Into the Deep

Some of my earliest memories come from liturgical experiences. As a young boy (and even today), I was enamored with the sights, smells, and sounds of the liturgical act. The whole mysterious experience captured my imagination, and ultimately, it captured my heart. Encountering the risen Christ in the liturgy was and continues to be a profound blessing.

Over the years, as I’ve studied the liturgy, prayed the liturgy, and accompanied others struggling to see the face of Christ in the liturgy, I have come to appreciate the multifaceted signs and symbols of our communal prayer. They speak to everyone in one way or another! From the sprinkling with holy water, to the simple beauty of signing oneself with the Sign of the Cross, to the powerful witness of a catechumen being plunged into the waters of Baptism, the signs and symbols of the liturgy lead us into the depths of the Paschal Mystery. Peeling back layer after layer, discovering the riches of the rites, we come to know the very heart of Christ, which in turn transforms us more and more into his disciples.

In this issue of Catechumeneon Quarterly, we explore the role mystagogy plays in both Christian initiation and the life of all the baptized. Pope Francis reminds us that “Mystagogy means discovering the new life we have received in the People of God through the Sacraments, and continually rediscovering the beauty of renewing it” (speech given to the CDWDS, February 14, 2019). Yes, mystagogy leads us “into the deep”; mystagogical catechesis aims to lead the baptized through the mysteries to discover anew the risen Christ in their life, in the life of the Church, and in the life of the world.

Yet many parishes struggle to incorporate this approach into formation, not only for the neophytes, but also for all the baptized. Often initiation ministers continue to think of it as part of the “program” instead of part of the process of ongoing conversion.

As we look toward Lent, Easter, and the Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis, I invite you to think outside the box with the parish’s pastoral team about how mystagogy can be incorporated into the life of your community. How might you reach the neophytes differently to help them “break open” the mysteries they celebrate? How might you gather newly married couples, first communicants, and confirmands to mystagogically unpack the experience of the sacramental life of the Church? The liturgy provides an unending wellspring of rich signs and symbols that lead us into the deep.

Timothy A. Johnston
Editor and Liturgical Training Consultant

Join catechumenal ministers, pastoral leaders, and RCIA trainers from around the country as we gather to share experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the Church’s vision of the RCIA adapted for children of catechetical age.

Tracks offered in English and Spanish!

Visit NGCI.org for full conference details.
Mystagogy: Where Mystery Meets Ministry

Teresita Weind

(This article was first published in the May 1987 issue of Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation and has been edited for this issue of Catechumeneon Quarterly.)

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. . . .

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? (Matthew 25:34–35, 37)

This ageless question raised and resolved in the Gospel according to Matthew is central to mystagogy — the question of Christian ministry, the question of diakonia. Mystagogy is a meeting place where we penetrate the Easter mysteries of our faith and encounter the concrete. Mystagogy introduces the integration of belief and service. Janet Hunt, in her article “Coming Home: Mystagogy and Beyond” (Celebration, January 1983, p. 1), describes it in this way:

Mystagogy, a Greek word meaning “education in the mysteries,” identifies the seven-week period from Easter to Pentecost in which neophytes come to a deeper, fuller understanding of the mysteries of faith, especially of their new sacramental life.

The Gift

Everything is set and kept in motion by this overwhelming mysterious gift of God’s love. This gift made human in Jesus Christ grew through wisdom and grace, gained favor with God, became obedient to death on a cross, and reached the fullness of life and love in transforming union with the Creator. This same gift continues pouring the Holy Spirit on all those called to believe in the Risen Christ. This gift is the reality we celebrate all along our journey into the fullness of the Kingdom.

On the way, Christians learn about the life of conversion that marks a response to God’s initiative. Mystagogy focuses this response in the lives of those newly initiated into the Paschal Mystery. These neophytes, filled with Easter life, eagerly and enthusiastically seek out ways to witness to the wonders of the Lord. They are the ones who sing for happiness and cause others to admit that our God here among us keeps on doing wonders. They are the living testimony that God is our gladness. The neophyte, through a life of service, is an epiphany of our compassionate God.

Mystagogy is the final period of Christian initiation. It is the post-Easter fifty days or seven weeks completing the previous three stages of evangelization, catechesis, and sacramental initiation. Of course, the National Statutes for the Catechumenate says that the formal period of mystagogy “should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation” (24). This extension helps the neophyte and the whole community, rehearse for the ongoing mystagogy of life.

The Ongoing Response

The formal Period of Mystagogy is an intense time in which neophytes are called to bear witness to Christ through lives of spiritual worship, prophetic mission, and Christian service (see “An Expanded View of Ministry” by the Cincinnati Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, December 1986). During mystagogy neophytes strive to internalize the connection between what is celebrated in liturgy and what is acted out at home, at work, and at play. No one ever masters the mission. All during their lifetime Christians continue to discover new and deeper dimensions of their baptismal vocation. Faithful to this call, seasoned followers of Christ are continually drawn into mystagogy, a commitment, and recommitment to ministry. Mystagogy provides both a fresh start and a recentering for living out their baptismal promises.

