

Looked Up To By Others

Faith
is not the belief
that God
will do what you want,
but that God
will do
what is right.



*The absence
of God
is worse
than
material
poverty
because
it kills
every
firm hope
and
leaves
the person
alone
with
his pain.*

*Archbishop
Paul Cordes*

A thousand times
I've failed, and
still Your
mercy remains.

Live so that your life on earth
draws those you love to the God
who alone can reunite you in Heaven.

Peace of Soul



Looking Up To Him

Divinely wise souls often
infuriate the worldly-wise
because they always see
things from the
Divine point of view.
The worldly are willing to let
anyone believe in God
if he pleases, but only on
condition that a belief in
God will mean no more than
belief in anything else.
They will allow God,
provided that
God does not matter.
But taking God seriously
is precisely
what makes the saint.
As St. Teresa put it,
“What is not God to me
is nothing.”
This passion is called
snobbish, intolerant, stupid,
and unwarranted intrusion;
yet those who resent it
deeply wish in their own
hearts that they had the
saint's inner peace
and happiness.

*Archbishop
Fulton Sheen*

The Bottom Line of a Vibrant Sacramental Life:

Getting Sunday Right

If you don't have time for praising God, you are busier than He ever intended you to be.

Making Confession a Way of Life

It's not about trying not to sin – but focusing so much on Jesus that sin isn't an option.

Scheduling the Most Vital Relationships

I am in love, and out of it, I will not go. ~ C.S. Lewis

Becoming an Earnest Student and a Loyal Son or Daughter

Feed your faith, and all your fears will starve to death.

Living Sacrificially in Ways Beyond Your Normal

Intense love does not measure, it just gives. ~ Mother Teresa

Learning to Trust ~ This Will Always Be the Bottom Line

Childlike faith is the victory.

A Few Helpful Questions for Sharpening Your Parish's Catechumenate

What makes the initiation process truly catechumenal in the ancient sense, and effective in the modern sense?

- The process must have authentic Liturgical / Catechetical / Pastoral components
- *Liturgies* are acts of movement – the discerned choice to step nearer to the living God, and depend on the graces therein
- *Catechesis* teaches for conversion – aims for change / harder choices / personal witness / call to trustingly embrace the Father
- *Pastoring* seeks to show authentic charity, and call it forth, to heal, to elevate, and to point our actions to Christ

What are the benefits to catechumenal catechesis that is authentically liturgical?

- ✦ Fosters more genuine and deep conversions to God and His calling on individual lives
- ✦ Allows for more frequent and more full appropriation of grace
- ✦ More fully expressive of the Church nature
- ✦ Fosters docility to the ancient ways of the Church
- ✦ Mitigates polemic tendencies regarding the teachings of the Church
- ✦ Helps the parish community grow in its communal and liturgical life
- ✦ Helps people to grasp the liturgical life of the Church in a daily, pragmatic way
- ✦ Creates a greater diversity of ministries for differing gifts and abilities of parishioners
- ✦ Assists in vocational awareness due to the regular focus on saints who have lived fully their vocations
- ✦ The ordered nature and paschal focus of the liturgical year implies and demands systematic catechesis
- ✦ Provides more diverse means of approach for children; in better accord with the learning types of children
- ✦ Gives people a chance to experience their priest's liturgical ministry more frequently and in a less distant setting
- ✦ Because the liturgical year forms the context of parish life, people become that much more integrated into parish life
- ✦ Helps catechesis accord with the adult learning model better than more didactic and academic forms of teaching
- ✦ Demands more people (sponsors, godparents, team) to be more liturgically aware and in tune with the cycles of the Church's life



What are some of the dangers to the degree that a parish lacks a liturgically-centered vision of the RCIA process?

- The catechumenate is viewed as unnecessarily effort intensive, or it becomes “canned”
- Doctrine is explained without reference to Jesus. His simple call is lost in the details
- Not expecting serious progress; or not having patience with how Jesus woos a soul
- Liturgical rites become celebrations of community entirely, not encounters with Christ
- The trust given to catechists and leaders never translates into trusting Jesus
- Forgiveness explained poorly can result in seeing Jesus' mercy as weakness or lenience

What are some questions to discuss in a parish setting to improve?

- ❖ How do we prepare RCIA participants and the parish for the major liturgical rites?
- ❖ How do we reflect on these rites after they take place?
- ❖ How often and how well do we make available the various minor rites (Celebrations of the Word, Blessings, Minor Exorcisms, Anointings, Presentations, etc.)?
- ❖ If we dismiss the catechumens from Sunday Mass, how often do we do so? If not, how can we change things to offer this opportunity?
- ❖ What takes place at Breaking Open the Word (Reflection on the Word)? Is it just another teaching session, or perhaps just a sharing of opinions?
- ❖ What happens during Lent? Is Lent a time for “interior reflection” or primarily catechetical instruction?
- ❖ Do we celebrate all of the Scrutinies, the Presentations, and the Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday?
- ❖ What is our Easter Vigil like? How many parishioners attend? Do the elect and the candidates feel welcomed and at home by their experience of the parish at the Vigil?
- ❖ Are sponsors and godparents deeply involved before and after the Easter Vigil? What sort of formation do they receive?

What should a parish see in its neophytes over time that gives evidence as to whether the RCIA process has been successful?

- ✦ Do your neophytes really feel they have a need for the Mass?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really have a desire for Jesus that is restless for more?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really desire to help others get to Heaven?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really have thankful hearts?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really need God in daily life?
- ✦ Do your neophytes really desire to sin less each day?

Sample agenda for an initial team meeting:

General introductions of team members.
Why RCIA? Why an RCIA team?
The RCIA schedule.

Qualifications of a team member:

- ✱ Be converted to Christ and his Church
- ✱ Docile to the Church's mission
- ✱ Punctual and flexible
- ✱ Desiring to continue your own formation
- ✱ Openness to new relationships
- ✱ Openness to questions
- ✱ Openness of your life as a witness of faith
- ✱ Prudent and able to keep confidentiality

Nature of the RCIA sessions:

- No commitment, no cost for the participants
- No participation required — each person must never feel manipulated, must be free to decide to come
- Spouse is welcome to come with the participant; we can provide babysitting
- Catechesis gradually introduces things Christian and things distinctively Catholic, including Catholic practices, navigating the Bible, Catholic teachings, living an adult Christian life
- If desired, we will try to find a Catholic from a participant's own faith background to talk with
- Any participant can always make an appointment to see our pastor, another priest, or the RCIA leader
- There will be a discernment process and interviews prior to each of the major Rites
- Questions from participants are never unwelcome, offensive, or too frequent
- Verbal questions should come only from participants, not team or sponsors (written ones are welcome from all)
- All participants will receive Bibles (and Catechisms if they request)
- Role of food and refreshments
- Role of handouts given at each session
- Role of the RCIA library of printed, video, and audio materials for participants
- Role of testimonies to be given by each team member
- Role and conduct of small groups
- Role of godparents and sponsors
- Critical importance of prayer
- Each team member must obtain a faithful intercessor who will agree to pray regularly for your work on the team

Jobs for the team (each person may occupy more than one of these roles):

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ✱ Catechist | ✱ Hospitality and Food | ✱ Music |
| ✱ Intercessor Coordinator | ✱ Library | ✱ Liturgy Coordinator |
| ✱ Sponsor Coordinator | ✱ Small Group Facilitator | ✱ Retreat Coordinator |
| ✱ Set-Up/Break-Down | ✱ Reflection on the Word Facilitator | |

Who are potential inquirers that might come if asked?

