

# Liturgical Components of the Christian Initiation Process:

## Gateways and Sources of Grace for Conversion

MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

### MYSTAGOGY AND THE NEOPHYTE YEAR

*Devoted to post-baptismal catechesis, this period is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community.*

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION  
*Reception into Full Communion*

PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

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### PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

*Coinciding with **Lent**, this period consists more in interior reflection than in instruction. It is intended to enlighten the minds and hearts of participants with a deep knowledge of Christ the Savior.*

#### Minor Rites in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment

- Penitential Rite (Candidates)
- Scrutinies (Catechumens)
- Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer
- Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday

RITE OF ELECTION  
*Call to Continuing Conversion*

CATECHUMENATE

### CATECHUMENATE

*This is an extended period for pastoral formation and guidance aimed at training participants in the Christian life; it includes a thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life.*

#### Minor Rites in the Period of the Catechumenate

- Celebrations of the Word of God
- Minor Exorcisms
- Anointings (Catechumens)
- Blessings

RITE OF ACCEPTANCE  
*Rite of Welcoming*

### PRECATECHUMENATE

*This is a time for inquiry and evangelization, an opportunity for the beginnings of faith.*

PRECATECHUMENATE

**Start**

□ CATECHUMENS ■ CANDIDATES □ PERIODS ■ STEPS

## **Five Weaknesses that the USCCB identified in its implementation review:**

### **Liturgical:**

1) The Major and minor rites are not implemented in the parish setting, or are done with poor preparation, or manipulated in some way that is destructive to the goal of liturgy.

### **Catechetical:**

2) The faith is not taught in a way that participants can grasp it and make it their own within the cultural context of Western society. This manifests in two ways: catechesis is often not authentically systematic, organic, and comprehensive; catechesis is often not carried out in accord with the needs of the four periods of the RCIA process.

### **Pastoral:**

3) Sponsors not used effectively as a decisive pastoral element.

4) Lack of a solid team structure capable of creating a consistent environment of supportive fellowship and nursery of conversion; lack of a supportive environment in the parish at large.

5) Improper balance in the clergy-laity relationship in the RCIA process.

## **Items from LM, Appendix V and VI:**

### **A walk through the RCIA process in the parish bulletin:**

How does our parish attract inquirers each year who consider becoming Catholic?

The short answer is you! When any parish has many inquirers year after year, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as parish members open their hearts to welcome others. Members of a welcoming and evangelizing community take seriously their call to share the Divine message of salvation. It happens in parish families, in the workplace, in gatherings with friends and neighbors, and in daily contacts. Give thanks to God as he continuously strengthens each of us who seek to do his will in offering a gentle, humble, and clear welcome to the Catholic faith. “Go out into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

### **How long is the RCIA process?**

The time varies, but is rarely shorter than six months or longer than three years. The Church greatly respects the time each person needs for conversion and decision. The RCIA text gives guides for discerning this on a case-by-case basis.

### **Why is the parish community important at the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming, and when will these Rites be celebrated?**

Members of the parish community should affirm that they are ready to help and support the RCIA candidates seeking to follow Christ. The Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming are celebrated at a time designated by the parish, and can be offered multiple times, depending upon when a given inquirer is ready to move forward.

### **A walk through the calendar year in the parish bulletin – For the Month of September:**

Life has many storms — distressful relationships, jobs, poor health; situations where we feel our powerlessness. If you know someone unbaptized or baptized in a non-Catholic Christian tradition, who is searching for strength and understanding to weather such squalls, invite them to seek the perspective the Catholic Church offers. Please contact...



# The Rites of Acceptance and Rite of Welcoming

After this first “gateway” is entered, the catechumens and candidates are in a formal relation with the Church. At each catechetical session they may be given anointings, blessings, and/or minor exorcisms (depending on their baptismal status). All catechesis should be done in the context of celebrations of the Word. (see RCIA 81-105)



## The Period of the Catechumenate

*(Teaching to the Rites: see RCIA 552, 553 and 556 ✠ Teaching from the Rites: see RCIA 526, 527 and 528)*

This is the longest period of the Christian initiation process. It is also the most densely catechetical. The principal guidelines for this period are found in RCIA 75 and 78:

A suitable catechesis is provided by priests or deacons, or by catechists and others of the faithful (RCIA 75):

- ✠ Planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage
- ✠ Accommodated to the liturgical year
- ✠ Solidly supported by celebrations of the Word

This catechesis leads the catechumens [and candidates] not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts, but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

The instruction that participants receive during this period should (RCIA 78, see also RCIA, National Statutes 7):

- ⊗ Present Catholic teaching in its entirety
- ⊗ Enlighten faith
- ⊗ Direct the heart toward God
- ⊗ Foster participation in the liturgy
- ⊗ Inspire apostolic activity
- ⊗ Nurture a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ

### **The Catechetical Components of this period are the elements of the Deposit of Faith:**

There is only time to present the “keys” to unlock the basic doctrines of the Deposit of Faith as they are found in Scripture and Tradition. A good guide for these “keys” is the *Credo of the People of God* by Pope Paul VI. As well, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the “sure norm” for teaching the Deposit of Faith. It should be the constant reference for the catechist. (see CCC 89)

Presuming a complete precatechumenal catechesis, the organization of the truths of the faith can be done along the paradigm for the adult Catholic life:

- ✠ Faith
- ✠ Hope
- ✠ Love



# Adult Methodologies & Effective Adult Catechesis

*One of the constant concerns whose urgency is confirmed by present day experience throughout the world, is the catechesis of adults. This is the principal form of catechesis because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibility and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form. ~ St. John Paul II, CT 43*

## In the world, not of the world . . .

*So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. ~ John 16:22*

"It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too, live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter's, and like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of thine own."  
~ Herman Melville, Moby-Dick

## Ultimate goals of adult catechesis . . .

*The ultimate and unifying goal of adult catechesis is to help the mature Christian to live as an adult by acquiring certain qualities.*

*~ Adult Catechesis in the Community, 34*

### ✧ **Attitude of conversion to the Lord (ACCC 36) . . .**

- ✓ Promotes an openness of heart to the mystery of the Lord's greatness and grace by encouraging sincere reconciliation with the Lord and one another
- ✓ Practices discipleship of Jesus by means of a life aimed at being like him (see Mark 1:15, CT 20)

### ✧ **Service and fellowship in the Christian community (ACCC 35, 37) . . .**

- ✓ Encourages them to live the gift and choice of faith through membership in the Christian community
- ✓ Explains and establishes their co-responsibility for the community's mission (see Acts 2:42)

### ✧ **Christian discipleship in the world (ACCC 38) . . .**

- ✓ Draws others into a life of faith-working-in-love (see Gal.5:6)
- ✓ Provides reasons for the hope that is in us (see 1 Pet 3:15)
- ✓ Takes effective steps in favor of the transformation of marriages and families social, and professional life in light of the Gospel
- ✓ Seeks harmonious and vital synthesis of the essential characteristics of the Christian life



*Judge the Catholic Church not by those who barely live by its spirit, but by the example of those who live closest to it.*

*~ Archbishop Fulton Sheen*

## Ten key principles of adult catechesis . . .

*And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him . . . “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ~ Mark 10:21; Matthew 19:21*



The *content* of adult catechesis are offered to men and women of every social and cultural background as the nourishing and satisfying bread of life so that, filled with Divine wisdom, they might radiate this wisdom in all areas of life (ACCC 47):

1. **Get to know them.** Must begin by accepting adults “where they are”, keeping in mind, “the specific adults with whom one is working, their cultural background, human and religious needs, their expectations, faith experiences, and their potential” (ACCC 56)
2. Ensure that the **great themes of Christianity** are clear, as well as how they can *participate* and *respond* to these truths
3. Provide **experiences of the Christian community** to reinforce concepts. The communitarian dimension of the contents of faith will be thoroughly developed . . . to know and experience the “mystery of the Church” . . . incarnate in a particular community (ACCC 53)
4. Incorporate **prayer**, opportunities for **service**
5. Say it so they *hear it* — find ways to break through. Enables them to gradually become more aware of **their value and dignity as human beings**, as a result of a careful and stimulating exposition of the great truths of faith (ACCC 49)
6. **Expect and encourage questions.** A meaningful faith response will be biblical, reasonable, and attentive to signs of the times (see ACCC 48)
7. Help them respond to you and to God. Catechesis of adults seeks to provide formation in a **spirituality suitable for the Christian laity**. Special attention should be reserved for teaching adults how to pray (ACCC 50)
8. Prepare them to **share their faith**, not just remain recipients (ACCC 51, 52)
9. Assist them in **living in the Church** in relevant and practical ways
10. Count on the **power of God** as dynamic and ever present

## Methodological considerations for discipling adults . . .

*It is a sin to bore people with the Gospel. ~ Frank Sheed*

- ✦ Create a **friendly and dialogical** rapport so that they can make known their needs and can participate . . . as subjects or agents in their own catechesis (ACCC 54, 57)
- ✦ Imbue all catechesis with a clear, **personal witness** to the Christian life (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Focus on expressing truths of the faith in practical and convincing ways. Knowledge and facts should not have to be ‘stored-up’, but should be **immediately applicable** to their lives and personal struggles (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Present truths of the faith as **certitudes** (ACCC 58)
- ✦ Ensure that catechesis has an **obvious, organic and systematic development**, and is not merely episodic or random. Connections between doctrines must be clear and deliberate at all stages (ACCC 59)
- ✦ Take advantage of the **diversity of means and instruments for imparting knowledge** of the faith and for maintaining communion in the faith. Don’t just lecture or talk (ACCC 64, 65)
- ✦ Look to **create links** between their experience of the local community, their participation in the liturgy, their charitable service, and their awareness of the Church’s life beyond the parish (ACCC 59)

*Adult Catechesis must give priority to the proclamation of salvation, drawing attention to the many difficulties, doubts, misunderstandings, prejudices and objections of today. It must introduce adults to a faith-filled reading of Sacred Scripture and the practice of prayer. ~ GDC 175*

# Adult Catechist Evaluation Form

CATECHIST \_\_\_\_\_

TEACHING \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Scale of Evaluation:** 1 = needs to be addressed as a weak area,  
2 = needs improvement, 3 = acceptable, 4 = good, 5 = outstanding.

