Introduction to RCIA 2014

The Road Ahead - Prayer of Thomas Merton

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, will I trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

I would like to welcome all of you to RCIA at St Teresa of Avila Catholic Church.

I know from past experience that you are here for many reasons. Some have already decided to convert to Catholicism while others are simply curious and are here to learn more about the Catholic faith. Still others are already Catholic and have joined us as a refresher in the Faith.

But is important for each of you to know that you are here tonight because God called you by name and you have chosen to answer His call. The initiative is always God's and never our own.

God has created each of you to be unique, and he loves you just as you are with all of your imperfections. Yet God desires that each of us develop a more intimate relationship with him.

We accomplish this through prayer, scripture, and worship, which include our participation in the sacraments.

Since you are not yet in full communion with the Church, you cannot participate in the sacraments. However, you are strongly encouraged to attend Mass weekly and on Holy Days of Obligation. I further encourage you to come forth at Communion to receive a blessing from the Priest, Deacon, or Eucharistic Minister. This will help to build a sense of community.
RCIA is the acronym for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

RCIA is the process by which adults enter the Catholic Church. We do this through the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

If you paid close attention to what I just said you would have noted that I described RCIA as a process not a program. It is a spiritual journey and not an academic course. We will not be teachers in the strict sense of the word. There will be no tests. There are no textbooks.

Over the next several months a variety of speakers will be sharing truths and beliefs dealing with the customs, traditions and practices of the Catholic Church.

Weekly we will be sharing scripture and prayer.

RCIA is a journey of spiritual growth just as much as it is a process of learning about the Church.

RCIA is NOT a course in theology though you will learn aspects of theology along the way. It is NOT a course of Church History though you will learn much about the history of our Church. It is not a Bible Study though weekly you will share scripture as we break open the Word of God.

RCIA is a spiritual journey that will culminate at the Easter Vigil Mass when many of you will enter the Church.

Ours will be a journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Next week you will hear about the faith journey of a few members of our team and I am hopeful that some of you will feel comfortable enough to tell your own stories.

No one on the RCIA team will ever pressure you to enter the Church. The choice is yours hopefully under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The first stage, which is where we begin tonight, is referred to as the Stage of Inquiry or the Pre-catechumenate. This is the period before a firm decision or commitment has been made to join the Catholic Church. This is the time to ask questions and check things out before a decision is made. One cannot rush this decision. This is a journey that takes as long as it takes.

The second stage is the Catechumenate. Those who decide to enter the Church and are being trained for a life in Christ are called catechumens. The term catechumen finds its origin from the early Church. In this stage, you are developing your faith and are being "catechized".
To Catechize is a form of religious instruction to learn the "catechism" which is the basic points about Catholic faith and life.

A Catechumen has not yet been baptized. In this stage one who has previously been baptized (Catholic or Non-Catholic with a few exceptions) is referred to as a candidate. As Catholics, we believe in one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

Our third stage is that of Purification and Enlightenment. During this stage you will be known as the “Elect.” This is a stage of more intense spiritual formation: A time for prayer and spiritual discernment. This stage coincides with the liturgical season of Lent.

Our last stage is that of Mystagogia where we concentrate on the mysteries of the Church. During this stage you will be referred to as neophytes but you will be in full communion with the Church having completed the three sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil Mass.

Each of these stages is separated by a liturgical rite:
   - Rite of Acceptance and Welcome
   - Rite of Election
   - Rites of Initiation

I strongly encourage you to gather together as a community at each of these services.

The goal of RCIA is not just a preparation to enter the Church but a spiritual conversion that will help you to meet all of life’s challenges along your spiritual journey. A journey that began when you were “knitted in your mother’s womb” by God and ends when you see God face to face.

Your ultimate goal will be a more perfect union with God.

Initiation has two meanings.

- A beginning, the beginning of your spiritual journey as new Catholics.
- Initiation also suggests joining a club or becoming a member of a group as in an initiation into a sorority or fraternity or a club. In this case you are being initiated into the faith community of St Teresa of Avila as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

This concept of community is very important and we will discuss it more at a later date. But for now take comfort in knowing that with every step of your journey you will be supported by your faith family of St. Teresa’s both in prayer and action if needed.
When one first glances at the schedule for RCIA, the most striking feature is the length of the process.

I know this appears overwhelming but I promise the weeks will fly by and before you know it you will be standing before the altar at the Easter Vigil Mass awaiting Baptism, Confirmation and your First Communion.

These Thursdays that we will meet together will hopefully prove to be not only informative but also very enjoyable. Although you are strangers tonight you will grow to become a family.

I invite you to speak to those who have gone through the program over the past several years. I believe they will agree with what I am telling you.

This will not be a chore. It will be a joy. I predict this will become the highlight of your week.

RCIA Team:

Deacon Kerry Diver
Terri Bair
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