getting to know his Church

We have already covered a huge amount, including:

- A Tour Around the Church
- Catholic Practices and Rituals
- Catholics and the Mass
- Catholics and Mary
- Catholics and the Pope
- Catholics and Prayer
- Catholics and Confession / Reconciliation
- An Introduction to the Bible

The very important question you now need to ask is:

Am I now ready / willing / wanting to move on to the next period, the Period of the Catechumenate?

What is the Period of the Catechumenate?

A **catechumen** (from Latin catechumenus, Greek κατηχομενος , instructed) is one receiving instruction in the principles of the Christian religion with a view to baptism. For this reason those who are already validly baptised in another Christian Faith are not known as Catechumens, but rather Candidates.

⁷⁵ The Catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life.

This is achieved in four ways {paraphrased}:

1. Suitable catechesis; solidly supported by celebrations of the Word.
2. The Catechumens learning to:
 - Turn more readily to God in prayer
 - To bear witness to the Faith
 - In all things to keep their hopes set on Christ
 - To follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds
 - To practice the love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation
3. Suitable liturgical rites, which purify the Catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing; including celebrations of the Word.
4. Learning to work actively with others to spread the Gospel.

From the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

The period of the Catechumenate is a time for:

- Continuing to build community within the group
- Getting more involved in parish activities, getting to know the parish community
- Learning about the basic teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church
- Exploring important and foundational Scripture passages

More importantly, it is a time for:

- Continuing to examine God's presence in our lives, past and present
- Developing prayer life, entering into the communal worship of the parish
- Fostering conversion
- Developing or improving our relationship with God

This period can last from months to several years. In the early Church a three year period of formation was not uncommon!

The conclusion of this Period leads onto the Rite of Election for those who are unbaptised and the Rite of Calling the Candidates to Continuing Conversion for those who are baptised. This usually takes place at the Diocesan Cathedral.

Various Rites pertain to this period of instruction for those who are unbaptised [Catechumens]:

- Celebrations of the Word of God
- Minor Exorcisms
- Blessings of the Catechumens
- Anointing of the Catechumens

An optional Rite also pertains to this period for those who are baptised [Candidates]:

- Rite of Sending the Candidates for Recognition by the Bishop and for the Call to Continuing Conversion

The First Step – The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

This Rite is designed for those who are unbaptised.

Prior to this Rite those who are unbaptised and baptised are known as Inquirers. The Inquirers who are unbaptised enter the **Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens** as Candidates and emerge as Catechumens.

The outline of this Rite is as follows:

Receiving the Candidates:

- Greeting
- Open Dialogue
- Candidates First Acceptance of the Gospel
- Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly
- Signing of the Candidates with the Cross
- Concluding Prayer
- Invitation to the Celebration of the Word of God

Liturgy of the Word:

- Instruction
- Readings
- Homily
- [Presentation of a Bible] - optional
- Intercessions for the Catechumens
- Prayer over the Catechumens
- Dismissal of the Catechumens

This is a very significant step to make. So much so that having taken it the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults says: ⁴⁷ 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. [...] When two catechumens marry or when a catechumen marries an unbaptised person, the appropriate rite is to be used. One who dies during the catechumenate receives a Christian burial.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

¹²⁵⁹ For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.

The First Step – The Rite of Welcoming for Candidates

For those Inquirers who are baptised there is an alternative Rite. It is known as the **Rite of Welcoming for Candidates**. They enter this Rite as Candidates and are known by this title for the rest of the RCIA process.

The outline of this Rite is as follows:

Receiving the Candidates:

- Greeting
- Opening Dialogue
- Candidates' Declaration Of Intent
- Affirmation By The Sponsors And The Assembly
- Signing Of The Candidates With The Cross
- Concluding Prayer

Liturgy of the Word:

- Instruction
- Readings
- Homily
- Presentation Of A Bible
- Profession Of Faith
- General Intercessions
- Prayer Over The Candidates

Liturgy Of The Eucharist

Closing Prayer

These Catechumens, who are our brothers and sisters, have already travelled a long road. We rejoice with them in the gentle guidance of God who has brought them to this day. Let us pray that they may press onwards, until they come to share fully in our way of life.

From the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens