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De-Mystifying Mystagogy in the RCIA

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Mystagogy
Embracing the Legacy from
the Early Church Fathers to
Pope Benedict XVI

Romans 6

Brothers and sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

Mystagogy's Purpose

The real purpose of mystagogy and mystagogical catechesis is to make all of us “aware.”

Cyril of Jerusalem Mystagogical Catechesis I 4th Century

“I long ago desired, true-born and dearly beloved children of the Church, to discourse to you concerning these spiritual and heavenly Mysteries; but knowing well, that seeing is far more persuasive than hearing, I waited till this season; that finding you more open to the influence of my words from this your experience, I might take and lead you to the brighter and more fragrant meadow of this present paradise.”

Cyril of Jerusalem 4th Century

“Then they bade you raise your hand, and you renounced Satan, as if he were actually present . . . Just as the tyrant pursued the people of old as far as the sea, this shameless, impudent demon, the source of all evil, pursues you as far as the fountain of salvation. The tyrant was submerged in the sea; the demon disappears in the water of salvation.”

The Paschal Octave

Jerusalem – End of 4th Century

Testimony of Egeria

“When the days of Easter come, during the eight days, that is from Easter until the octave, after the dismissal from the church, we go while singing hymns to the Anastasis, where we pray and the faithful are blessed. The Bishop stands . . . and explains all that was done at baptism. At this time, no catechumen is permitted to enter the Anastasis. Only the neophytes and the faithful who want to hear the mysteries explained can enter.”

The Paschal Octave

Jerusalem – End of 4th Century

Testimony of Egeria

“The doors are closed so that no catechumen may enter. While the Bishop explains all these things, the people shout out loud their approval so that even outside the church the cries of the faithful can be heard. He unveils all the mysteries so well that no one can remain unmoved by what they hear.”

Ambrose of Milan – Late 4th Century De Mysteriis

“Now is the time to speak of the mysteries and to reflect systematically on the sacred ritual actions. We would not have considered it helpful to those not yet initiated, but rather a betrayal of them, if we had decided to give such a detailed explanation before baptism. Indeed it is better for the light of the mysteries themselves to have inundated you as a surprise than it would have been for us to have given an explanation beforehand.”

St. Augustine – Early 5th Century Sermon 8 in the Paschal Octave

“I speak to you who have just been reborn in baptism, my little children in Christ, you who are the new offspring of the Church, the gift of the Father, proof of Mother Church’s fruitfulness. All of you who stand fast in the Lord are a holy seed, a new colony of bees, the very flower of our ministry and fruit of our toil, my joy and my crown.”

St. Augustine – Early 5th Century Sermon 8 in the Paschal Octave

“This is the octave day of your new birth. And so your own hope of resurrection, though not yet realized, is sure and certain, because you have received the sacrament or sign of this reality, and have been given the pledge of the Spirit. ‘For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.’ ”

John Paul II

Mane Nobiscum Domine

Apostolic Letter on the Year of the Eucharist (#17)

“The best way to enter into the mystery of salvation made present in the sacred ‘signs’ remains that of following faithfully the unfolding of the liturgical year. Pastors should be committed to that “*mystagogical catechesis*” so dear to the Fathers of the Church, by which the faithful are helped to understand the meaning of the liturgy’s words and actions, to pass from its signs to the mystery which they contain, and to enter into that mystery in every aspect of our lives.”

Pope Benedict XVI — 2007

Sacramentum Caritatis

64. The Church's great liturgical tradition teaches us that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one's life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. The Synod Fathers unanimously indicated, in this regard, a mystagogical approach to catechesis, which would lead the faithful to understand more deeply the mysteries being celebrated.

Sacramentum Caritatis

That is why, in the Church's most ancient tradition, the process of Christian formation always had an experiential character. While not neglecting a systematic understanding of the content of the faith, it centred on a vital and convincing encounter with Christ, as proclaimed by authentic witnesses. It is first and foremost the witness who introduces others to the mysteries. Naturally, this initial encounter gains depth through catechesis and finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Sacramentum Caritatis

This basic structure of the Christian experience calls for a process of mystagogy which should always respect three elements:

- a) *It interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation*, in accordance with the Church's living tradition.
- b) A mystagogical catechesis must also be concerned with *presenting the meaning of the signs* contained in the rites.
- c) Finally, a mystagogical catechesis must be concerned with bringing out the *significance of the rites for the Christian life* in all its dimensions – work and responsibility, thoughts and emotions, activity and repose.