What the first session needs to be like.

Prayer for those we seek to serve...

Most holy Mother of God, Immaculate Virgin, we beseech you, for the sake of Christ, our Lord, your Son, offer your loving prayers before the throne of God for all those wandering children of yours who are outside the full communion of His one true Church.

Obtain for them, most tender Mother, the grace to see the love of God, the desire to understand the truth of the Catholic faith, and the strength to courageously embrace the gospel.

May the good influence of Catholic instruction, the pious example of the team, godparents, sponsors, and members of our parish, the prudent words of Catholic friends, the zeal of priests and religious, gently and sweetly invite them to come to their Father's home and to the unity of the fold of Christ.

Protect and watch over them in your kindness while they stray in exile and darkness. Obtain for them many effective graces. Be merciful and aid them, holy Mother, now in their time of desolation and need, so that you may have joy hereafter in welcoming to your family in Heaven these souls which have been redeemed by the passion and death of your most holy Son, Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

Agenda for future team meetings:

- The items for discussion will be different at each meeting depending on the stage of the RCIA process and current needs
- Team members will report on the progress of participants
- Discussion of ways to better help various participants, or ways to address pastoral issues that have arisen
- Specific team members give updates concerning their respective roles
- Reminder about upcoming liturgical events or other calendar matters

Giving a Personal Testimony (Witness) in an RCIA Setting

*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
~ 1 John 5:11*

The Importance of a Testimony

A testimony is a verbal sharing that describes a conversion to Jesus and his Church that happened through the action of grace. A testimony allows inquirers and participants to hear and see how conversion of heart takes place and how to enter the mystery of Christ and to join his Church. For inquirers and participants who do not have a strong relationship with Christ, or who may have limited experience of authentic Christian witness, fellowship, and service, the RCIA team needs to demonstrate what those realities are like. Otherwise, how will inquirers and participants know what they are called by God to be? How will they know what it looks like to respond to that calling and to try to live as a disciple of Christ?

There are three ways in which this calling and this response can be demonstrated:

- 1) Teaching the life of Christ as the model *par excellence*.
- 2) Teaching the lives of saints for the purpose of showing that Christ can be followed successfully in every era, every age-level, and every state of life.
- 3) Teaching your life to them, within the context of how you have heard, responded to, and are striving to live out the very personal call to holiness that the grace of the Holy Spirit makes possible.

This last point is the purpose of a testimony.

The Purposes of a Testimony

A testimony is valuable to the work of conversion in the RCIA process for these reasons:

- ✠ It *removes misconceptions and barriers to relationships*: When inquirers and participants begin coming to sessions, they normally do not know members of the team, and cannot know what kind of person you are and what you think of them. Perhaps they wonder if you are a know-it-all, or the opposite — someone who knows little about Christ and the Bible. Perhaps they think you are there “just to do a job,” or to make the group larger, or to learn more about the Catholic faith yourself without any direct interest in them. They might wonder what you think of non-Catholics, or if you are judgmental. Done well, a testimony allows inquirers and participants to become knowledgeable about you, which may not otherwise occur quickly, or occur at all, in casual conversation. After you have given your testimony, their ability to relate to you is greatly increased, because you have given them “keys” to entering a relationship with you as a follower of Christ. Your testimony clears up misconceptions by communicating your humility, your joy at their presence in the RCIA process, your intention to serve them, and your desire to love them and have fellowship with them. The ice is broken. Instead of conversations and small-group sessions that are awkward and superficial, inquirers and participants can be at ease with you and are more likely to open their hearts to you.
- ✠ It *models conversion*: Inquirers and participants need to have others demonstrate what it would look like to turn one’s life away from sin and towards Christ and his Church. They may be aware of many poor examples of weak, lukewarm Catholicism that could be interpreted as the norm, unless countered by team members who give a more faithful witness to a life converted to Christ. Your testimony should reveal you as a real person, imperfect and struggling with sin, yet serious about sinning less and less, and seeking holiness, confident that God not only desires this, but will make it possible to any soul that seeks honestly to know and do his will.

What to Do

- Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you to say only that which he wants you to say.
- Speak clearly; make eye contact.
- Be sure to speak to inquirers and participants, not to other team members; it is very easy to unconsciously default to speaking towards those you are most familiar with in the room.
- Consider practicing your testimony, perhaps in front of a mirror.
- Consider having a note card or a very simple outline on a sheet to remind you of the points you want to make.
- Be brief; generally between five and, at most, fifteen minutes is normal for a testimony in an RCIA setting.
- Know what you are going to say and what you hope to achieve.
- A possible outline could be:
 - ✦ Begin with an interesting story.
 - ✦ Describe your early faith life, to the degree that you were distant from, or not as close as you are now, to God and the Catholic Church.
 - ✦ Tell the story of how and why this changed, perhaps gradually or suddenly, in your life.
 - ✦ Explain what difference a relationship with Jesus and Holy Mother Church has made in your life.
 - ✦ Conclude with a thought-provoking comment, question, or loving challenge to those present.Keep in mind that a testimony is often a powerful way to help others think about what God and the Church are asking of them and offering to them.
- Allow inquirers and participants to see your joy in the Lord and your love for his Church.

What to Avoid

- ✦ Do not give a biography of your life; although it is important to you. In a testimony only that which is relevant to how you came to love Jesus and his Church should be included, so every detail you include must in some way serve this purpose.
- ✦ Do not use Catholic terminology or phrases that would be unfamiliar to inquirers and participants.
- ✦ Do not exaggerate elements of your story, or downplay things out of a false sense of humility.
- ✦ Do not be negative about other people or other religious organizations; a testimony is about hope and your thankfulness for God's mercies.
- ✦ Do not read your testimony from a pre-written text; this is your story, to simply be told from the heart.
- ✦ Do not speak condescendingly to inquirers and participants, or give a lecture; you are giving a testimony, not a teaching.
- ✦ Do not be afraid; the focus is not on you, but on the works of God in your life.

Questions to Help You Consider the Content of Your Testimony

Reflect on some or all of these questions to help you identify the “wonderful works of God” in your life:

- What prompted me to respond to God's grace?
- How have I found joy in the Lord and in his Church?
- When have I experienced the peace which surpasses understanding (through the Church)?
- How have I experienced my heart being softened by Jesus (through his Church)?
- How has my mind been changed by Christ and the Church?
- How have I grown in virtue through Jesus and the Church?
- What other blessings have I received from the Lord and his Church?
- What difference has the Holy Spirit made in my life?
- How have I loved those who are difficult for me to love?
- What are some things I am thankful to God for (to his Church for)?

“The most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith” (Guide for Catechists 8).

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

IDEAS THAT HELP INCORPORATE LITURGICAL OR PARA-LITURGICAL ASPECTS
IN THE WORK OF PASSING ON THE CATHOLIC FAITH

The liturgy is connaturally the center and soul of the whole striving toward perfection in the way in which Mother Church officially proposes it to her children.

