

How Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it.

Mystagogia *Part II* *Beyond Fifty Days:* *Why? What?*



Office of
Evangelization and Worship

The deepening of one grasp on the Paschal Mystery continues beyond fifty days. Incorporation continues beyond fifty days. Forming disciples takes a lifetime. While mystagogy is a formal period of the RCIA with its gatherings of the neophytes for the duration of the Easter season it is also named the *final* period, not signaling the end but rather naming the post-initiation season of life, mystagogy. The idea of faith formation as a lifelong process needs to be developed in our parishes because it is an issue of pastoral care. “Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States” stresses that the participants, themselves after having gone through such an intense initiation process, had a felt need for something beyond the formal process of initiation.

Mystagogical catechesis needs to continue beyond Easter’s fifty days. Spiritual development is at risk if formal faith formation is seemingly terminated. This ongoing, beyond the fifty days, faith formation requires a catechesis inspired and based on the principles derived from the baptismal catechumenate. Some of the fundamental tasks of this catechesis are as follows:

- To enable an ongoing participation in the sacramental life of the Church. There should be RCIA team members that are responsible for not only the fifty days of post-baptismal catechesis but also responsible for preparing the neophytes for post-baptismal sacraments. For example, since baptism forgives all sin, the celebration of the sacrament of penance is celebrated with the neophytes some time after baptism. The sacrament of reconciliation needs to have a systematic catechesis, that is “planned to be gradual and complete in coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word.” There should be time before hand to review and explain the theology and the rite and afterward a time of mystagogical reflection. Neophytes should never be simply told when the next parish communal celebration of reconciliation is taking place and asked to attend. The initial experience of reconciliation should be according to the first form, individual penance and eventually the neophyte participates in the parish’s communal celebration. The neophytes should also be prepared and have the chance to participate in the other post-baptismal sacraments, marriage, orders, anointing of the sick, in the same way.
- To promote knowledge of the faith based on the various aspects of the Paschal Mystery as it unfolds in the celebrations of the liturgical year, as it is proclaimed at the *table of the word* and professed in the creed. It should be remembered that the neophytes experience of catechesis is a ministry of the Word in an ecclesial context. It would be detrimental to faith development if the neophytes’ ongoing catechesis was solely an informational experience and not integrated and comprehensive.



Our catechesis needs mystagogy.

- To promote faith development that leads to ongoing conversion. Opportunities for promoting this would include parish missions, retreats, and spiritual direction.
- To have all activity permeated with a spirit of prayer. The newly-initiated need to be introduced to the Church's rich tradition of other forms of prayer, such as Morning and Evening Prayer, stations of the cross, the rosary, devotion to Mary and the saints. This formation must also include patterns of family prayer, popular devotional practices, the family's seasonal customs and the way Sunday is celebrated in the domestic church.
- To form genuine Christian communities. Such catechesis directs the neophyte to a deepening of their baptismal identity and that in gathering for the liturgy they stand as the Church, the people of God! Involving newly received members in parish ministries and incorporating them into small faith communities are some of the ways used to achieve this deepening and incorporation. It should be remembered that incorporation into parish liturgical ministries should be initially focused on the ministry of the assembly. Participation in and incorporation into the worship of the assembly takes time. Inviting the newly baptized to be special ministers of the eucharist or readers should be reserved for a later time. In the same way to invite the newly initiated to be catechists for any age group would be premature because of their own need for catechesis is great.
- To educate to a missionary dimension. Catechesis arouses a living faith that is expressed Sunday after Sunday in the dismissal mandate of the Eucharist: *Go in peace to love and serve the Lord*. The desires expressed by many (newly initiated) for more formation should demonstrate the need for parishes to have ongoing faith formation opportunities for all adults. The U.S. bishops' publication in 1999 of *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* should be a means of developing and strengthening this effort as it is implemented in diocese and parishes across the country. -From "Journey to the Fullness of Life" U. S. Catholic Conference

Why the Church Needs Mystagogy

The Church needs to do mystagogy not only because the neophytes need it but because the Church needs it. Our catechesis needs mystagogy. The restoration of the practice of mystagogy offers the Church an opportunity in making post-baptismal catechesis an ongoing enterprise for adults. The catechesis of adults is the "principal kind of catechesis." Maintaining the mystagogical principle will birth catechesis for adults as a means of pastoral care. This will eliminate our previous attempts at scheduling optional parish adult education to inform people about various areas of theology.

The Church's system of sacramental preparation needs mystagogy. Because the mystagogical principle belongs not only to the post-baptismal catechesis of the RCIA but the entire sacramental life of the Church, exploring mystagogy is a means of unleashing our sacraments from graduations to thresholds, a means of giving sacramental preparation programs the dimension of process. To omit a mystagogical reflection on the experience of the sacred mysteries as ritualized in the sacrament of first communion, confirmation, marriage, reconciliation or orders is to omit the opportunity for the translating of the sacramental moment to every day life. To omit post-sacramental catechesis perpetuates the notion that sacraments are a moment in time and that sacraments are ends and not beginnings!

Mystagogy rekindles an ancient role of the bishop. The RCIA call for a comprehensive participation of all levels of the parish and the Church. The rite calls for priests and deacons, catechists, the assembly, the entire parish community to a responsibility and participation in initiation. But in the tradition of mystagogical catechesis it is the bishops who were and are the "principal dispensers of the mysteries of God... those who lead others to holiness." The fourth century golden age of the catechumenate saw an engagement of bishops in the catechumenal process that has never been surpassed. Their participation in the faith journey of the whole people of God is of extreme importance. Episcopal shepherds must interpret the sacramental experience empowering all for mission.

The more the Church becomes reacquainted with mystagogy the more we will understand faith formation as ongoing, as belonging to cradle Catholics and those who are initiated during later seasons of their lives. The more the Church does mystagogy the more we deepen our grasp of our participation in the paschal mysteries of Christ. Mystagogy is the time that the newly initiates and the all the baptized derive new perceptions of faith, of the Church, and the world. It is vital to the ongoing faith formation of the newly initiated and it is vital to all the baptized people of God. Mystagogy is about life after baptism.

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