Some liturgists have referred to this time as the “honeymoon” of initiation. In some ways, this term does not seem quite apt, however. I have never been married and consequently cannot comment from personal experience. But what I’ve learned about the period of the honeymoon leads me to believe that it is a time away from work, schedules, and community obligations. Mystagogy, on the other hand, moves forward where honeymoon stops. During the fifty days, the task is to “go to work,” “reach out,” and serve the community.
with a new consciousness and vigor. One word directs this new consciousness: faith. Easter faith shows us how to see death and life; mystagogy gives us time and space to try out our new vision. “Lord, when did we see you hungry?”

The Creative Tension of Death and Life

On December 22, 1986, Bill Conroy, a parishioner here at St. Catherine of Siena–St. Lucy Church, died of Lou Gehrig’s disease. Probably no death is ever “in season,” but this one seemed so ill-timed, right at the turning point of Advent to Christmas. What liturgist welcomes this intrusion? How bold of death to remind us that she walks in full partnership with life all the way to the Kingdom! Bill’s death broke in upon my Easter faith. His death made me realize that while Advent and Christmas may stand on their own in meaning, their deeper significance is found in their connection to the one central mystery of our faith, the Paschal Mystery. In every season, we try to hold fast to the life restored through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In every season, we try to gather all of our living into the paschal event where death and life are thrown together and held together in creative tension (see Andrew D. Ciferni, “Easter Is Three Days,” Hosanna: A Journal of Pastoral Liturgy, January 1979, p. 28). We profess this in our creed; we sing it in our songs:

We hold the death of the Lord deep in our heart.
Living, now we remain with Jesus the Christ.
(David Haas, “Now We Remain”)

In Bill’s death, the profession of faith in word and song became an experience of the interlocking of death and life. We celebrate this Passover ritually in the Sacred Triduum. Easter mysteries draw us into the continuing Passover from death to life. From Deuteronomy to Revelation we are cautioned to choose life. All who struggle with this option know that it implies a recognition of death and its surrender, detachment, abandonment, and loss.

On the third day, in sacramental initiation, we are restored to life and original dignity. As we move forward and begin acting from the place of restoration, we experience inside and outside the tension of death and life. The two seem locked in a wrestling match. Once restored, we profess that there is nothing to fear, not even death. But this assurance does not dismiss death. Mystagogy puts our faith to work in service, dying to ourselves in order to live in communion with Christ. This service quickly shows us whether our restored life is real enough, deep enough, sure enough, whole enough, and shared enough to hold death in balance rather than yield to its illusions of triumph or victory.

My Continuing Mystagogy

The experience of Bill’s death and burial during those last days of Advent was a mystagogical journey for me. The pain and joy, confusion and enlightenment, darkness and light, separation and communion—all these revealed to me a life big enough and great enough to embrace the reality of death. Denial and escape were not options. In the heart of the transition from Advent hope to Christmas joy was found the acceptance to acknowledge and embrace Sister Death. Apart from the context of faith, death seems so meaningless, so cruel, and so absurd. Connected to the liturgical cycle of life within us, death assumes its proper partnership with life. On this side of the Kingdom, the journey will always include the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual deaths that open the way to transformation.

We buried Bill the morning of December 24. Still in mourning, we changed the liturgical environment from Advent to Christmas; we welcomed and celebrated with our families at 6 pm in our traditional Christmas Eucharist. At midnight, we sang our joy to the world for the gift that destroyed death, restored life, and keeps coming to us in
glory. Far distant from the initial seven weeks, we were acting out our faith of mystagogy.

The interplay continued for me a few more days. The creative tension was so real as I visited with a friend on Christmas Day, and spent the day after Christmas with her, only to return home that evening to find our house burglarized. Where do we put this pain and loss if not into the vessel of life we share with those who have been baptized and reborn in Christ Jesus?

**Conclusion**

The interplay of life and death appropriately symbolizes mystagogy. It is this dynamic that brings us face to face with the unearned, unmerited, undeserved gift of life and the surrender of control that is required of all who truly trust in the Lord. In the marketplace, our home, and our church, mystagogy gives us the time to grow into what is expected of those whose lives are transformed by the Paschal Mystery. Inside God, inside the mystery that is bigger than any and all of us, we learn to serve and be served, respect one another, bond with others apart from domination and dependency—to use the terms of Madonna Kolbenschlag—and celebrate our differences rather than become paralyzed by prejudice or a conflict of “isms."