~ Fr. Cyprian Vagaggini, OSB, in Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy

Suggestions for different subjects for guided meditations:

- Guided meditation on the prayers of the RCIA major Rites
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Baptismal Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Confirmation Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of the Penitential Rite
- Guided meditation on the prayers of each of the Scrutinies
- Guided meditation on specific Gospel stories, on the Psalms, Wisdom Books, or other passages in Scripture
- Guided meditation on the Creed
- Guided meditation on one of the Eucharistic Prayers
- Guided meditation on other major prayers of the Mass (e.g. the Confiteor, the Gloria, the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, the Communion Rite, etc.)
- Guided meditation on the Divine Praises, or other litanies
- Guided meditation on the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, or well-known prayers
- Guided meditation on the verses of hymns

Suggestions for places to visit and tour:

- ✧ The parish church
- ✧ The parish sacristy
- ✧ The diocesan cathedral
- ✧ A monastery or a retreat house
- ✧ A local shrine or other Catholic worship site
- ✧ An Eastern Rite Catholic church
- ✧ A local Catholic historical site
- ✧ A large or very old Catholic cemetery

Suggestions for different prayer forms:

- ▲ Adoration
- ▲ Liturgy of the Word (according to various themes)
- ▲ Silent prayer time alone
- ▲ Silent prayer time in an outdoor setting
- ▲ Silent prayer time in small groups
- ▲ Silent prayer time in a church or chapel
- ▲ Explain and offer Masses for various intentions
- ▲ Explain and pray formal *Lectio Divina*

- ▲ Explain and pray the Liturgy of the Hours
- ▲ Explain and pray the rosary
- ▲ Explain and pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet
- ▲ Explain and pray the Stations of the Cross
- ▲ Explain and pray the Stations of Light
- ▲ Explain and pray the Angelus or Regina Caeli
- ▲ Explain and pray a litany
- ▲ Explain and pray by laying on hands
- ▲ Explain and begin a novena for a specific intention
- ▲ Explain and pray a prayer in Latin
- ▲ Sing psalms, sing hymns, sing common Mass settings
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a passage of Scripture or a description of a Biblical scene
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a description of an event in Church history
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a saint's writing or on the life of a saint
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a prayer text
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a hymn text
- ▲ Personal silent meditation on a poem with suitable themes

Suggestions for other creative elements:

- ✚ Walk through the Mass
- ✚ Walk through the Bible or a specific Gospel
- ✚ Walk through a missalette
- ✚ Walk through a part of the Liturgy of the Hours (e.g., morning, midday, evening, or night prayer)
- ✚ Walk through an examination of conscience
- ✚ Demonstrate how to go to Confession
- ✚ Demonstrate how to receive Holy Communion, and how to offer a thanksgiving prayer after Holy Communion
- ✚ Explain and hold a Jewish Passover Seder
- ✚ Explain different Catholic objects (sacred vessels, sick-call crucifix, special statue, medal or devotional item, relic, etc.)
- ✚ Virtual computer tour of Catholic places
- ✚ Video tour of a major shrine or other Catholic places
- ✚ Video of a major papal event
- ✚ Movie on a Biblical story, life of a saint, or Catholic theme

AN EXERCISE IN LITURGICAL CATECHESIS:

Take five common doctrines, and come up with (in a single sentence for each) an ear-catching proclamation of how each doctrine connects to the sacred liturgy. Do not limit this to articulating connections to the Mass only, but also the broader liturgical reality that the Church understands.

Dies Domini

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY AND FAITHFUL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON KEEPING THE LORD'S DAY HOLY

Chapter I – DIES DOMINI – The Day of the Lord

- ✦ The Celebration of the Creator's Work
- ✦ "Through him all things were made" (Jn 1:3)
- ✦ "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1)
- ✦ "Shabbat": the Creator's joyful rest
- ✦ "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gn 2:3)
- ✦ "To keep holy" by "remembering"
- ✦ From the Sabbath to Sunday

The commandment of the Decalogue by which God decrees the Sabbath observance is formulated in the Book of Exodus in a distinctive way: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy" (20:8). And the inspired text goes on to give the reason for this, recalling as it does the work of God: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (v. 11). Before decreeing that something be done, the commandment urges that something be remembered. It is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to rest. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only as God rested, but to rest in the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse. (DD 16)

Chapter II – DIES CHRISTI – The Day of Christ

- ✦ The Day of the Risen Lord and of the Gift of the Holy Spirit
- ✦ The weekly Easter
- ✦ The first day of the week
- ✦ Growing distinction from the Sabbath
- ✦ The day of the new creation
- ✦ The eighth day: image of eternity
- ✦ The day of Christ-Light
- ✦ The day of the gift of the Spirit
- ✦ The day of faith
- ✦ An indispensable day!

Sharing in the Eucharist is the heart of Sunday, but the duty to keep Sunday holy cannot be reduced to this . . . For example, the relaxed gathering of parents and children can be an opportunity not only to listen to one another but also to share a few formative and more reflective moments . . . This rather traditional way of keeping Sunday holy has perhaps become more difficult for many people; but the Church shows her faith in the strength of the Risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit by making it known that, today more than ever, she is unwilling to settle for minimalism and mediocrity at the level of faith. She wants to help Christians to do what is most right and pleasing to the Lord. (DD 52)

Chapter III – DIES ECCLESIAE – The Day of the Church

- ✦ The Eucharistic Assembly: Heart of Sunday
- ✦ The Presence of the Risen Lord
- ✦ The Eucharistic assembly
- ✦ The Sunday Eucharist
- ✦ The day of the Church
- ✦ A pilgrim people
- ✦ The day of hope
- ✦ The table of the Word
- ✦ The table of the Body of Christ
- ✦ Easter banquet and fraternal gathering
- ✦ From Mass to "mission"
- ✦ The Sunday obligation
- ✦ A joyful celebration in song
- ✦ A celebration involving all
- ✦ Other moments of the Christian Sunday
- ✦ Sunday assemblies without a priest
- ✦ Radio and television

Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live . . . In order that rest may not degenerate into emptiness or boredom, it must offer spiritual enrichment, greater freedom, opportunities for contemplation and fraternal communion. Therefore, among the forms of culture and entertainment which society offers, the faithful should choose those which are most in keeping with a life lived in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Sunday rest then becomes "prophetic" . . . If Sunday is a day of joy, Christians should declare by their actual behavior that we cannot be happy "on our own" . . . But presuming a wider sense of commitment, why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? (DD 67, 68, 72)

Chapter IV – DIES HOMINIS – The Day of Man

- ✦ Sunday: Day of Joy, Rest, and Solidarity
- ✦ The "full joy" of Christ
- ✦ The fulfilment of the Sabbath
- ✦ The day of rest
- ✦ A day of solidarity

Chapter V – DIES DIERUM – The Day of Days

- ✦ Sunday: the Primordial Feast, Revealing the Meaning of Time
- ✦ Christ the Alpha and Omega of time
- ✦ Sunday in the Liturgical Year



Portrait of a New Catholic

FOR THE NEW CATHOLICS, the sacraments of initiation mark the beginning of “newness of life” as fully initiated members of the Body of Christ. The new Catholics now have access to the fullness of sacramental grace. Having celebrated the sacraments of initiation, the neophytes have been “renewed in mind, tasted more deeply the sweetness of God’s Word, received the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and grown to know the goodness of the Lord” (RCIA 245). Mystagogy, or post-baptismal catechesis, is the time when they are “introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned and above all through their experience of the sacraments they have received” (RCIA 245; note that RCIA 410 directs that newly-received Catholics and newly-baptized Catholics are to go through mystagogy together).