## Preparation and Proclamation

Teaching was planned and organized; catechist was clearly ready to go \_\_\_\_\_  
Appropriate arrangement of environment and sacred space \_\_\_\_\_  
Suitable opening prayer/Liturgy of the Word/music for this doctrine/topic \_\_\_\_\_  
Delivered a statement of truth to “ring in their ears” \_\_\_\_\_

## Explanation and Application

### Content:

Focused the teaching on how it helped someone get closer to God/Jesus \_\_\_\_\_  
Use of Scripture was well-paced, and with adequate context \_\_\_\_\_  
Used stories in a functional and succinct manner \_\_\_\_\_  
Included some element of personal witness in the teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
Incorporated a knowledge of participants lives’ into the teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
Connected the teaching with real life (what does this mean for them?) \_\_\_\_\_  
Included some reference to the importance of the liturgy/sacramental life \_\_\_\_\_  
Made reference to previous teachings (if applicable) to create connections \_\_\_\_\_  
Avoided unfamiliar terms/defined essential new terms \_\_\_\_\_  
Clearly was thinking about the participants while teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
Displayed a clear mastery of the subject matter \_\_\_\_\_  
Explanations were clear and helpful for those not used to “churchy” culture \_\_\_\_\_

### Method:

Maintained eye contact with participants on both sides of the room \_\_\_\_\_  
Used hand-motions, expressions, and movement \_\_\_\_\_  
Evidenced independence from written notes where appropriate \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching given in a faith-filled way (these truths are certitudes to me!) \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching given in a hope-filled way (Heaven is real; God is trustworthy!) \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching given in a loving way (good teacher = humble, friendly teacher) \_\_\_\_\_  
Teaching given in a respectful way towards other faiths/individuals \_\_\_\_\_

## Celebration

Suitable concluding prayer/music for this topic or for the liturgical calendar \_\_\_\_\_  
Upbeat closing (thanking God; acclaiming his wonderful truth together) \_\_\_\_\_

What most impacted you in a positive way about this teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*My teaching is not mine,  
but his who sent me.  
~ John 7:16 ~*

## Teaching Tools

Scripture \_\_\_\_\_  
Catechism \_\_\_\_\_  
Own Stories \_\_\_\_\_  
Saint Stories \_\_\_\_\_  
Other Stories \_\_\_\_\_  
Analogies \_\_\_\_\_  
Dialogue \_\_\_\_\_  
Apologetics \_\_\_\_\_  
Humor \_\_\_\_\_  
Art \_\_\_\_\_  
Props \_\_\_\_\_  
Handouts \_\_\_\_\_  
Music \_\_\_\_\_  
Video \_\_\_\_\_  
Computer \_\_\_\_\_  
Board \_\_\_\_\_  
Resources \_\_\_\_\_  
Q &A \_\_\_\_\_  
Exercises \_\_\_\_\_

Overall comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Total teaching time: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

*The most precious gift that the Church can offer the bewildered and restless world of our time  
is form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith.  
~ Guide for Catechists, Pontifical Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, para. 8 ~*



## Three Examples of Arrangements of Teachings

This appendix offers three examples of how parish RCIA directors and catechists have used the principles discussed in the introductory sections of this *Manual* to determine an initial ordering of their RCIA teachings. The purpose of the three lists presented here is to offer examples of the *order* of catechetical teachings only, for the purpose of fleshing out the concept of a *systematic* arrangement of doctrine that takes into account the purpose of each of the four periods of the RCIA process (as discussed in Section Three). The *organic* aspect of teaching each session cannot be fully deduced from these basic lists because this relates more to *how* doctrines are taught than to how they are *sequenced*.

The arrangement of the teachings in each list should not be interpreted as a “topical” approach — which usually exists in parishes that use some set of pre-ordered handouts or a bound text that necessitates a certain arrangement of teachings. In these circumstances, the RCIA director and catechists can exercise little or no choice in the ordering of teachings, and must forfeit this decision-making process to a publishing organization or company that obviously cannot account for situations unique to that parish in that year. This restriction is detrimental to the need for flexibility discussed in Sections Five and Six of this *Manual*. In contrast to this, the lists given in this appendix are designed to follow the hierarchy of truths, but are not intended to be substitutes for the careful considerations that can only occur at the parish level.

Lists of this kind can only be considered *initial*. They are necessarily completed by parish personnel prior to knowing who the participants will be. While much of this initial ordering usually remains intact in any given year, the catechist must allow the process to remain open to changes. These changes may result from various pastoral circumstances, for example: the need for a second or even a third teaching on certain aspects of the faith with which a certain group is struggling; the need to add a teaching or two to attend to unanticipated needs; bad weather that forces cancellation of scheduled sessions; changes in parish leadership that temporarily disrupt the process; a news event that claims a session or two to suitably address the issue, etc.

These lists do not indicate which teachings might occur together during a retreat, nor do they incorporate events that are specific to the liturgical or parish calendar that might take the place of a regular session (such as a Tenebrae Service, attendance at a Chrism Mass, a party for new Catholics, attendance at an Eastern Rite Divine Liturgy, participation in a Parish Mission, attendance at a Catholic Baptism, wedding, or funeral, etc.). Nor does this set of lists include suggestions for the Neophyte Year, beyond the seven weeks of the Mystagogy period. Lastly, the following three examples offered in this appendix do not restrict themselves solely to the titles of the 60 doctrines presented in this *Manual*. Instead, these lists present various ways that the Deposit of Faith could be arranged to accomplish systematic catechesis in a nine-month setting, a twelve-month setting, and a year-round setting.



