Memories and Mystagogy: *Recognizing the Works of God*

Remember sitting on the couch with your family squeezed up next to you, huddled over pages of your family photo albums? Or maybe sprawled on the living room floor with your cousins in the dark, hearing your great-uncle narrate the slide show of family vacations of summers past. Today that scene remains, but the photo book may be a laptop, and the projection on the screen is now images cast from your phone to your Smart TV. But in all scenarios, the activity of sharing images evokes many things in us:



Memories of events that took place…

Feelings we had at that moment…

Significant encounters with people or experiences documented…

I think we can learn a lot about the role of Mystagogy in our church by comparing it to this classic family activity.

The new *Directory for Catechesis* uses several descriptors for catechists, including:

A teacher and a mystagogue who introduces others to the mystery of God, revealed in the paschal mystery of Christ; ...the catechist has the two-fold task of transmitting the content of the faith and leading others into the mystery of the faith itself. (DC 113b)

A mystagogue is someone who knows the power of mystagogical reflection, the process of looking back at an experience and reliving it; picturing it in your mind so that you participate in it again, but this time with new vision and with the intention of finding God. Mystagogy is a meaningful tool for all catechists as we accompany others in faith. And while the Church is wise to distinguish the final period of a new believer's journey as Mystagogy, that doesn't mean the process should only happen during the Easter Season. Let's see how we can integrate mystagogical reflection throughout the process.

Back to the photo album.

When viewing family photos, as we relive a vacation, we may also compare it to another time we did the same trip. For example, a week in Disney World or the beach is a very different experience as a family of preschoolers than with teenagers. The place is the same, but we have changed, and therefore our encounter with the place changes.

Might this also be our experience with celebrating the liturgy, feast days, liturgical seasons, Scripture passages and more? As we learn more about our faith, grow in our relationship with God and have other life experiences, the way we encounter life will change. We may not even realize the change if we aren't intentional about reflecting on it.

But a catechist does more than just help people "notice the differences." A catechist "*lead(s) others into the mystery of the faith itself*." (DC 113b) A catechist accompanies others into a deeper experience, often by asking questions: Why was this experience different? What was better? What was lost/missing? How do you feel about these changes? What can you learn about yourself or God from this reflection?

We start this process during the pre-evangelization phase when we first meet our "inquirers". As our relationship with them grows we start to ask questions beyond, "How was your past week? What new questions do you have for me?" We probe them to name where they have seen God in their life, where the Spirit may be nudging them, what emotions/anxieties/excitements do they have following Jesus and being a part of our faith community? Asking deeper questions isn't just a good idea, it is our duty as we lead them toward the Rite of Acceptance.

Paragraph 42 of the *RCIA Study Edition* says the seekers should have "the beginnings of a spiritual life;" there should be "evidence of the first faith" and "an initial conversion and intention to change their lives" (RCIA 42). And, depending on which prayer option (A, B, or C) is used during the Rite of Acceptance, the seekers will attest with "I am!" that they "have followed God's light and the way of the Gospel," or "acknowledge with joy Christ has come…", or "wish to become his disciples and members of his Church." These are strong statements to which they promise and should be reflected upon before participating in the Rite, as well as after.

Following the Rite of Acceptance, use mystagogical reflection to give the presence and mystery of God the priority He deserves. Don't ask what they "thought" about the rituals, but dive into the actions and their feelings: of being welcomed by the parish community, making their statements of commitment, being signed with the cross by their sponsor, and being prayed over by the whole community. Was there a "signing" of the body that was especially meaningful to them? A prayer of intercession that gave them pause? Likely, their shared responses will highlight the unique way the Spirit was present in each catechumen, and the power of being in community and knowing of other's prayers for them. Their comments and reflections then guide the catechist to share the foundational truths of our faith as well as the awesome mystery of our God.

For more ideas on questions to ask while doing mystagogy, read this article by Joe Paprocki.

Questions, comments or suggestions of how you include mystagogical reflection in your formation programs? Send a message to Sheri Kemp.