**The liturgy teaches the mind through the senses, the heart through the emotions, the individual by aid of the social, the human through the divine. It answers the whole person, body and soul, heart and mind—and is the one complete and genuine form of the holy grail so earnestly sought today: religious experience.**


Easter—and Christmas, its winter counterpart—brings us to the heart of the mystery of gratuitous life and abundant giving. Bill’s death broke into our Christmas schedules. And it paved the way for the overwhelming gift of God’s love. God keeps coming so that we may have life and have it more abundantly (see John 10:10). All of us who knew Bill and heard him pray on Thanksgiving Day for a miracle now know that we received an answer to his prayer. He died almost a month to the date of his prayer. In his death, we were drawn up into another loving embrace of Easter life.

Because of Bill’s goodness and life, we were sent out again to serve. Bill was a man of justice and peace. He showed us the nonviolent and gentle way to address and confront some of the evils of our day. His period of mystagogy shaped him as a faithful disciple of Jesus and his ministry of peace shaped us. It seems in mystagogy we all learn the mystery and the ministry from each other. Bill knew—and now we know better than before—Jesus Christ is the Way. As Walter Hawkins sings:

> When I think about the hour, then I know what I must do,
> When I think about what God has done for me;
> I will open up my heart to everyone I see,
> And say, Jesus Christ is the Way.
> No one knows the day, nor the hour,
> Maybe morn, night or noon.
> But just rest assured, time will be no more,
> He is coming soon.
> I will open up my heart to everyone I see,
> And say: Jesus Christ is the Way.
> (Jesus Christ Is The Way)

**TERESITA WEIND, SNDден, is the congregational leader for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. She is the former pastoral associate and catechumenate director for St. Catherine and St. Lucy Church, Oak Park, Illinois. This talk was given at the Southwest Liturgical Conference, Beaumont, Texas, in January 1987. Used with permission of Sister Virgil Kummer, OP, conference coordinator.**
Deepening Our Paschal Identity in Christ

Anne C. McGuire, PhD

(This article was first published in Pastoral Liturgy, vol. 37, no. 1, and has been edited for this issue of Catechumeneon Quarterly.)

Every spring the Church calls us together to celebrate the primary mystery of our Catholic faith: God’s saving love in the Paschal Mystery. As Catholics, we sing, we process, we listen, we reflect, we gather, we leave, we reconvene, we pray, we lament, we rejoice. We do this with Christ, with the disciples, and with the Church throughout the world. The Triduum (Latin for “Three Days”) both expresses and celebrates the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s saving death and Resurrection. Through the celebration of the Triduum, we profoundly deepen our understanding of our core identity as Christians, people who have died and risen in Christ.

In early Christianity, the identity of the community was rooted in the understanding that Jesus Christ was the mediator of the divine-human experience. All of life was rooted in who Jesus Christ was, how he lived, and what his living-dying-rising experience meant for those who called themselves Christian. Baptism, community, and eventually the ritual experiences of Triduum grew from their identity in the Paschal Mystery.

The earliest expression of this is captured in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans (6:3–11), which begins with an important question: “Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Paul goes on to remind us that “if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” Part of this experience of “living in Christ” takes place here and now as we deepen our union with Christ and one another. It is the ritual expression of participation in the Paschal Mystery that is proclaimed, ritualized, and owned by the worshipping community over the course of this unitive feast of Three Days, the core feast of the liturgical year.

The Triduum begins on Holy Thursday with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, the community’s entrance into this experience. The focus of the liturgy is multifaceted: entrance into the Triduum, remembrance of the Passover supper, foot washing, institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. Each focus provides the community with a connection to an original biblical experience and a realization of that experience in our lives today.

The Passover ritual celebrated by Christ and the disciples is newly proclaimed in the institution of the Eucharist. It becomes Christ’s body and blood, broken and poured out for us, unifying the community in both the proclamation of the word and the reception of Holy Communion as well as in the procession with the Blessed Sacrament to the altar of repose. The foot washing extends the proclamation of John’s Gospel into a ritual that connects those gathered today with Jesus, who celebrated this ritual and this meal with the apostles in the upper room. Jesus is not only addressing Peter and the apostles when he says, “Do you realize what I have done for you?” (John 13:12). We are all searching for understanding, hoping to adequately “realize” what Jesus is doing and saying and being for us.

On Good Friday, the focus of the liturgy is again multifaceted: the image of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Passion from Saint John’s Gospel, the outpouring of love in the veneration of the cross, solemn intercessions for all God’s people, and the reception of Holy Communion. In giving ourselves to the Scripture story, we recall in some of our ritual movements the “stational” liturgies of the early Church in the Holy Land, during which the people visited the places of Jesus’ last days, processing from station to station (holy site
to holy site), venerating relics, and immersed in prayers of remembrance. We experience these patterns of prayer and remembrance as immersion into the Paschal Mystery.