# Example One

## PERIOD OF THE PRECATECHUMENATE

Welcome Session  
 The Existence of God  
 The Trinity  
 God the Father  
 Creation  
 Angels  
 Made in the Image of God  
 Original Sin  
 The Mystery of Evil and Divine Providence  
 The Story of Salvation  
 Revelation  
 Sacred Scripture  
 Sacred Tradition  
 The Sacramental Economy as the Father's Plan  
 The Person of Jesus  
 Salvation, Justification, and the Paschal Mystery  
 The Gift of Grace  
 The Holy Spirit  
 The Four Marks of the Church  
 The First Three Commandments  
 The Second Seven Commandments  
 Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell  
 The Life of Prayer and the Hope of Salvation  
 Devotion in the Church Family  
 The Lord's Prayer as the Family Prayer  
 The Communion of Saints  
 The Blessed Virgin Mary  
 The Kingdom of God  
 The Second Coming of Christ

## PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

The Great Covenants  
 The Incarnation and the Final Covenant  
 Church History as the Story of Salvation Continued  
 Liturgy in the Church  
 Sacraments and Sacramentals in the Church  
 Traditions of Prayer in the Church  
 Holy Orders  
 Baptism  
 Confirmation  
 Eucharist  
 Teaching Mass  
 Reconciliation  
 Anointing of the Sick and Redemptive Suffering

Matrimony  
 Natural Law  
 Freedom in Christ  
 Temptation and Sin  
 The Battle of Prayer  
 The Seven Deadly Sins  
 The Dignity of the Human Person  
 The Sin of Contraception in Our Culture  
 The Sin of Abortion in Our Culture  
 The Culture of Life  
 The Cardinal Virtues  
 The Theological Virtue of Faith  
 The Theological Virtue of Hope  
 The Theological Virtue of Love  
 The Two Great Commandments of the New Law  
 Social Teachings of the Church  
 The Corporal Works of Mercy  
 The Spiritual Works of Mercy  
 The Priesthood of the Faithful  
 The Mystical Body of Christ  
 The Universal Call to Holiness  
 The Personal Call of Vocation

## PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Adoration of God the Son (Transfiguration)  
 Mercy and Humility of the Son (Samaritan Woman)  
 Spiritual Blindness and Pride (Blind Man)  
 Liturgical Prayer and the Hope of New Life (Lazarus)  
 The Lord's Prayer and Forgiveness  
 Eucharistic Meditation and Chaplet of Divine Mercy  
 Meditation on the Sacraments in the Church Fathers

## PERIOD OF POST-BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS (MYSTAGOGY)

Sacramental Living in the Apostolic Church  
 The Mass as the Way of Life  
 Evangelization and the Call of the Good Shepherd  
 Personal Devotion to Jesus  
 Ecumenism and Other Religions  
 Becoming a Saint  
 The Catholic Worldview



## Example Two

### PERIOD OF THE PRECATECHUMENATE

Get Acquainted Gathering  
 Who is God? (The Trinity)  
 What Does God Begin? (Creation)  
 What Does God Want? (The Story)  
 Who Am I? (Image and Likeness of God)  
 How has God Spoken? (Revelation)  
 How to Communicate with God? (Prayer)  
 What Does It Mean to Believe? (Faith)  
 What Should We Believe? (The Deposit of Faith)  
 Who is Jesus? (The Son of God)  
 What Difference Does Jesus Make? (The Incarnation)  
 What About My Sin Problem? (Sin and Grace)  
 The Father's Plan and the Means to Follow It  
 The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church  
 God's Family and My Part in It (Body of Christ)  
 The Blessed Virgin Mary  
 Saints and the Church  
 What Do I Do Now? (Repent; Give Your Life to God)  
 Faith, Hope and Love (The Adult Catholic Life)

### PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

God's Plan in the Sacramental Economy  
 The Church as Dispenser of the Mysteries  
 The Church as Necessary for Me  
 The Sacrament of Baptism  
 Saints and the Power of Baptism  
 The Ten Commandments of the Moral Life  
 The Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Moral Life  
 The Sacrament of Eucharist  
 Explanation of the Mass  
 The Sacrament of Confirmation  
 The Sacrament of Holy Orders  
 The Sacrament of Marriage  
 NFP and the Darkness of Contraception  
 The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick  
 Suffering and the Call of the Cross

Saints and the Power of Redemptive Suffering  
 History of the Church (Part I) (1<sup>st</sup> 1000 Years)  
 History of the Church (Part II) (1000-Present)  
 My Part in the Church (God's Work for Me)  
 Participating in the Life of Christ  
 Helping Others to Participate in the Life of Christ  
 The Dignity of the Human Person in Matthew 25  
 The Challenge of Charity and Holiness  
 The Catholic Vision of the Moral Life  
 The Corporal Works of Mercy  
 The Spiritual Works of Mercy  
 The Pursuit of Happiness in the Trinity  
 Relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
 The Lord's Prayer as a Summary of the Gospel  
 The Lord's Prayer as the Church's Mission Statement  
 The Lord's Prayer and the Hope of Heaven

### PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The Eucharist as Christ Revealed (Transfiguration)  
 Sin and the Challenge of Purity (Samaritan Woman)  
 Sin and the Challenge of Humility (Blind Man)  
 The Dignity of Life in Christ (Lazarus)  
 Teaching on Holy Week  
 Workshop on the Sacrament of Reconciliation  
 Lord's Prayer as a Prayer of Unity

