

Rite of Christian Initiation

Rite of Acceptance

St. John–Holy Angels Parish

“You have followed God’s light, and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you.” (RCIA, #42)

Next weekend, Nov. 21, at the 11am Mass, all gathered will ‘accept’ new members into our Church in the Gathering Space. Read on...

Being Accepted

Becoming Catholic is a process. The Catholic Church has recently recovered and developed a process that some of the earliest Christians had used when people came to them asking to be baptized. The first part of this process is called “Evangelization and Precatechumenate.”

In this initial phase, an unbaptized adult or child of a certain age is moved by some experience to inquire about the Catholic Church. Through some informal contact with a member of the Church, he or she begins to explore the Church. This part of the process can happen anytime for as long as needed.

When the inquiring person and the Church community believe that the person is starting to show signs of a Christian faith and is ready to commit to becoming Catholic, the person is invited to celebrate a ritual called the “Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate.” By celebrating this rite, the person is officially and publicly declaring his or her intention to enter a formal relationship with the Church, learning its ways, and participating in its lifestyle. The Church, in turn, accepts their commitment and pledges its support throughout the person’s journey of faith.

This rite makes the person an official member of the Church as one who is preparing to be baptized. Therefore, the person is given an official title and role to play in the Church: that of “catechumen,” which means “one in whom the Word of God echoes.” In preparation for this rite, the Church also gives the inquiring person a gift—

one of its own baptized members to be a sponsor or companion of the person through the next part of the process of becoming Catholic, called the “Period of the Catechumenate.”

The Threshold

The door, or threshold of the Church, is an important symbol in many Catholic rites (baptisms, funerals). Doors symbolize transitions and new ways of life. Christ, the Good Shepherd, is the most important door, because “whoever enters through Christ will be saved.” In the Rite of Acceptance, those wishing to answer God’s call are met at the threshold of the Church by the baptized (the Assembly gathered for Mass) and are ritually welcomed to enter into the Church’s doors.

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At the beginning of the 11am Holy Angels Mass on Sun., Nov. 21, we will be “accepting” the unbaptized in the Gathering Space for the Opening Prayers. This is mainly symbolic of their Rite of Acceptance: we are being asked to “accept” them as members of the Christian community and we, as the already-baptized, will lead the catechumens, as newly self-declared Christians, into the worship space for the first time. How moving!

The Cross

To enter into Christ and his Church also means entering into his dying and rising, for he said, “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Therefore, in the Rite of Acceptance, the Church consecrates (sets apart and makes holy) those who are committing themselves to following Christ by signing their bodies by tracing the sign of the cross.

The Word and the Assembly

In order to learn how to take up the cross of Christ each day of their lives, these catechumens will need to be nourished by the Word of God, for “one does not live on bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.” In the Scriptures that they will hear every Sunday in the Mass, God speaks; and in the Gospels, Christ proclaims to all those assembled that God’s promises last forever. No matter what things the catechumens will encounter—suffering, pain, obstacles, doubt, fear, sin, death—God will never leave them. God’s love through Christ never fails those who call upon his name.

Where we encounter Christ and his love most clearly is in the Assembly, gathered each weekend at Mass. When God’s people gather each weekend to proclaim the Scriptures, offer prayers for the world, and remember Christ in the sharing of a simple meal—the Eucharist—Jesus is truly

present. The gathered Assembly models for the catechumens how to die to selfishness, how to forgive others, how to preach the Good News, how to live in hope through the Holy Spirit. These catechumens will depend on the Assembly to teach them how to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Because they are not baptized or full members of the Church yet, catechumens cannot yet participate in the prayers of the faithful or the Eucharist. Therefore, after the homily, the catechumens, accompanied by a member of the baptized, are dismissed—sent to feast on the Word of God—to reflect on how God is continuing to call them in this part of their faith journey, and to discern how they are to respond.

The catechumens will join us for the prayers of the faithful and the Eucharist on the evening of April 23, the Easter Vigil, where, for the first time they will feast at the Table of Word and Eucharist; they will be brought into full membership of the Catholic Church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist.

As members of the parish community and of the Church of God, it is our duty and our call as Christian sisters and brothers to teach these catechumens how to live out our call as disciples of Christ. Greet them on their journey, talk to them about your personal journey of faith, and how God works in your life. Encourage them, and most importantly...pray with and for them.

RCIA Words to Know

catechesis: Greek, meaning “sounding down” or “re-echoing down to another;” a way of communicating faith

catechumen: Greek, meaning “one in whom word echoes;” one who celebrated the Rite of Acceptance

dismissal: a sending; catechumens are sent after homily to reflect on God’s Word; the baptized are sent at Mass to “go, love and serve the Lord;”

not meant to separate but enable one’s mission

evangelization: first stage of RCIA, of unfixed duration, also called inquiry or pre-catechumenate; proclaiming faith in Christ; mission of all baptized

inquirer: name given to the unbaptized who are drawn to the Christian way of life

RCIA: stands for “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults;” process for becoming Christian

Rite of Acceptance: first public rite for those becoming Catholic; marks transition from inquiry period to catechumate period

signing of the senses: ritual act of tracing the sign of the cross on the catechumen’s forehead and other parts of the body during the Rite of Acceptance

Interested in becoming Catholic? Been away from the Church? Want to reacquaint yourself? Haven’t made all of your Sacraments? Call 302.731.2219.