As the Good Friday liturgy begins in silence, the community continues the process of remembering its identity in Christ. Just as Jesus made use of the rituals of the Passover supper and transformed them into the Eucharist, so too the Suffering Servant of Isaiah becomes the crucified Christ, who transformed the wood of the cross by his death and Resurrection into the Tree of Life and the Cross of Glory. The veneration of a relic of the True Cross, of the wood that we “behold,” is at the heart of the assembly’s expression of faith this day. The cleansing (washing) of the feet the evening before is united this day with the cross: we are all cleansed by the blood of the cross. We know that the empty cross, testifying to Christ’s Resurrection, is the Cross of Glory and the sacrifice of Christ is transformed into a victory for all humankind. Hence, we rediscover the depth of the meaning found in the Paschal Mystery.

Death has no more power over us. Through Christ’s death, we shall be united in the Resurrection. Good Friday is a day when we identify with Jesus in his death, but not without the knowledge (both head and heart knowledge) that he has handed himself over to us in the Eucharistic bread and wine at the same time he has handed himself over to the Father. We identify with Jesus’ death, knowing that the meaning of his death is incomplete without the fulfillment of the Resurrection. Good Friday, then, while at the center of the liturgical Paschal Mystery, is “to be continued” the next evening as we gather for the Easter Vigil.

This is the night. Our earliest theologians and ancient liturgical texts tell us of this night of celebration, mystery, and paschal continuity that we have inherited. It is the “Mother of all Vigils,” St. Augustine tells us, when we proclaim Christ as our Light. It is the night of all nights when, in the joyful singing of the Exsultet, we proclaim this night as one that transcends time. This night unites the Exodus experience of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea with the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. It unites the Resurrection of Christ with “Christians everywhere” proclaiming their joy. It is a night of rejoicing in who we are: paschal Christians.

The liturgical experience of the Easter Vigil is rich with the echoes of the Holy Thursday and Good Friday liturgies and builds on their foundations. The memorable readings from Scripture root us in the earliest paschal expressions of faith using a montage of images: creation, sacrifice, covenant, death, new life, salvation, and restoration; Exodus passage through death to life, a call to rebirth through water and the spirit, hearts of stone renewed into hearts of flesh. These biblical typologies remind the twenty-first-century community that our roots are deep, giving power and life to our contemporary communities of faith.

The baptismal nature of the Easter Vigil continues to remind us of our paschal identity. We are baptized into the death of our Lord and rise with him to newness of life. Those who are baptized this night join the community of the faithful as we recall and renew our own Baptism. This is who we are and what we are to be: paschal Christians living, dying, and rising daily with Christ. The Easter Vigil proclaims this paschal character in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist as well as in the alleluias, the festive colors, and our attitude of joyful praise and thanksgiving. We rejoice and exult together that Christ is risen and that we are privileged to share the identity of the risen Christ in the world!

Easter Sunday extends the joy of the Easter Vigil. Now the community elaborates on the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery begun at the Vigil. We rejoice! Alleluia! This is particularly evident in the Easter sequence and the renewal of baptismal promises, the sprinkling of the congregation, and the possible Baptism of additional members into the community. The Paschal Mystery is our heritage and our identity, our root metaphor and our common bond. As the entrance antiphon for Easter Sunday proclaims, the Lord has indeed arisen, alleluia!

ANNE MCGUIRE, is the Kies Family Professor of Humanities and Associate Professor and Chair of Religion at Haverford College, Haverford, PA.
The Period of Mystagogy is difficult to maintain for fifty days let alone for a full year as the National Statutes ask. What practical advice can you offer to help parishes and families implement this period and live mystagogically?

Sarah, you are not alone in this struggle. I am sure many readers (and certainly many whom I’ve encountered over the years) ask a similar question. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides only eight paragraphs for the Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis, and unlike the other periods, the rite doesn’t provide a clear “how to” or rubrics for this period. This can be overwhelming (and exhausting) if this task is the sole responsibility of the RCIA coordinator.

I think a helpful starting point is to look at the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which describes mystagogy as “liturgical catechesis that aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ” (1075). If this is true, maybe we’ve been overthinking it all these years; maybe we need to step back and reflect on these simple words and unpack them with the RCIA team or parish’s pastoral team. The primary aim of mystagogy is to lead people into deeper communion with Christ. Often, initiation ministers can be caught in a “program” mode and feel as if they have to have “classes” or more structured meetings like were held during the Period of the Catechumenate. Maybe another vision or pathway is possible?

In Evangelii gaudium, Pope Francis reminds us that mystagogy is “a progressive experience of formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation” (166; emphasis mine). What Pope Francis and the Catechism help us understand is that postbaptismal catechesis is lifelong and that the mindset of a parish community and its approach to formation may need to be assessed and reimagined. The rite and the National Statutes do call for an extended experience, up to a full liturgical year, as you noted. There is wisdom here, but it’s not calling us to meet weekly for a class or session necessarily. Rather, it is an invitation of accompaniment where godparents, team members, and the parish community walk together to mine the rich experience of initiation.