### PERIOD OF POST-BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS (MYSTAGOGY)

Pursuing Holiness in Holy Mother Church  
 The Eucharist as a Call to Virtue  
 Who Is Jesus to You Now?  
 Who is the Father to You Now?  
 Who is the Holy Spirit to You Now?  
 Being Catholic in a Non-Catholic Society  
 God's Plan for the Glory of His Life in You



## Example Three

### PERIOD OF THE PRECATECHUMENATE

Welcome and Introduction  
 Who Am I? and What Am I?  
 The Story of God's Work Among Us  
 What is Faith?  
 What is the Gospel?  
 God Calls Us By Name: God's Plan for Us  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 God as a Trinity of Persons  
 The Incarnation of Jesus Christ  
 The Holy Spirit and the Supernatural Life of Grace  
 Relationship: The Life of Prayer to God  
 Broken Relationship: The Life of Sin  
 Restored Relationship: The Covenants of God  
 Guides for Our Relationship: The Commandments  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 The Church in God's Plan  
 Revelation and the Church  
 Tradition and the Church  
 Scripture and the Church  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 The Old Testament  
 The New Testament  
 The People of the New Testament  
 The Mother of Us All: Mary  
 The Elder Members of the Family: Saints  
 The Connection Among Us All: Liturgy  
 The Sacramental Principle and Sacramentals  
 The Mass as the Life of the Family in Jesus  
 Special Question and Answer Night

### PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

The Salvation Story and the Pattern of the Creed  
 The Father as the Origin of All Truth  
 The Father as the Origin of All Goodness  
 The Father as the Origin of All Beauty  
 Jesus as the Answer to Sin  
 Jesus as the Incarnation of Perfect Love  
 Jesus as the Model of Holiness  
 Jesus as the Invitation to Divinization  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 The Holy Spirit as the Guarantor of the Church  
 The Holy Spirit as the Animator of Our Faith  
 The Holy Spirit as the Giver of Gifts and Sanctifier  
 The Church Militant: Dispenser of the Mysteries  
 The Church Suffering: The Last Mercy of Purgatory  
 The Church Triumphant: The Joys of Heaven  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 Tour of the Church  
 The Sacraments of the Church

Holy Orders and the Gift of Apostolicity  
 Baptism and Faith  
 The Eucharist and Love  
 Teaching Mass  
 Confirmation and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit  
 Reconciliation and Hope  
 Anointing of the Sick and Redemptive Suffering  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 Matrimony as a Holy Union  
 The Call to Serve Life: The Culture of Life  
 Family Life and the Culture of Death  
 Vocation and the Culture of Life  
 Suffering and the Culture of Death  
 The One Destiny: Death and Judgment  
 The Two Ways: Heaven and Hell  
 The Christian Call: Happiness in Holiness  
 Special Question and Answer Night  
 Morality for All Humans: The Human Virtues  
 Morality for All Christians: The Theological Virtues  
 Social Issues  
 Social Sins  
 Discipleship and Charity: Loving as Jesus Loves  
 Discipleship and Evangelization: The Royal Priesthood  
 Discipleship and Prayer: Staying in the Relationship  
 Adoration in the Life of the Church  
 Catholic Traditions of Prayer  
 Struggles in the Life of Prayer  
 Special Question and Answer Night

### PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

The Transfiguration and the Light of Faith  
 The Woman at the Well and Baptism's Living Water  
 The Man Born Blind and Seeing All That Jesus Offers  
 Lazarus and Our Resurrection in the Second Coming  
 Reconciliation as a Sacrament of Healing  
 Praying with Scripture and the Our Father  
 Eucharist: Source and Summit of Catholic Worship

### PERIOD OF POST-BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS (MYSTAGOGY)

How Baptism Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How Confirmation Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How the Eucharist Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How Reconciliation Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How Anointing of the Sick Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How Marriage Enables the Call to Holiness  
 How Holy Orders Enables the Call to Holiness



# On Not Using Lectionary-Based Catechesis as the Primary Method to Determine the Order of Teachings

## Liturgical Catechesis

The General Directory for Catechesis defines liturgical catechesis as preparing “for the sacraments by promoting a deeper understanding and experience of the liturgy. This explains the contents of the prayers, the meaning of the signs and gestures, educates to active participation, contemplation and silence” (GDC 71; see CT 23; GDC 117). In the mind of the Church, the Christian initiation process is intended to be fundamentally liturgical, and RCIA catechesis is to be wholly ordered to the conversion of the hearts and minds of participants (GDC 80, 88; CCC 1248). Liturgical catechesis, and more fully the liturgy itself, is an indispensable means of conversion directed to an intimate union with Christ and his Church:

Thus considered, the liturgy appears as the principal means of the Church for causing her view of the world to penetrate vitally into the minds of the faithful, even if, in its complexus, it is a means of communication of doctrine less direct, less conceptually precise, and less intellectual than the other means which the Magisterium habitually uses. It is the principal means in the sense that it is more vitally effective, more continual, more intuitive, and penetrating, more popular and universal (Cyprian Vagaggini, O.S.B., *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, The Liturgical Press, 1976, p. 518).

To have the full power of the liturgy bear upon the lives of RCIA participants, it is the task of liturgical catechesis to suitably prepare them: “sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments” (CT 23). The Second Vatican Council stressed the connection between the liturgical life and the teaching necessary to foster it:

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active par-

ticipation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work (SC 14).