Mystagogical Catechesis A Transforming Catechetical Method

The Movements of Mystagogical Catechesis

- The Event
- Reflective Remembrance
- Initial Reflection
- Secondary Reflection
- Sharing the Christian Vision
- Change for the Sake of Mission

The Event

- **Liturgical** (Sunday Mass, First Communion, Rites of Initiation, Confirmation, Reconciliation, School Mass, Funeral, Stations of the Cross, etc.)
- **Apostolic Activity** (Nursing Home visit, Food Pantry, “Service” projects, etc.)
- **Parish or School Functions**

Reflective Remembrance

- *This step may be needed if some time has elapsed since the event.*
- Recall the event using images, words, photos, video recordings, audio recordings, digital images, musical fragments, suggestions of sound, mood, and color.

Initial Reflection

- Allow the participants to describe the “raw” experience, without much quest for deeper meaning:
 - What did you see, hear, smell, taste, feel?
 - What did you experience?
 - What touched you about the event?
 - How would you describe your feelings at any particular moment?

Secondary Reflection

- This step is designed to allow the participants to go beyond the experiential into the worlds of meaning behind the experience.
- They are invited to “savor the mysteries.”
- This is at the heart of mystagogy.

Secondary Reflection

- Probing the meaning:
 - How were you struck by God’s presence?
 - What was your experience of God?
 - How would you describe your experience of Christ during the event?
 - How was the Church made present?
 - If we could put lips on the symbols, what would they say?
 - What was written on your heart?

Sharing the Christian Vision

- In dialogue with the experience, some relevant aspect/aspects of the Tradition are developed.
- Use the experience and the reflection upon the experience as the starting point.
- This movement further probes the worlds of meaning revealed in the experience and the reflections.

Sharing the Christian Vision

- Many would describe this movement as the only “catechetical moment,” yet the entire process should be seen as catechetical through and through!
- Traditional “tools” of catechesis (the manila folder, the lesson plan, etc.) enter the picture here, but are always used in relation to the experience and the reflections on the experience.

Change for the Sake of Mission

- This is the ultimate quest of mystagogical catechesis.
 - Given the event, the reflections on the event, the worlds of meaning disclosed, and the dialogue with Christian Vision, *what difference does it all make?*
 - How has the experience shaped the lives and future actions of the participants?
 - Where is God leading me/What is the cost?

Opportunities for Mystagogical Catechesis

- The homily
- Catechetical gatherings
- Religious formation in Catholic schools
- The parish bulletin
- Reflections with catechumens & candidates
- Christian witness (Period of Mystagogy)
- Reflections on apprenticeship activities

Mystagogy

The Period of Mystagogy in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Let's look at the Rite

- Paragraphs 244-251
- National Statutes 22-24

Let's look at the Rite

- Paragraphs 244-251
- National Statutes 22–24
- Let's read through these paragraphs now, noticing what we see as the Rite's vision for the period of mystagogy

RCIA 244

“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.”

RCIA 245

“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.”

RCIA 245 (cont.)

“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 247

“Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community, its main setting is the so-called Masses for the neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season.”

RCIA 248

“All the neophytes and their godparents should make an effort to take part in the Masses for the neophytes and the entire local community should be invited to participate with them. Special places in the congregation are to be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents. The homily and, as circumstances suggest, the general intercessions should take into account the presence and needs of the neophytes.”

Vision of Mystagogy Principles

- Community and neophytes together deepen their grasp of the paschal mystery (244)
- Making the paschal a part of their lives through:
 - Meditation on the Gospel
 - Sharing in the Eucharist
 - Doing the works of charity

Vision of Mystagogy Principles

- Community, godparents, pastors should provide “friendly help”
- Fuller and more effective understanding of the Mysteries through the Gospel and the experience of the sacraments
- Interaction between neophytes and the community – beneficial for both

Vision of Mystagogy Principles

- The main settings for mystagogy are the Sunday Masses of the Easter Season (special places in the congregation)
- Some sort of celebration near Pentecost
- Anniversary of Baptism
- Annual Celebration with the bishop
- At least monthly assemblies (National Statutes #24)

Two Central Points

- Deepening the grasp of the paschal mystery
- Experience is a critical conversation partner

The Shape of Mystagogy in the RCIA

- Sunday Masses of the Easter Season with special places reserved
- Preaching that is mystagogical in nature, drawing neophytes and the entire community into a deeper grasp of the paschal mystery
- “Sessions” – are they needed? If so, would a reflection session following Mass suffice?
- Pentecost Celebration
- Monthly gatherings (connected to some parish event with time for reflection)
- Anniversary Celebration
- Mass with the bishop

Dialogue between Practice and the Vision of the Rite

- How is your current practice of mystagogy affirmed by the vision of the rite?
- How is your current practice of mystagogy challenged by the vision of the rite?
- Name some ways that the period of mystagogy will look different in your parish next year.