Like Augustine, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Cyril of Jerusalem, we are called to accompany the baptized in breaking open the mystery and revealing, like what happens in lectio divina, what God is inviting us to see, to hear, to embody, to encounter, etc. in this time and in this place. The rite tells us that mystagogy is “a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and in doing the works of charity” (244; emphasis mine).

Practically, the initiation team, along with the pastoral staff, can ask where this is already happening in the life of the parish. The Sunday Eucharist, for example, is the primary place for catechesis, meditating on the Gospel, and sharing in the Eucharist, which sends the baptized on missions to love and serve neighbor. Is this happening in your community? Is the liturgy celebrated well to rouse the heart and mind? Is the preaching pertinent and mystagogical, especially during Easter? Are there groups that serve the local soup kitchen or food bank, or visit the sick and dying? If so, how can neophytes (and newly married couples and confirmands, for example), be invited to share in this ministry. The key is then to break open the experience of Mass and of mission, and of the Gospel, not just with the neophytes, but also with the entire community. The role of the catechist (or mystagogue) is to connect these experiences to the sacramental life of the Church (e.g., How is visiting the homeless related to anointing with Chrism and why?) revealing various facets of the Paschal Mystery. The main thing in the yearlong Period of Postbaptismal Catechesis is to ensure there are opportunities for the neophytes and the whole parish family to meditate on the Gospel, participate in the Church’s liturgy, and grow as missionary disciples. This is the parish’s agenda or curriculum, if you will. Once this is in place, it can really shape the overall vision of formation for the parish so that anyone who celebrates a sacrament has an opportunity (or develops the skills) to mystagogically reflect and peel back the layers to discover the very heart of the matter, the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

Sarah S.

TIMOTHY A. JOHNSTON holds an MA in liturgical studies from St. John’s School of Theology and Seminary and an MA in Christian doctrine from Marquette University. He currently serves as an editor and liturgical training consultant at Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago.

Searching for best practices? Email training@ltp.org if you have a question that you would like answered by one of the Catechumeneon team members.
Great Is the Mystery: Encountering the Formational Power of the Liturgy
Joe Paprocki and D. Todd Williamson

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “the liturgy is . . . the privileged place for catechizing the People of God” (1075). This book is an invitation to that privileged place, the liturgy, where we encounter the great mystery of Christ that must be at the heart of our catechesis. This book is about the great mystery that is God and our encounters with God and God’s saving love for us.

This book is for all those engaged in mystagogia—the kind of catechesis and formation that is the result of careful attention to and reflection on the celebration of the Church’s liturgy (e.g., Mass, Baptism, Marriage, and funerals). This is a wonderful resource for catechists and liturgists who seek to help those with whom they work to enter deeply into the mystery of God.

What people are saying . . .

Too often in our parishes and dioceses, catechesis remains disconnected from liturgy, and vice versa. I am immensely grateful for the work of Joe Paprocki and Todd Williamson in bridging that gap. Utilizing story, reflection, Scripture, and the rich tradition of Catholic teaching—centered on the Paschal Mystery—they uncover the connections between liturgy and catechesis in the life of the Church. Great Is the Mystery is an invaluable resource for catechetical and liturgical leaders seeking to know what we celebrate and celebrate what we know.

—Jonathan F. Sullivan
Director of Parish Ministries, Services, and Catechesis Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana

This remarkable book is an artistic blending of personal storytelling and carefully researched history of the Church’s liturgy as the setting of encounter with the mystery of God in our lives. For teachers, catechists, and Catholics who want to know more about the development of the liturgical life of the Church, this book is highly informative and readable. Great Is the Mystery draws the reader to the beauty of the Paschal Mystery, and can be used as a catechetical resource throughout the year.

—Esther Hicks
Director of Catholic School Identity and Mission
Archdiocese of Chicago

Available now
Order code: GIM | $19.95
Paperback | 7 x 10
www.lfp.org
CHAPTER 12

THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

How Did the Cross Become Beautiful?

It is hard to remember that the cross, now a familiar symbol of Christianity, was once the means of brutal capital punishment. Today, we use crosses as decoration. We wear them on our clothing and jewelry. We often romanticize the image of the cross by decorating it with flowers or jewels. Children and young people sometimes make the cross “cute,” coloring it in bright colors on sheets of paper or as decoration on notebooks or backpacks. This can lead us to forget what it truly means to prominently display a crucifix in each of our churches. It would be as if you walked into a church and saw a large figure of a dead man strapped to an electric chair displayed prominently for all to see. The image, on its own, is not beautiful or comforting; we find beauty and comfort in its message.