The concepts of liturgical formation and liturgical catechesis presented in Sections Two and Five of this Manual, as well as the material in Appendix VII, emphasize their fundamental role in fostering this “full and active participation” in the liturgy. This focus does not, however, imply a Lectionary-based model of catechesis as the means to determine the order of teachings for the RCIA process.

## The Lectionary

The premise of the Lectionary is to make God’s love audible. As the primary author of Scripture, God anticipated the need of every generation to hear his voice as both immanent and transcendent — in the personal moment of grace and in continuity with prior and future believers. As the Incarnate God, Jesus is both immanent and transcendent, and it is the Church’s intention that the liturgical use of Scripture reflect this reality: “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel” (GIRM 29). To deepen this connection between Jesus and Scripture, the Church places the various canonical writings into the pattern of Jesus’ own life, following the Gospel accounts:

In the course of the year, [the Church] unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and nativity to the Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord (SC 102).

In this manner, the transcendent quality of Scripture’s divine authorship is ordered to a more imma-

nent goal — that of bringing Christ forth from the Gospel pages to each listener through a more profound encounter with Scripture as a whole. The homily then rightly seeks to further solidify this encounter. As the voice of the Holy Spirit, the Lectionary informs the worship of the faithful by connecting them to their Jewish and Christian heritage and their eschatological inheritance. As with all things in the Mass, the connection between things old and things new is the living Person of Christ: “In the Liturgy of the Word the Holy Spirit ‘recalls’ to the assembly all that Christ has done for us” (CCC 1103). This *narratio* is dependent upon an implied relationship between the two Testaments. The Lectionary’s window on the Person of Christ brings a clarity that is often elusive when seen only through the dark glass of Old Testament prophecy. Through the seemingly simple act of pairing and relating verses from different times and sources in a certain order and structure, the Church works to form its people into the image of the Word Incarnate. The Lectionary is, in this way, the written and proclaimed version of the fifth-century Canon of St. Vincent of Lerins: that is to be held as true which has been taught everywhere in the Church, held by all in the Church, from the very beginning of the Church in the teaching of Jesus’ apostles.

Within this context, the Lectionary for Mass, the key ecclesial document expounding upon the rationale behind the Lectionary’s design, states:

The present Order of Readings for Mass, then, is an arrangement of biblical readings that provides the faithful with a knowledge of the whole of God’s Word, in a pattern suited to the purpose. Throughout the liturgical year, but above all during the seasons of Easter, Lent, and Advent, the choice and sequence of readings are aimed at giving Christ’s faithful an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the Order of Readings corresponds to the requirements and interests of the Christian people. The celebration of the Liturgy is not

in itself simply a form of catechesis, but it does contain an element of teaching. The Lectionary of the Roman Missal brings this out<sup>2</sup> and therefore deserves to be regarded as a pedagogical resource aiding catechesis (LFM 60-61).

While declaring that the Lectionary aims to provide “an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation,” this magisterial document concludes the point by asserting the Lectionary’s role as a “pedagogical resource aiding catechesis.” This stops short of recommending the order of Sunday readings as the primary principle upon which to accomplish systematic and organic catechesis. Why would this be so? Put another way, if systematic and organic aspects of catechesis are important, and the Lectionary offers a good model of organizing the faith to accomplish these ends, then why does not the Church suggest this very thing? To narrow the focus onto RCIA, the following paragraphs suggest three reasons that magisterial documents do not put forward the Sunday Lectionary as an appropriate curriculum for all periods of the catechumenal process.

#### Reason One: Lectionary-based catechesis is redundant with other expositions of the Sunday readings

The Lectionary plays a central role in what many parishes call “Breaking Open the Word.” Breaking Open the Word is an element of the RCIA process separate from the catechetical session (see RCIA 81-84). It has an important role that is primarily liturgical instead of didactic, flowing from the proclamation at the Sunday Mass, following the dismissal at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. This is, of course, Lectionary-based, but without a direct systematic intent, which is by design here. It is separate from the kind of structured formation normally found in catechetical sessions. Breaking Open the Word certainly provides a reasonable opportunity to “reflect more deeply” on the content of the Sunday Lectionary (RCIA 67).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution, *Missale Romanum*: in *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli VI promulgatum* (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1975), p. 15, quoted in *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli VI promulgatum*, *Ordo lectionum Missae*, editio typica altera (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1981), p. XXXI.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nn. 9 and 33; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction, *Inter Oecumenici*, 26 September 1964, n. 7: AAS 56 (1964) 878; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Trendendae*, 16 October 1979, n. 23: AAS 71 (1979) 1296-1297.



This occasion to relate to the Lectionary readings is in addition to what the homilist himself has to offer, which is the privileged locus of exposition of the meaning and application of the Word proclaimed. Although it is not possible to dwell too much on any portion of Sacred Scripture, for participants at the weekly RCIA catechetical session to dwell for a third time on these same Sunday readings (the homily and Breaking Open the Word being the first two) subordinates the importance of systematic methodology and the need for flexibility in the order of teachings. Nor is this idea supported by a careful reading of paragraphs 81-87 of the RCIA ritual book, which encourages three forms of a celebration of the Word, only one of which (RCIA 83) is to be explicitly based on the Sunday readings.