Mystagogy is essential to help the neophytes “grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal mystery and in making it a part of their lives” (RCIA 244). Just as Lent provides an opportunity to enter into the desert to be purified and so become more like Christ, so the Easter season is an opportunity for the neophytes to rejoice in the risen Lord and, in that joy, to begin to practice their Catholic faith in its fullness. The RCIA ritual book explains that this will take place through “meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity” (RCIA 244).

MEDITATION ON THE GOSPEL

The ritual book explains that the Sundays of the Easter season contain “particularly suitable readings from the Lectionary, especially the readings for Year A”


(RCIA 247) to aid the neophytes in grasping the mystery of what has taken place in the Easter sacraments. For example, the Fourth Sunday of Easter always contains readings taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John focusing on Jesus as the Good Shepherd, reminding the neophytes that they are now “the sheep of his flock” and that he will always care for them.

The neophytes who were baptized at the Easter Vigil now begin to stay for the entire Mass on Sundays, and no longer participate in Reflection on the Word sessions. It may be beneficial for the RCIA leader to offer

ways that they might continue to have this experience (for example, joining a general parish Bible study that is lectionary-based, meeting after Mass or during the week as a group with their godparents, or discussing the Scripture readings at home with their families). Several Catholic publishing companies offer materials to use for this purpose.

It is important that the neophytes continue to listen to the Gospel message not only through the Scriptures that are proclaimed and homilies preached at Mass, but also through their own prayerful reading of Scripture. By meditating on the Gospel and by seeking to make it a part of their lives, neophytes grow in their personal identity as Catholics and in their relationship with God. If the neophytes had the opportunity to reflect on the first two gateway Rites, as suggested in Chapter 6, “The Major Rites of the Catechumenal Process,” and if Reflection on the Word sessions were a regular part of the catechumenal process, the neophytes will already have the tools and the habits to engage readily in post-baptismal mystagogy.





The task of systematic catechesis does not end with the reception of the sacraments of initiation. The period of mystagogy, and beyond Pentecost through the remainder of the neophyte year, can be used to establish a habit of ongoing deepening in the new Catholics' understanding of doctrine. Beyond mystagogy, the United States bishops recommend that the neophytes meet at least monthly "for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community" (NS 24). Monthly gatherings with the pastor or another member of the parish clergy, the RCIA leader, or a team member "just to chat" can be beneficial for them to ask questions about Catholic teaching or practices, clarifying aspects of their practice of the faith, and providing ongoing spiritual formation for the group. A monthly neophyte newsletter (or even a section of the parish's website) is another way to continue catechetical formation beyond regular meetings. Occasional retreat days during the first year also give opportunities for further systematic instruction in the faith and deepening of the life of prayer. Other ideas for keeping in touch with neophytes include regular emails or newsletters to inform them about events in the parish and the diocese. If fellowship was strong among participants before Easter, then they will seek to continue it in one form or another.

Neophytes should also be introduced to the vast and dazzling array of Catholic media explaining Scripture, the Christian life, and doctrine; telling the lives of the saints, Church history, and stories of conversion; and providing guidance in the life of Christian prayer, charity, and evangelization. Books, periodicals, newspapers, video and audio media, and the internet are available to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the financial resources of the parish and each neophyte. The RCIA team should use the neophyte year to give new Catholics a thorough introduction to Catholic media, helping them to learn where to look to find information, such as Catholic bookstores, subscribing to Catholic periodicals, finding good Catholic websites, and discovering additional opportunities for reading, listening, and viewing materials without cost, especially through a parish library if one exists.

SHARING IN THE EUCHARIST

While meditation on the Gospel strengthens the neophytes in their personal life of faith, the surpass-

ing means for grasping the Paschal mystery has always been the Eucharist, the Church's great sign of unity (see CCC 1396, 1398), and is the source and sustainer of *communio*. Sharing in the Eucharist binds the neophytes more closely with other Catholics and helps the entire community to grow in its relationship with God through liturgical worship.

There are several ways to make the "Masses for the neophytes" (RCIA 248) during the neophyte year more effective in drawing the community closer together. Special places should be reserved for the neophytes, their godparents, and members of the RCIA team during this year (see RCIA 248). This shows the neophytes the importance that the community places on their presence, reminds the rest of the faithful to live their own Baptismal apostolate which these individuals have recently taken on, and helps the community to remember to keep the neophytes in their prayers.

Both the Sunday homilies and the intercessions should "take into account the presence and needs of the neophytes" (see RCIA 248). The homilies that are offered throughout the Easter season should, for example, help keep the focus on Baptism and the other sacraments of initiation, and should remind both the neophytes and the rest of the faithful of the need to live out their Baptismal apostolate in both word and deed. Offering one of the Prayers of the Faithful after the Easter season (for example, one weekend each month) for the neophytes is another way to keep them on the minds and in the hearts of the community once the Easter season has passed (see Appendix VI of this *Manual*, "Prayers of the Faithful by the Calendar").

The pastor and RCIA leader should maintain especially close contact with the neophytes. The most recent study of new Catholics, completed several years ago by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, noted with concern that not even two-thirds of U. S. neophytes regularly attended Mass on Sundays (or the vigil Mass on Saturday evening) (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States*, October 2000). It is not much comfort to realize that this is twice the percentage of all U. S. Catholics who go to Mass every week.



DOING THE WORKS OF CHARITY

While the neophytes and the entire community must grow in their personal identity as Catholics (meditating on the Gospel) and in their corporate identity as the Body of Christ (sharing in the Eucharist), the reason Catholics do these things is not only personal but also communal—to turn to the service of others. From the time the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming were celebrated, various forms of parish service should be made known to the participants, and they should have been invited to begin engaging in service to the community. Now they are full-fledged members of the parish, and live the “law of love”: *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him”* (1 Jn 3:16–19).

Aided by the grace of the sacraments, the new Catholics are able to put the Gospel message which they have heard throughout their formation into practice in a more complete way. They are able to respond more and more as a disciple of Christ would when they encounter situations at home, at work, and elsewhere. Their access to sacramental graces enables them to act differently from the way the world would have them act. A dying to self leads to a rising to the new life of self-gift, a desire to respond to however God calls the neophyte to work for others. The fifty days of the Easter season can be an opportune time to encourage the new Catholics to rethink their choices and, to the extent that their health, obligations to family and employment, and availability of means of transportation permit, intensify their existing commitments to service (including changing commitments to other forms of service as appropriate).