“The Cross is the utterly incommensurable factor in the revelation of God. We have become far too used to it. We have surrounded the scandal of the Cross with roses. Our faith begins at the point where atheists suppose that it must end. Our faith begins with the bleakness and power which is the night of the Cross, abandonment, temptation, and doubt about everything that exists!”

(Ronald Rolheiser, The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God)

The crucifix does indeed symbolize ultimate victory. Yet, unlike other symbols of victory that display a powerful, conquering figure who is in control of the situation, the crucifix displays defeat and loss. Jesus conquers death not with the force of an army, but with surrender. Jesus’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection are not something that he accomplishes. Rather, he allows it to happen to him. As Richard Rohr reminds us, “We are, after all, the only religion that worships the victim.” The meaning of the Cross is that we find salvation only in letting go and entering into the mystery. We find salvation only when we dismiss the idea that somehow we are in control and can do something to earn it. We find salvation when we come face to face with defeat and realize that God has already been there through his only Son who died for us. The crucifix brings us face to face with the real meaning of life which, as Ronald Rolheiser says, is understood more by not understanding than by understanding. When we come face to face with ultimate mystery and bow in reverence, trusting that God is somehow at work and present in whatever we are experiencing, we have discovered the meaning of the Cross.
“O marvelous power of the cross! O ineffable glory of the passion! There we find the tribunal of the Lord, there the judgment of the world, there the power of the crucified! You have drawn all things to yourself, Lord, and when you stretched out your hands one whole day toward a people who did not believe in you and persisted in discrediting you, the whole world acquired the understanding to confess your majesty!

. . . [Y]our cross is the source of all blessings, the source of all graces; through it, from their weakness, the faithful receive strength, from shame, glory, from death, life. Now, in truth, when the array of sacrifices of the flesh have come to an end, the unique offering of your Body and your Blood swallows up all the differences between the victims; for you are the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and you accomplish in yourself all the mysteries, so that all the peoples may form a single kingdom, just as all the victims gave way to one sole sacrifice.”

(Pope St. Leo the Great, De Passione Domini)

“O God, who willed that your Only Begotten Son / should undergo the Cross to save the human race, / grant, we pray, / that we, who have known his mystery on earth, / may merit the grace of his redemption in heaven.”

(Collect, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, The Roman Missal)

REFLECTION

» September 14 is the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. Use the occasion as an opportunity to reflect deeply upon the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ in our lives and in our worship.

» Spend some time reflecting about the idea of being “branded” or claimed by Christ with the Sign of the Cross. Incorporate the action of signing yourself with the Sign of the Cross into your daily experience.

» Reflect upon what it truly means to identify yourself with Christ. Read the letter of Paul to the Philippians 2:6–11 and reflect upon what it means to sign yourself with the Sign of the Cross that Jesus humbly accepted.

» Pay attention to all of the places in which you see a cross displayed or worn on a typical day. Each time you encounter one, pause for a moment to reflect upon how that cross has claimed you for Christ.

» In Baptism, you were marked numerous times with the sign of Christ’s cross with the following words repeated: “Receive the sign of the cross . . .” What do these words mean to you? What does it mean that Christ claims you? What does it mean to identify with Christ and to belong to him? How does this sign separate you or set you apart?

» Where in your life are you experiencing, or have you experienced, Christ’s cross? How did you, or how might you now, surrender the idea that this cross is a sign of God’s abandonment of you in your need? How does surrendering that notion help you to experience transformation?
CHAPTER 16

THE MYSTERY OF DISMISSAL AND DISCIPLESHIP

A Minor Rite with Major Implications

In its simplest form, the Concluding Rites of the Mass can be accomplished with a minimum of 34 words, a Sign of the Cross, a procession, and a song. All told, this simple rite can come and go in the blink of an eye, literally taking little more than 60–90 seconds.

Priest: The Lord be with you.
People: And with your spirit.
Priest: May almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
People: Amen.
Priest: Go forth, the Mass is ended.
People: Thanks be to God.

(Concluding Rites, The Roman Missal)

So why devote an entire chapter to something so seemingly insignificant? Simply because there is nothing minor or insignificant about being sent forth on a mission from God. For fans of classic comedy films, that phrase, “on a mission from God,” conjures up images of Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi in The Blues Brothers. In that movie, Jake and Elwood Blues tirelessly (and hilariously) struggle to raise money to save an orphanage because, as they are fond of saying, they are “on a mission from God.”