**Reason Two: Lectionary-based catechesis cannot be assumed in references to liturgical catechesis**

RCIA 75.1 calls for a catechesis that is “accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word.” This certainly calls for liturgical catechesis of the kind discussed above, but cannot be made synonymous with Lectionary-based catechesis, which does not allow for the “thoroughly comprehensive catechesis” (RCIA Appendix III, National Statutes for the Catechumenate 7) or the “orderly and systematic initiation”<sup>3</sup> (GDC 66) envisioned by the Church. At no point in discussing the need for catechesis to be hierarchical, systematic, organic, coherent, and comprehensive does the GDC or the RCIA ritual book go on to declare that the Sunday Lectionary readings meet these criteria for the purpose of exposition of the Deposit of Faith.

The idea that the terms liturgical catechesis and Lectionary-based catechesis (outside of the context of the homily) are interchangeable is not found in the RCIA ritual book or the catechetical documents in use since the Second Vatican Council’s directive to revise the Lectionary (see SC 35, 51). This is significant in light of the above quotation from the Lectionary for Mass. This document remarks that the Lectionary is an “arrangement of biblical readings that provides the faithful with a knowledge of the whole of God’s Word, in a pattern suited to the purpose” (LFM 60). If this “pattern” were to mean that the Lectionary provides an adequate systematic catechesis (see GDC 66),

then why does no post-conciliar catechetical document make that connection? Only in the context of encouraging a stronger catechetical element in inculturation for “so great a part of the people of God” as is accessible on Sundays does the GDC specifically mention that the Lectionary should be “valued afresh” (GDC 207). Otherwise, the Lectionary is not mentioned again in any part of the GDC, while other principles for determining how to accomplish systematic and organic catechesis are discussed in detail (and summarized in Sections Five and Six of this Manual). But even in paragraph 207 of the GDC, the Lectionary and the liturgical year are noted separately, and are not simply treated as synonymous. Many practitioners of Lectionary-based catechesis in RCIA assume that these terms are synonymous, and thus may conclude that every magisterial reference to the relationship between catechesis and the liturgical year (see GDC 30, 135, 176; ACCC 61; RCIA 16, 75) is a direct indication that the Lectionary readings should be the source for the doctrinal content of RCIA catechetical sessions. However, the complete absence of direct magisterial recommendation of Lectionary-based catechesis indicates that this conclusion is incorrect.

**Reason Three: Lectionary-based catechesis does not suit the demands of systematic catechesis**

Regarding the Catechumenate period specifically, the RCIA ritual book stipulates that readings for celebrations of the Word should be “chosen for their relevance to the formation of the catechumens” (RCIA 87). This statement makes little sense if the ritual book were assuming the use of the Sunday Lectionary readings in catechetical sessions for this long period.

In the United States, paragraph 6 of the RCIA ritual book’s Appendix III, National Statutes for the Catechumenate, directs that the Catechumenate period and the period of Purification and Enlightenment should together “extend for at least one year of formation.” This is sometimes interpreted as indicating the use of Lectionary-based catechesis during this entire time, but is instead simply ensuring the opportunity for catechumens and candidates to be exposed to a full liturgical cycle, which can certainly occur without the order of the content of the catechetical sessions during that year being based upon the Lectionary. The

<sup>3</sup> CT 22. Cf. CT 21b, 18d.

only stated rationale for this extended timeframe is “for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong” (RCIA 76). This does not by any means point to a call for a year of Lectionary-based catechesis as the reason behind the recommended duration, especially in light of paragraph 87 noted above.

If the Lectionary readings were assumed in the catechetical documents to be suitably systematic, then much in these same documents that discusses flexibility in forming a systematic and organic presentation of the faith would be contradicted (see CT 31; GDC 118; ACCC 30, 56; DCG 76). Determining the order of teachings by the Sunday Lectionary can produce a sense of being “locked in” to teaching certain aspects of the faith independent of all other pastoral circumstances. A catechist might teach on the Trinity using the compelling readings for the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity (which occurs in the summertime) at another more appropriate time. Three more detailed examples are given below, but the same could be said for any set of Lectionary readings that may suit the proclamation of the basic Gospel or the gradual unfolding of the Deposit of Faith by being used at another time. Paragraph 87 of the ritual text is, however, suggesting more than shifting around sets of Lectionary readings for the purpose of catechetical sessions; it simply gives license to select any relevant combination of “one or more” readings from Sacred Scripture.

▣ ***The Eucharist:*** A catechist may have reason to want to use the powerful passages in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at some other time than the short section used for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) in Year A, or the five-week late-summer stretch of Ordinary Time in Year B. Year C does not use this catechetically critical chapter at any point in the cycle. If a catechist wants to teach on the Eucharist without using John 6, the obvious choices would be the institution narratives of the Last Supper in the synoptic Gospels, or perhaps Paul’s recounting of those words in 1 Cor 11:23-26. Using Lectionary-based catechesis, these readings are available only on Palm Sunday (Years A, B, C), Holy Thursday (Years A, B, C) or Corpus Christi (Years B, C). Since two of these feasts occur immediately prior to the Easter Vigil, and the third in the early summertime, this limited availability can seem somewhat

hobbling to catechists desiring to bring up the “source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 11) at times that might be more suited to a group of inquirers or those in other stages of the process.