During their first year as Catholics, neophytes should be securely established in the life of the parish. The difficulties of this year can be great. Even though the regular formation experienced during the catechumenal process is completed, the neophytes must be supported and strengthened to grow in faith, hope, and charity as they continue to live the moral life, the


sacramental life, and the liturgical life. A Bible study with new friends in the parish, a charitable work to join, and opportunities to contribute special skills to the work of the parish should all be aspects of this year. Throughout the year, care should be taken to make sure that the neophytes are always specifically invited to parish missions, presentations by visiting speakers, and other adult education events. They also can be helped to join an existing small Christian community, or to establish a new community with their fellow neophytes. The entire community of the faithful should endeavor to give their loving and friendly help to the neophytes; in so doing, they themselves, together with the neophytes, enter ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ (see GDC 168).

When the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops looked at the incorporation of neophytes into parish life, they found that “among the most appreciated parts of the RCIA process cited by the survey participants is incorporation into parish life. The RCIA is viewed as a helpful instrument for enabling participants to become more fully integrated into the community’s life and mission. This element is rated as important to the participants as growing closer to God, experiencing conversion, and learning about the Catholic faith” (USCCB, *Journey to the Fullness of Life: A Report on the Implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States*, October 2000).

While acknowledging that there are many ways that parish communities can become better, the USCCB report commented that neophytes who were surveyed expressed “particular appreciation for the wide range of activities available to them in their parishes, the strong sense of community that they experienced, and the quality of the clergy who are assigned to them.” Nevertheless, there is a long way to go to fully incorporate neophytes into the life of the parish. Only half of survey respondents actually participated actively in “parish ministries and committees” (USCCB, *Journey to the Fullness of Life*).

THE MISSION TO EVANGELIZE

Over the course of the neophyte year, the new Catholics will continue to grow in their faith. They will find joy in the celebration of the sacraments and



in the welcome they receive into the parish community. As they celebrate the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year, they experience the mystery of Christ as presented in the Mass and other prayers of the Church, in the joys and sorrows of their own lives, and in the life of the parish, the diocese, and the universal Church. Some will rejoice that they now share the faith of their spouse, or of a Catholic family into which they had married. Others will find that their parish has given them new purpose and new friendships. Some may also experience sorrow as they lose contact with friends who do not agree with their decision to become Catholic or who have a way of life which they find does not support them in living as a Christian. Some may suffer the loss of closeness with parents who did not want a son or daughter to become a Catholic. They are called to accept their suffering for the sake of making their Beloved more loved.

Neophytes should experience a filling up with God's zeal to unmake the world's work in others' souls. Neophytes should share the joy that they have found in the Catholic faith with their families, friends, and co-workers. The witness of individuals who have made a decision to become Catholic and who live the fullness of the Christian life with joy and enthusiasm is a powerful force to draw others to the Church. However, they should also remember that, while some might see their joy and ask about becoming Catholic themselves, not everyone will share their excitement and some people might even be cynical or rude. As neophytes live out their Baptismal apostolate to bring Christ to the world, it is essential for them to find ways to witness to their new-found faith outside of the parish, despite indifference and rejection. They must come to understand that they will always be a minority, but nonetheless always look for opportunities to work in the "mission field" wherever they live and whom-ever they encounter (see GDC 86).

In restoring the catechumenate, the Second Vatican Council reminded the Church of her call to evangelize and her responsibility to provide formation for the men and women who approach the Church seeking the sacraments of initiation so that they may be "introduced into the life of faith, liturgy and charity of the People of God by successive sacred rites" (AG


14). The Church succeeds in accomplishing her mission every time an individual begins the Christian initiation process, is initiated, and embarks upon the Christian life in the company of his or her brothers and sisters in the faith. The paths taken by the men and women who have entered into the mystery of Christ through the adult Christian initiation process vary greatly after initiation. Many raise families who are strong in the faith. Some are called to priesthood, religious life, or the permanent diaconate (see GDC 86). Others respond to God's call through a life entirely committed to generous service to others. All are called to spread the Good News of God's love and salvation which he offers to all through the Church. If those who have taken on the name of Christian live out their Baptismal apostolate, then the world will be transformed.

THE CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

What is the Catholic worldview? It is the way that Catholics perceive, think, and act in light of the authentic realities and transcendent truths that God has revealed through the Church. It is seeing and understanding the world *as Christ and his Church see it*. Becoming Catholic is not simply like joining a club; it is a change of attitude, perception, and intent in life, to differing degrees, depending on the spiritual place where an individual was when he or she first began the Christian initiation process.

Developing a Catholic worldview takes time, usually several years. Many new Catholics find themselves saying, "In *my* church..." not meaning the Catholic Church but the ecclesial community they last attended or in which they had grown up. Eventually, they begin to correct themselves: "Well, I really mean *my old* church." They may discover with surprise that they look at an issue in a different way, or they may discover that new issues arise that they had never dealt with before, and they desire to understand them from a Catholic perspective. These are signs that they are beginning to identify themselves as Catholics and to form a Catholic worldview.

In their new identity, some neophytes may face decisions about habits or ways of thinking which they discover are not consistent with their new life in



Christ. Some may have a radical new perspective on how they relate to their families and friends, how they engage in their jobs, and how they see the world at large. Others will have less dramatic transformations but will find that they are “different” somehow from the person they were when they began the Christian initiation process. More and more, they see things and events through new eyes: those of a Catholic Christian.

Every person has a worldview, whether or not he or she consciously thinks about it. A worldview is the way of thinking and feeling through which an individual understands the people and events of his or her culture, and through which decisions are made as to his or her beliefs and actions. It is formed by the culture in which people live, and the circumstance and events of their own and others’ lives. What kind of lifestyle choices are made, what one looks for in a spouse, decisions about the number of children to have, where to live, what kind of employment to seek, what goals to seek in life—all are formed by one’s worldview. Attitudes about public issues such as crime and punishment and war, the legality of abortion and euthanasia, the government’s role in helping the poor and the sick and immigrants, are colored by one’s worldview; even whether to view public issues in a moral light is affected by one’s worldview. Participation in the popular culture affects a person’s worldview, and a person’s worldview affects how much he or she chooses to participate in, or disengage from, the popular culture.

Since beginning the Christian initiation process, the neophytes’ worldview has been changing, thanks to prayer, the witness of other Catholics, learning the Church’s teachings, and the graces they have received from the Rites of the Christian initiation process and the sacraments of initiation. The reception of the sacraments brings sacramental grace and light to their minds and hearts to aid them in developing their Catholic worldview. As their minds and hearts continue to be fed on Scripture, the liturgy, reception of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, prayer, and continued study of the Church’s doctrines, the fullness of Catholic truth begins to permeate all areas of their thinking. They may find themselves more sensitive to issues concerning life, human dignity, the value of suffering, the importance of family, the dignity


of labor, and stewardship of the natural world—in short, every aspect of human life and society. They may find that their own lifestyles are too shallow and extravagant. Their goals in raising their children may begin to focus less on the “right” college and career, and more on preparing them for eternity.

CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES

By the time participants have received the sacraments of initiation, the RCIA leader should have ensured that they have heard, understood, and been formed by principles that define for them a Catholic worldview. Taken together, the following nine points comprise one way of describing the principles of a Catholic worldview:

Who God is Always Informs Us About What God Does

“*God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). This is who God is; his essence is love. This central truth sheds light on all others in the Deposit of Faith, and informs his followers of the essential purpose of all of God’s actions—from the first act of creation, through the long drama of salvation history, down to the final act of just estrangement of a damned soul and the final act of merciful espousal of a saved soul. God’s power is not wielded in an arbitrary way (see CCC 271, 373), and he wishes us to know this by revealing his “innermost secret” (CCC 221, citing 1 Jn 4:8, 16). God is a family of Persons whose life is love, an eternal exchange of complete self-gift (see CCC 221). The fact of the Blessed Trinity, one of the two core tenets of the Christian faith (see GDC 100), illuminates all the other mysteries of the faith, and the mystery of humankind itself, made in the image of the Trinitarian God. Trinitarian love is our source—God’s love outpoured in the act of creation, of which humanity is the crown. Trinitarian love is the Divine charity that is infused into every Christian soul at Baptism. Trinitarian love is the point of being Christian at all, for through our redemption our deformed and defaced human nature is restored to God’s original purpose, the loving gift of self, the death to self that gives eternal life for which each of us was created. Who God is—love—informs us why he made us free beings—love demands that the beloved have



authentic freedom to respond. Free will is necessary because we must be able to *choose* to love God, not be *compelled* to love him; we must be able to *choose* to give ourselves to others, not be *compelled* to self-gift. Yet the necessity of free will opened the possibility of abusing that freedom. In this way love also necessitates taking the risk that the beloved would say “no.” Hence the potential for that which is evil to come into existence in a creation wholly authored by he who is All Holy. Thus are the questions of free will and evil (and all aspects of Catholic life and doctrine) enlightened by the logic of God’s loving identity—God’s essential nature informing us, sometimes dimly, sometimes with burning clarity, of the reasons for God’s actions.

The Content of the Faith Reflects the Character of God

Our God is one God, not three, and the Catholic faith given to us is one as well. All of the truths of the faith begin with the central doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and flow from these core doctrines organically. St. Paul, in writing of the Mystical Body of Christ, used the analogy of the human body in its organic wholeness: *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable”* (1 Cor 12:21–22). As with the Mystical Body of Christ, so with the doctrines of the faith. Each doctrine is arranged in its proper relation to the others (called the “hierarchy of truths”) and each is essential to the whole, so that the entire Deposit of Faith would fail to hold together logically if even one doctrine—one part of that organic truth—was removed.

God’s attributes are truth, goodness, and beauty, and all three are attributes of the faith as well. The intellect seeks to know truth, and the will seeks the good. In the Catholic worldview, doctrinal and moral absolutes are the source of human freedom and the standard by which all situations are judged and the true basis of human freedom. Morality flows from recognizing the truths of our human nature, the original harmonies of body and soul that were destroyed by the sin of our first parents. God has revealed who and what we are in Jesus Christ our Lord, who “fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most


high calling” (GS 22). Human freedom is God’s gift to enable his beloved creatures to seek the good; that is, to seek Goodness Itself. Morality, therefore, is not rule-following; it is the pursuit of happiness.

Finally, the Catholic faith is beautiful, and everything that is Catholic should be beautiful. Beauty, one of God’s attributes, is reflected in the beauty created for his glory, especially the art and architecture and music that houses, adorns, and accompanies worship.

God Has the Plan

A Catholic worldview is imbued with a sense of transcendence—the majesty of God in relation to his creatures: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Is 55:8–9). Yet from the beginning God intended intimacy with his human creatures, and thus the Catholic is equally imbued with the immanence of God who, as Jesus told his disciples, is always near: *“I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you”* (Jn 14:16–18).

Even while humans have, again and again, failed to keep the covenantal promises, God has remained faithful to the covenant (see Heb 10:23). God invites us to life in the covenant according to our nature as beings who exist in time. He accommodates the revelation of himself to our nature, gradually and incrementally bringing us to knowledge and love of him. He has made our relationship with Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity who took our human nature and became truly man while remaining truly God, the center of being Catholic. At its height, this relationship takes the form of spousal love (see Lk 5:34–35) and, in each human life, God’s justice and mercy are offered efficaciously as a husband cares for and loves his wife, not as a judge would mete out justice to a condemned criminal. Christ humbled himself to share in our humanity so that he might lift us up to share in his Divinity (see CCC 460, 526). A Catholic worldview is founded on the Blessed Trinity and the recognition of God’s plan and of Jesus Christ as the Lord of history and of each individual life:



He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.... For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in Heaven and things on earth. In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory (Eph 1:5-6, 9-12).

What God Enters into, He Redeems

This is the core of the distinctively Catholic sacramental principle. In God's plan, the visible creation becomes a channel for that which is invisible. The Catholic understands in his very being that the Incarnation is the key to understanding how God works. God uses human nature, the ensouled body and embodied soul, to accomplish his purposes. Jesus entered the womb of Mary, and made motherhood holy in a way that it had never been understood in any prior culture. He chose to live in poverty, and thus made poverty a powerful means of drawing nearer to God that uncounted millions would vow themselves to in centuries to follow. He entered suffering and death, the greatest consequences of sin, and thereby made suffering necessary for our sanctification (see Rom 8:17) and an efficacious means of helping others (see below). This is the paradox that the "way of perfection passes by way of the Cross" (CCC 2015), that "*whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for [Jesus'] sake and the gospel's will save it*" (Mk 8:35). By his death, Jesus redeemed death itself. Instead of death being the worst curse of sin, believers now know that Jesus has transformed it into the only route to eternal blessedness (see 1 Cor 15:54-55). God can bring good from evil (see Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20), for God wastes nothing, and anything human can be used to glorify God. The redemption of the material world (see Rom 8:19-22) is the reason that God uses the sacraments as the continued history of Christ on earth. In every time and in every age, God uses the material world

to pour out his grace, most superlatively through the sacraments of his Church.


Jesus Did Not Come to Take Away Suffering, But to Give It Meaning

The world has such a horror of suffering that it often uses deeply immoral ways to avoid it. In dramatic confrontation with the popular culture, which fears suffering above all else and will use any means, moral or immoral, to evade it, the Catholic worldview sees that suffering is not valueless. Jesus' purpose was to redeem fallen humanity; he came to deal with the greatest evil, which is not suffering, but sin.

The cross of Jesus has redeemed suffering itself. Jesus has told us that "*if any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*" (Mk 8:34). Furthermore, human suffering has value to God; he has given it redemptive power (see Col 1:24). Sanctified by Christ in his Paschal mystery, human suffering has been endowed with redemptive value in light of Christ's sacrifice. Not only is holiness attained only through suffering, but also the Christian is able to suffer for others, and thereby impart grace to other souls. We can take confidence from the fact that God will not test us beyond what we can bear (see 1 Cor 10:13).

We are Saved as a Family, Not Just as Individuals

Catholicism is not a "me and Jesus" faith in which all that matters is repentance for sins and acceptance of Jesus as one's Lord and Savior. God's relationship with human beings has always, from the beginning of our creation, operated through familial covenants, an exchange of persons in which promises are made. God has always worked with his people this way, both with Israel and with the New Israel, the Catholic Church (see Lk 22:20). On the first Pentecost, when St. Peter finished speaking to the crowd, "*they were cut to the heart*" and asked St. Peter and the apostles what they should do (see Acts 2:37). St. Peter instructed them to repent of their sins and to be baptized (see Acts 2:38), which incorporated them into the Body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:13). God has fashioned our redemption to be interdependent, declaring that to love neighbor is to love God: "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*" (Mt 25:31-46).