In a very serious and literal way, we Catholics are on a mission from God—a mission that was bestowed upon us the day we entered the waters of Baptism. As disciples of Christ, we are entrusted with proclaiming the Good News to the ends of the earth. Each time we gather for the Eucharist, we are renewed, instructed, fortified, challenged, and commissioned to carry out this mission. The Concluding Rites, although brief and simple, are the punctuation mark that sends us forth so that we might resume “good works, praising and blessing God.” The Concluding Rites of the Mass need not be elaborate since the preceding rites, specifically the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, very clearly, adequately, and eloquently articulate our mission. Like runners who have prepared thoroughly for a race through drills and strategy sessions, we need only to hear, so to speak, the sound of “on your mark, get set, go!” in order to know exactly where our feet should be taking us next.
Mission: Possible

In the classic TV and movie saga, *Mission: Impossible,* Mr. Phelps, the main character and leader of the Impossible Mission Force, was the regular recipient of a recorded message. The voice on the recording would identify in detail the task they were being assigned. The voice would then say, “Your mission, should you decide to accept it, . . .” followed by a description of the complex strategies to be followed in order to defeat the evil forces at work. Finally, after all the complex details (including the famous “this tape will self-destruct in five seconds”), the voice simply said, “Good luck, Jim.” With those simple concluding words, the real work of making an impossible mission possible began.

In much the same way, the Concluding Rites at Mass send us forth with a few simple words to begin the real work of undertaking what may seem like an impossible mission: bringing the Good News of Jesus into every aspect of our lives and world. Like the *Mission: Impossible* tape that dissolves in smoke when the message is concluded, leaving no trace of itself behind, our ritual celebration of the Eucharist “dissolves” as we are dismissed from a now-empty altar, leaving no external trace of the bread and wine that only moments earlier was before our very eyes. Filled with the Body and Blood of Jesus and “armed” with the Good News, we set forth to proclaim our firm belief that with God, all things are possible!

Unlike the Impossible Mission Force, who concealed their identity in order to accomplish their goal, we boldly reveal our identity as disciples of Christ. We leave in union, knowing that without one another’s support and strength, this mission would indeed be impossible. We leave with a song of praise on our lips, announcing for all who would hear that we are indeed on a mission and that we will indeed overcome all obstacles.

“Go!”

If you look closely at the last words said by the priest or deacon in the Concluding Rites, you will not find the words “Let us go” but only “Go forth.” This final utterance is not a suggestion or invitation to be considered by those present but, rather, a command, a mandate, an imperative. We were told very clearly that the work of the Body of Christ has only begun here in church. The bulk of the work of the people is now to take place in the streets, neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, workplaces, and communities of our world. We are “on assignment.”

The following story illustrates this sense of mission. A priest was once taking a group of children on a tour of the church. At one point, he asked the young people to point out what they thought was the most important location in the church, hoping to use the opportunity to explain the altar, the tabernacle, and so forth. Before anyone else could raise a hand, a young man blurted out, “The exit sign!” The priest, somewhat perturbed by what he thought was a wisecrack, invited the young man to explain why he thought the exit sign was so important. Without hesitation the boy replied, “Because that’s where we’re supposed to take the Gospel!”

With this in mind, we are indeed dismissed to carry out our mission. In fact, the very word *Mass* is derived from the Concluding Rites. In Latin, the priest or deacon says, *`Ite, missa est!"* which means, literally, “Go, (the assembly) is dismissed!” It is this
Training and Events Calendar

Virtual Workshops™

The Essentials of Christian Initiation

All classes take place from 8:00 – 9:30 PM ET.

Registration fee is $150 per person.

Track One: An Introduction to the RCIA
February 1 – March 8, 2021
The course guides participants through the various periods and steps of the RCIA through the lens of conversion, evangelization, and discipleship. Additionally, sessions will include the principles of initiation ministry and the role of the baptized faithful in the catechumenal process.

Track Two: The Initiation Team: Recruiting, Training, and Ministry
October 19 – November 30, 2020
This will help new and veteran ministers consider the role of a parish team, help them reflect on recruiting and maintaining a team, as well as the role formation plays in developing a team. Sessions will include team selection, discernment of gifts, involving the parish community, and the spiritual formation of initiation ministers.

For more information or to register, visit www.Catechumeneon.org

In-Person Training

Diocesan Events

March 9–10, 2020
The Catechumen’s Journey: An Overview of the Initiation Process
Diocese of Ogdensburg
Crowne Plaza Lake Placid, Lake Placid, NY

August 7–8, 2020
The Vision of Christian Initiation (Two Tracks: English and Spanish)
[Pre-Gathering Workshop for Leaders (English only): August 7, The Year-Round Catechumenate]
Diocese of Richmond
Roslyn Retreat Center, Richmond, VA

To register for any of these events, please visit https://catechumeneon.org/events.

Contact us at training@LTP.org if you are interested in hosting a workshop, institute, or retreat.