▣ ***The Moral Life:*** To teach the Ten Commandments a catechist would normally favor one of the two lists in the Old Testament (Ex 20:1-17 or Dt 5:6-21), or the portion of the Sermon on the Mount that interprets the Commandments (Mt 5:17-43). The Lectionary uses only the first part (not the full Decalogue) of the passage in Deuteronomy in Year B alone, on the ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is usually shortly after Pentecost. Otherwise, the Ten Commandments are not read in the Sunday Lectionary at all, outside of the Third Sunday of Lent in Year B (which is not when any RCIA process can afford to do a teaching on the Commandments). The passage from Matthew’s Gospel is read in Year A only, usually just before Lent. If a catechist instead desires to use the Beatitudes to address the moral life, there are two New Testament lists to choose from (Mt 5:1-12 or Lk 6:17-23). In the Lectionary, however, the classic list in Matthew’s Gospel is used only in Year A, just after Christmas, and the shorter version in Luke’s Gospel only in Year C, two weeks later in Ordinary Time.

▣ ***Social Teachings:*** There are numerous Scripture passages that are relevant to this area of the Church’s teaching. One of the best passages is the discourse in which Jesus declares that, “as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:31-46). This essential text occurs in the Sunday Lectionary only on the Solemnity of Christ the King in Year A, where the liturgical theme is Christ’s kingship, not the exposition of social doctrine. A catechist would have nothing as fully suitable in Years B and C.

The point of these examples is not to suggest any deficiencies in the Lectionary *per se*, but to point out its inadequacy as the primary source of deciding what to teach when, especially since the catechumenal process in the United States rarely extends through the full three-year cycle of the Sunday Lectionary in any parish. Obviously, a catechist could choose to use any of the above Scripture passages to elaborate upon the pre-set



Lectionary texts. The problem here is not a restricted sense of the choice of readings, but an unsystematic sequence from week to week that makes Lectionary-based catechesis “topical.”

Using the Sunday Lectionary as an organizing principle creates in Lectionary-based catechesis a sense of “jumping around” that seriously impairs the systematic unfolding of the faith. A catechist may be talking about one doctrine one Sunday and then a totally different aspect of the faith the next Sunday. Depending on when participants enter the RCIA process, using the Lectionary to order the teachings could potentially leave them trying to make sense, for example, of the call to self-denial and the embrace of the cross without first understanding themselves as being created in God’s image or having discussed the place of evil and death in God’s redemptive plan. Presenting truths of the faith in an unsystematic manner can create the false impression that the doctrines of the Church are simply a collection of facts from which the catechist pulls a new topic each week, leaving the catechumens and candidates struggling to grasp the coherence of the faith. This misuse of the Lectionary relative to the catechumenal process makes demonstrating tight cohesion among doctrines (the organic unity) stilted or forced, if it can even be attempted at all within such a context. Very frequently, the result is that RCIA participants do not end up getting a firm grasp on the faith, leaving them vulnerable to a culture quick to demand compromise on Catholicism’s “hard sayings” and hobbled by a profound inability to think with the mind of the Church, that is, the mind of Christ.

Although the Lectionary is not specifically designed to provide a systematic, gradual unfolding of the faith for every part of the RCIA process (certainly not during the Precatechumenate and Catechumenate periods), Lectionary-based catechesis, using the Year A readings, is specifically called for as a foundation for systematic catechesis during the period of Mystagogy. In this case, the Lectionary readings have specifically been chosen to provide a focused exploration of the sacramental life during this time (see RCIA 247; this is also the case for the readings relating to the Penitential Rite and the Year A readings relating to the three Scrutinies during Lent, where a clear theme of self-searching and repentance exists specifically with the intent of the catechumenal process for this period in mind; see RCIA 146, 462). The ritual

book’s call for Lectionary-based catechesis at these times helps clarify that the Church’s official RCIA guidelines are not operating by implicitly calling for general application of Lectionary-based catechesis, but instead explicitly calling for this method only when appropriate. Those are the only occasions when there is a stated agreement between the Lectionary and systematic methodology.

In summary, the Lectionary is an important resource and has catechetical aspects in its own right, but is not the determinative factor in devising a curriculum, outside of those areas noted above. The Lectionary is designed to produce an “ever-deepening perception of the faith” (LFM 60) — the traditional understanding of mystagogical catechesis. Initiatory catechesis, however, requires not only a deepening, but also a gradual and incremental unfolding of the faith (see GDC 85, 88-89) which the Lectionary is not designed to accomplish. The overall theme of the Lectionary is to walk through the life of Christ and the major events prefiguring him and flowing from his time on earth. This theme is not, however, a systematic principle when the readings are used in a catechetical session outside the context of the rest of the liturgy of the Mass. This is one reason why the Bible itself, specifically the life of Christ recorded in the four Gospels, does not stand alone in the Tradition or function as a catechism. Since early times, the creedal formulas and successively more developed catechisms sought to order the teaching of the apostles in a systematic way, while maintaining a profound Christocentric focus:

In the message of salvation there is a certain hierarchy of truths, which the Church has always recognized when it composed creeds or summaries of the truths of faith<sup>4</sup>. ... On all levels catechesis should take account of this hierarchy of the truths of faith (DCG 43).

The Lectionary does not follow the hierarchy of truths from Sunday to Sunday. In fact, the Lectionary itself can only be understood properly in terms of the hierarchy of truths (see GDC 114; DCG 47-48). The universal Church’s choice of Sunday readings was not intended, and should not be made to serve, a regional or local catechism’s role, nor supplant the parish RCIA leader’s effort to “deduce the order” which is “most appropriate to the circumstances” (GDC 118).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. UR 11.