Fellowship is necessary to the practice of Catholicism; love of the brethren teaches charity and forgiveness (see GDC 86). A superb “first thought” upon arising in the morning is “Who has God given me to love today?”

God Normally Works Through the Normal

While God has never failed to suspend the physical laws of the universe to demonstrate his power and show his glory, the faithful Catholic does not expect that this is the only or the most often way God will work in his or her life. Most Christians with terminal cancer will not be healed miraculously, but will find that the blessings God intends are not in their case to be in the nature of a miracle, but in the nature of the normal act of dying—the lessons of dependency upon the Lord in times of fear and pain, and the paradox of surrendering to the normal ways in which God calls most of us home, and by which he purifies souls very powerfully. God normally interacts with each person within the confines of the physical laws that he has ordained, and has saved us in such a way that those physical laws can be used in his plan, not always subordinated. Otherwise, our faith would not be based on trust in God, whom we cannot see—which is an act of acknowledging and responding to *love*, but more so on miraculous events that we can see—which is an act of acknowledging and responding to *power*. God desires us to be attracted not primarily to his power, but to his love, which is in part why Jesus so fully laid down the trappings of Divine power to live in normalcy and to carry out the great saving act of love by a death that would attract by the very paradox of its powerlessness. Jesus told St. Thomas and, through him, us that we are the more blessed for believing without seeing evidence of miracles (see Jn 20:24–29). The usual interaction of God with the material world is through our spiritual souls, and from this fact flows the importance of prayer.

Truth Demands a Witness

The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman near Jacob’s Well. Eventually, the woman goes back to the city and tells everyone, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be

the Christ?” (Jn 4:29). Jesus frequently speaks of bearing witness to himself in the Gospel of John (see, for example, Jn 1:7–8, 5:36, 15:26–27), and the Acts of the Apostles emphasizes the importance of witnesses to Jesus and to his Resurrection (see Acts 3:15, 10:39). The entire New Testament bears witness to Jesus (see DV 17–20).

Sacred Scripture is seen as the Word of God written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is its chief Author (see DV 11) and who guides the Church in distinguishing Divine revelation from other writings, even those most edifying and faithful. The Holy Spirit is the Inspirator of sacred Scripture, Animator of sacred Tradition, and Guarantor of the magisterium, and the true Catholic acknowledges the Church’s Divine mandate and authority to preach, teach, and sanctify. The life of the faithful Catholic is animated by the Holy Spirit, who animates the Body of Christ.

Faith is passed on to each generation by the witness of the family (see CCC 2205). Beginning with the self-gift of husband and wife to each other, the family is a school of faith, hope, charity, and self-gift. Husband and wife sanctify each other, and transmit the faith by the witness of holy lives.

Achieving a Catholic worldview means that everywhere, the world offers opportunities to love. Every day, a Catholic is to see life from the perspective of who God has given him or her to love. This might be spouse and children, or a dying parent, or an aged relative or neighbor who needs help and support. It might be the homeless man or family that one never meets, or the sick in a hospital or nursing home where one volunteers, or the co-workers burdened by depression. It might be a child with a bloated stomach and stick-like arms and legs from starvation, or a child in need of foster care. It might be a member of the parish who can no longer drive to shop or to see a doctor, or a parish in a desperately poor part of the world that cannot afford liturgical books or catechetical materials. It might be a person who cannot read, or a person who cannot hear. It might be a person who has never heard the Good News, or who has been hurt or angered by the bad witness of “good Catholics.” Seeing opportunities to love is the same as having a heart eager to love with the love of Christ, a heart giving witness to the truth.



The Only Reason to be Catholic is to Become a Saint

Trinitarian love is our hope, our goal, our end, and the reward we, with St. Paul, await: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing”* (2 Tm 4:7–8).

For a Catholic with a truly converted heart, everything in life is oriented to the end of life, where Christ himself will be the measure of all that each person has experienced and accomplished. Everyone’s life will be judged, as St. John of the Cross wrote, “on our love,” and those who lived in God’s friendship will be saved and those who spurned God’s offer of love by putting other things ahead of love of God and neighbor—power, wealth, pleasure, fame—will be damned (see Mt 25:31–46). The Catholic’s life is focused not on the goods of this world, but on the “pearl of great price” (see Mt 13:45–46), eternal happiness with God in Heaven. At the same time, the worldview of a Catholic abounds in hope and a realistic assessment of death as the door to eternal life, not something to be ignored, denied, or escaped. The holy death of a loved one, even a beloved son or daughter, is a source of joy as well as of mourning, and even the death of one obviously not prepared to meet God does not destroy hope, for God’s mercy extends beyond the grave (see CCC 1030).

Holiness is not mere goodness, for many people have been superlatively good but not holy. Holiness is “Godness,” desiring *“what God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Cor 2:9), when we shall see God, in all his glory, beauty, and love, *“as he is”* (1 Jn 3:2). The Church exists *solely* for the purpose of making sinners into saints (see CCC 760, 776).

CONCLUSION

The result of conversion to Christ is peace of soul and zeal of heart. These new Catholics join the rest of the Christian faithful in a life of ongoing conversion in which, by cooperating with God’s grace, they turn away from things that are not of God and towards those that are. They become *“strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”* (Eph 6:10) as they strive to live up to their call to a life of holiness, contending *“against the world rulers of this present darkness [and] against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the Heavenly places”* (Eph 6:12). They do not fear the hour of their death, for they have decided to engage in spiritual warfare until their last breath. Founded in grace—the power of God’s very life—then they can say, more and more each day, *“it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal 2:19–20) until they achieve the goal that Jesus set before the crowds on the mountain in Galilee: *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5:48).



For Those Exploring the Teachings of the Catholic Church: A First Teaching

By Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Archbishop Sheen, who died in 1979, is being considered by the Catholic Church for sainthood. During his long life of service, he wrote 95 books on the Catholic faith, and preached hundreds of retreats, especially for priests. In 1951 he began his famous television series entitled, "Life is Worth Living." It eventually reached an estimated 30 million viewers each week, and won an Emmy. He wrote the following to those beginning to explore the Catholic faith...



Dear Inquirer...

1. You are not here because you are going to join the Catholic Church – you are here to investigate it.

There is no more obligation to embrace the Catholic Church because you come to learn about it in inquiry sessions, than there is a duty to buy a mink coat because you enter into a department store. On the other hand, even though you were willing, the Church would not let you join, unless you knew its teachings and the Church was certain of your good dispositions of soul. As St. Peter said: "If anyone asks you to give an account of the hope which you cherish, be ready at all times to answer for it" (1 Peter 3:15).

2. There is only one thing required of you at the beginning, and that is good will.

Good will is readiness to accept the truth. Someone might prove to you that there was sunlight outside of the window, but all the proof in the world would be useless, unless you had the good will to lift up the curtain to allow it to enter the room.