Regional Events

June 22–26, 2020 | Chicago, IL
Initiating Adults into Christ: A Practical, Theological, Liturgical, and Catechetical Endeavor
Note: Catechumeneon team members are involved in presenting this course.
Catholic Theological Union
https://ctu.edu/summeratctu

National Events

July 7–10, 2020 | Louisville, KY
Annual Convention: National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM)
Note: Catechumeneon team members are presenting the following sessions: The Sacraments: Assessing our Parish Celebrations of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation; Meaningful Ways to Celebrate the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; Preparing Sacramental Liturgies: Rubrics and Adaptations; The Joy in Parish Baptisms!
In-Person Training Opportunities

With *Catechumeneon*, LTP offers assistance to parishes and dioceses as they seek to train and form ministers around Christian initiation. We invite you to consider hosting one of our training events to help your catechumenal ministers and parish leaders deepen their understanding and vision of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*.

These pages provide an overview of the in-person and virtual training that you can host in your parish, diocese, or region.

For more information, contact us at training@ltp.org or call 773-579-4900, ext. 3536.

### 1-Day Workshops

Whether you are interested in a basic overview or a detailed explanation of specific topics, work with us to sponsor a one-day RCIA workshop. Workshops can be presented in English and/or Spanish.

**Topics include:**
- The Principles of Initiation Ministry
- An Overview of the RCIA: The Steps and Periods
- RCIA and Baptized Candidates
- The Vision of the RCIA Adapted for Children
- Implementing and Sustaining the Year-Round Catechumenate
- Diocesan Workshop for Deacons
- Diocesan Workshop for Priests
- Other intermediate and advanced topics available upon request

### 2-Day Institutes

The two-day institutes are intensive training events with five presentations each day. These institutes are foundational in nature and are designed for those who have limited experience or training in the RCIA. Experienced ministers are always welcome to join, share their knowledge and experience, and serve as mentors to others in ministry.

**Topics include:**
- The Principles of Initiation Ministry
- An Overview of the RCIA
- Collaborate with LTP to create customized institute topics

### 3-Day Retreats

The RCIA is a spiritual journey for both the catechumens and the parish community. It is an extended time of prayer and formation during which the unbaptized candidates are apprenticed in faith to the baptized faithful. Conducted in a retreat-like manner, this training event will offer participants an experiential understanding of the RCIA as they walk through its periods and rites. Together they will participate in catechesis, ritual celebration, and apostolic witness adapted from the vision of the RCIA.
Virtual Training Opportunities

Virtual Workshops™ offer engaging and professional training and formation for liturgical ministers, catechists, and parish staffs. Participants gather virtually for 90 minutes of training, dialogue, and reflection. All Virtual Workshops™ utilize several multimedia components at once, including live video, short films, presentation slides, chat boxes, handouts/downloads, discussion boards, and polls.

LTP offers the opportunity for your parish, diocese, or region to contract a closed session of any of our Virtual Workshops™.

**Participation models include:**
- Individual participation from home computer or mobile device
- Group participation with several people gathered from a parish meeting room or select satellite sites around the diocese
- Hybrid model that blends both of these options

**Topics include:**
- An Introduction to the RCIA: Exploring the Process and the Vision
- Developing Your Parish’s Initiation Ministry Team
- The Vision of the RCIA Adapted for Children
- Preparing the Liturgies of the RCIA
- Involving the Parish Community in the RCIA
- Effective Catechesis in the RCIA: Forming Disciples through Adult Learning Methods

For more information on any of these offerings, visit [www.Catechumeneon.org](http://www.Catechumeneon.org)

Catechumeneon Quarterly is published by Liturgy Training Publications 3949 South Racine Avenue, Chicago, IL 60609; website: www.LTP.org CQ03

Virtual Formation Retreats

These virtual gatherings will provide spiritual and practical formation while helping participants deepen their understanding of their ministry. Envisioned to be held on a Saturday morning, a diocese or clusters of parishes may bring participants together in various host sites. For those who are unable to attend in person because of distance or other circumstances, they can attend virtually from their home computer or mobile device.

**Retreats for:**
- Sponsors and Godparents
- Parish Leaders

Virtual Workshops™ for Clergy

In collaboration with the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC), LTP has developed a series of Virtual Workshops™ specifically designed for the ongoing formation of priests.

Choose from a list of workshops or create one that works for your diocese. You determine the date and time, and LTP will provide the technical assistance and promotional material needed to make your virtual training experience a success.

**Virtual Workshops™ for Priests include:**
- An Overview of the RCIA: Exploring the Rites of Christian Initiation
- The Priest as Shepherd of Christian Initiation
- Revitalizing Your Parish’s Initiation Ministry Team
- Preparing and Presiding: The Rites of Christian Initiation
- Pastoral Counseling and Discernment in the RCIA
- Marriage, Annulments, and Other Canonical Issues in the RCIA Process

For more information on any of these offerings, visit [www.Catechumeneon.org](http://www.Catechumeneon.org)