



Lessons in RCIA: **What is a Mystagogia Mass?**

DEPARTMENT FOR PASTORAL MINISTRIES | MAY 2024



The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) describes what we call the Mystagogia Mass as the opportunity for the bishop “to show his pastoral concern for these new members of the Church, particularly if he was unable to preside at the sacraments of initiation himself,” by presiding at a celebration of the Eucharist with them (See RCIA, paragraph 251).

What is Postbaptismal Catechesis – or Mystagogy?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), otherwise called the Catechumenate, is structured into stages (or periods) and steps. The final stage of this catechumenal journey is referred to as the period of Mystagogy or Mystagogia. This takes place after the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil and lasts at least until Pentecost. Those who were newly baptized, confirmed, and received Eucharist are now called Neophytes. Those who completed their sacraments of initiation through Confirmation and Eucharist, including those who entered into Full Communion of the Catholic Church by a profession of faith, are now fully initiated Catholics. In the strictest sense, the period of mystagogy applies to Neophytes. But in a broader sense, it can include all those who are now fully initiated.

“This is the time, usually the Easter season, following the celebration of initiation, during which the newly initiated experience being fully a part of the Christian community by means of pertinent catechesis and particularly by participation with all the faithful in the Sunday eucharistic celebration” (from outline for Christian Initiation of Adults).

By Dolores Martinez, Ph.D.
*Director of Worship,
Department for Pastoral Ministries*



Lessons in RCIA: What is a Mystagogia Mass?

DEPARTMENT FOR PASTORAL MINISTRIES | MAY 2024

"This is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist, and doing the works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priests (pastors) should give them thoughtful and friendly help" (RCIA, 244).

This is a beautiful time not to be missed or dismissed as unimportant. "The neophytes are, as the term 'mystagogy' suggests, 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. For they have truly 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. Out of this experience, which belongs to Christians and increases as it is lived, they derive a new perception of the faith, of the Church, and of the world" (RCIA, 245).

"Just as their new participation in the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of the Scriptures, so too it increases their contact with the rest of the faithful and has an impact on the experience of the community. As a result, interaction between the neophytes and the faithful is made easier and more beneficial. Postbaptismal catechesis is significant for the neophytes and the rest of the faithful. Through it, the neophytes, with the help of their godparents, should experience a full and joyful welcome into the community

and enter closer ties with the other faithful. The faithful, in turn, should derive from it a renewal of inspiration and of outlook." (RCIA, 246)

The newly initiated are no longer dismissed from Sunday Mass. They stay through the liturgy to receive Holy Communion along with the rest of the community. Their reflection sessions can be held after Mass, over coffee and doughnuts, for example. There are no preselected topics to discuss. The agenda is their experience of Eucharist, of the Mass, of Community, of the Word of God. This is not a period of recruitment into liturgical ministries. Allow them to be Catholic first, for a good long time – what it means to be a worshipper in the pew.

More on the word neophyte:

Neophyte, just like the word Mystagogia, are words derived from the Greek language. A neophyte is a newly initiated person. What does neophyte mean? The etymology of the word means newly planted. A new plant. It has to be nurtured, watered, tended, and to a certain extent pruned, and sometimes staked to grow straight. Another way of understanding neophyte is as a graft of a plant. You can graft a bud or stem onto a sturdy stalk and bind it together whereby tissues of plants are joined to continue their growth together.

Caring for the Neophyte

Consider what happens when there is a new baby in the family. Everyone gives a great deal of attention to the newborn. We cuddle it,



Lessons in RCIA: What is a Mystagogia Mass?

DEPARTMENT FOR PASTORAL MINISTRIES | MAY 2024

we keep it warm, and dry, and we feed it. We caress the newborn and begin to talk to it in the hopes that it will ultimately begin to return the sounds, later the words, and much later, full conversations. We would never dream of, nor could we conceive of, abandoning the baby to fend for itself. The baby is surrounded by the love and care and concern of its community, the family. In the same way, each Catholic community is called to care for its newborns in the faith, its neophytes. Do you know who they are? Have you met at least one personally? Have you invited at least one to coffee and doughnuts on parish hospitality Sunday? Have you invited a neophyte to sit with you and/or your family during Sunday Mass? There are so many things we can do to show them, in a continuous way, that they belong at the table of the Lord with us.