3. Though good will comes from you, God must add something to it, and that is what is called actual grace.

Actual grace is a momentary or transient illumination of the mind to see a truth which was not previously seen, or to do something about that truth which was not previously done. When conversion, therefore, is completed it will be found to be a union of good will with the grace of God.

You may think that you have decided to come to these sessions because you read a certain book, or were inspired by a certain person, or had reached a decision through your own wisdom. These are not the cause, but only the occasion. The real cause is God Himself.

As our Blessed Lord said: "I am the Way; I am Truth and Life; nobody can come to the Father, except through Me" (John 14:6). It is our good will that responds to a God-initiated call.

4. To understand the fullness of the truth, it is necessary not only to study but also to lead a good life.

Not all men are outside of the Church because of ignorance; some are outside of it because of the way they live. Most people do not have difficulty with the creed of the Church; they have difficulty with the commandments.

Good behavior or a moral life are just as essential as study and knowledge. It is the clean of heart that see God. As our Blessed Lord said: "Anyone who acts shamefully hates the light, will not come into the light, for fear that his doings will be found out" (John 3:20).

As a bank robber does not like to have the searchlight of a policeman fixed upon him in his crime, so neither do sinners who are unwilling to abandon their sinful ways like to have the searchlight of God's truth on their iniquity.

5. You will not normally begin your time learning in these sessions with faith, you will begin them with reason.

Just as you cannot go into any store and ask for credit without an investigation having been made of your ability to pay, so neither can you have faith in Christ without a reason for believing Him. These reasons are called motives of credibility. Instead, therefore, of faith being contrary to reason it actually begins with it. That is why instructions in Christian doctrine are not the same as indoctrination into Communism, for example. Communism is forced upon the mind, whereas Christianity is a free correspondence with God's grace.

Furthermore, Communism is contrary to human nature with its hate, whereas Christianity is the perfection of human nature and particularly of human reason. As the telescope does not destroy the eye, so neither does faith destroy reason, but rather opens up to the vision of other worlds.

6. Though there will come a moment in these sessions when you will become absolutely convinced that Christ is the Son of the Living God, True God and True Man, you must not think that this acceptance of His Divinity is due solely to your reason, your judgment, or to a study of the motives of credibility.

This tremendous conviction comes from God Himself through the gift of faith. When Peter affirmed the Divinity of His Master, he was told: "It is not flesh and blood, it is my Father in Heaven that has revealed this to you" (Matthew 16:17).

7. The gravity and the number of your sins are not an obstacle to coming to the Church.

It is rather the recognition of our sinfulness that makes our soul clamor for a Redeemer. Just as we sometimes can run up more debts than we can pay, so we know that of and by our own resources we cannot make up for sins. Hence Christ, Who is the Son of God, became Man.

As Man He could take our sins upon Himself, as God His reparation and atonement for them on the Cross would have infinite merit. The worst thing in the world is not sin, it is far worse to deny sin. He who is blind and denies vision has no hope for a cure. If you had never sinned you never could call Christ your Savior.

8. The teaching will lead to an understanding of another life than that of the physical or the natural.

Two little tadpoles in the water were one day discussing the possibility of another kind of existence than their own. One said that he was going to look for another world. His companion said: "Don't be so foolish as to think there is anything else in the world besides water."

As it would be foolish for the rose to deny that there was a higher life than that of the plants, so it is foolish for us to deny that there is a higher life than that of the human. This life which is above the natural is called supernatural, which means above the natural, and is the life of God in which we participate once we are united to Jesus Christ.

You are natural because you were born of your parents; you are supernatural because you were born of God. That is why sacred Scripture always urges us to become something that we are not. By nature we are only creatures; by supernatural grace, we are children of God.

It is possible to put a pebble in a gold setting but the gold setting was made for a diamond; so it is possible for us to go on living human natural lives though we were made to become settings for the Divine life of grace.

9. All during your instructions you must pray.

Though you may know few formal prayers, say many times during the day this simple invocation: "O Lord, give me a knowledge of the truth and a strength to follow it." Let your first petition be to know the fullness of truth, not mere fragments of it that come from human knowledge. When finally this fullness of truth does come to your mind, you will see that all the bits of information that you had before were like the crazy patterns of a Japanese lantern. But after Divine Truth comes into your mind it is like a candle put into that lantern, in which everything is revealed as a beautiful design.

But, it is not enough to merely know the truth. Truth implies tremendous responsibility. There are many who like to knock at the door of truth, but they would hate to see it open. That is why you must add the second prayer, the strength to follow the truth as you see it.

St. Paul condemned the pagan Romans: "Although they had the knowledge of God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him as God... and their senseless hearts grew darkened" (Romans 1:21). During the time of these inquiry sessions remember that there are thousands of blessings suspended from Heaven on silken cords, and prayer is the sword that cuts them.

10. Be prepared for the enmity and hatred of the world.

If you joined a sun cult, or one of the Oriental religions, or became a Muslim, or started a religion of your own, your friends would say to you, "Well he's free and that is the way he believes." But just as soon as you embrace the Catholic Church you will be accused of having lost your reason, of having surrendered your freedom, and of cutting off the pleasures of life. It is the Church that makes the difference.

So long as you join any natural religion you are part of the world, therefore, the world accepts you. But when you embrace the Church, you are lifted out of the natural into the supernatural order; your mind undergoes a complete reversal of values, the world sees that it has lost its own and therefore, it will despise you.

Our Blessed Lord warned that this would happen. "If the world hates you be sure that it hated Me before it learned to hate you. If you belonged to the world, the world would know you for its own and love you; it is because you do not belong to the world, because I have chosen you from the midst of the world that the world hates you. Do not forget what I said to you. No servant can be greater than His Master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you" (John 15:18).

11. Be not disturbed by any prejudices against the Catholic Church which you bring to your first sessions.

Perhaps if I had been told the same lies against the Church that so many in our society have been told, I might have hated the Church ten times more than some. People, I find, do not hate the Church, they only hate that which they mistakenly believe to be the Church.

When you look at stained glass windows from the outside of a church, they seem to have no pattern, they are only a mass of crazy leaden lines; but once you are in the church, these windows glow with Scriptural figures. So the Church will shine before your soul as Christ continuing and living through the ages, once you are in it.

12. Your greatest joys are before you.

Even if there are sorrows and trials in your life they will be made sweet through the cross. All other religions are sunshine religions. The Catholic faith begins not with sunshine but with the shadow, not with the feast but with the fast, not with the Resurrection but the Cross. We begin with defeat and end in glory.

In the faith, you will come to the fullness and perfection of love. As the highest peak of love in the natural order is the union of two in one flesh in matrimony, so in the reception of Communion you have the union of two in one Christ which is the perfection of love. In the future, you will refrain from sin not because it is the breaking of a law, but because it is the wounding of Someone you love.

From the day of your conversion onward, you will read your own autobiography on the crucifix. Every sin of pride will be seen as the crown of thorns, every grasping avarice will be seen in His nailed hands, every wandering from God's grace will be told in His riven feet, every errant love will be read in His wounded Heart, but there will never be despair but love, for you will say with St. John of the Cross:

**Oh sweet burn! Oh, delectable wound!
Oh, soft hand, Oh, delicate touch
That savors eternal life and pays every debt,
In slaying thou has changed my death to life.**