

IS YOUR MYSTAGOGIA MISSING?

SUGGESTIONS TO NURTURE YOUR NEOPHYTES
AND ENRICH YOUR PARISH COMMUNITY



INTRODUCTION

In the initiation of new Catholics, a period of mystagogy follows the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. The term mystagogy means “the mysteries revealed.” In this period, “the neophytes [newly planted] are introduced into a fuller understanding of the mysteries through the gospel message and above all through their experience of the *sacraments* they have received” (RCIA 245, emphasis added). An effective mystagogy in the parish must focus on the *Word* and the *Eucharist*.

Too often, parish initiation teams think that the main focus of this period is urging the neophytes to join a parish club or sign up to volunteer at the soup kitchen. Such participation in parish life and apostolic works should have already been a vital part of the catechumenate period.

This is the 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 works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in the newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priest should give them thoughtful and friendly help (RCIA 244).

Similar to their formation during the catechumenate period, their continuing formation must be based upon participation in the liturgy of the Church; ongoing catechesis in harmony with the Liturgical Year; immersion into the Christian way of life, and participation in apostolic works (cf. RCIA #75).

We have developed the attached brochures based upon those four categories – liturgy, catechesis, the Christian way of life, and apostolic works. We hope that they can assist you in the formation of your initiation team, your sponsors, and your parish community.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “Come then, eat your bread with enjoyment” He means spiritual bread. “Come then” his invitation brings salvation and blessedness. “And drink your wine with a merry heart—the wine of the Spirit. “And let oil be poured over your head”—you see him here hinting at the sacramental anointing. “And let your garments always be white, because of the Lord has approved of what you do. For before you drew near to the gift, your works were “vanity of vanities.”

Once you have stripped off the old garments and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be clad in white always. I am not, of course, saying that you must always wear white clothing on your body, but that your spiritual dress must be truly white and shining, so that they may say, in the words of the blessed Isaiah, “Let my soul rejoice in the Lord. He has clothed me with the garment of salvation and with the robe of gladness he has covered me.”

(Cyril of Jerusalem, quoting from the books of Ecclesiastes and Isaiah as he instructed neophytes, c. 386 AD.)

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THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

PART I: THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH

Since the neophytes were initiated to participate fully in the sacramental the life of the Church, their presence in the assembly at Sunday Mass is of utmost importance.

You need do nothing more than to prepare the Church's liturgy well. The orations and readings for the Sundays of the Easter season draw our attention to the glory of the Resurrection, to the initiation sacraments, and to the neophytes in our midst. Rely on the rites—their symbols, assigned readings, and profound orations—to give the neophytes (and the rest of the parish) the proper Easter "attitude." The Second Sunday of Easter provides the perfect example.

DOMINICA IN ALBIS

In the fourth and fifth century, the newly-baptized wore their white garments for Easter Week. They came to church daily to hear the bishop explain the rites they had experienced at the Easter Vigil and to participate in the Eucharist. The following Sunday, the eighth day of Easter, came to be known as *dominica in albis*, "the Sunday for laying aside the white garment." You may continue this tradition in your parish and invite the neophytes to wear their white garment to church on the Second Sunday of Easter.

While all the Sundays of the Easter season are appropriate for Masses with the neophytes, the Second Sunday of Easter provides particularly appropriate readings and orations.

YEAR C—SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 12-16

Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Revelation 1: 9-11 a, 12-13, 17-19

John 20: 19-31

Great numbers of believers were added
Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
his love is everlasting.

I was dead, but now I live forever.

"Peace be with you"; doubting Thomas

God of mercy,
you wash away our sins in water,
you give us new birth in the Spirit
and redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection
increase our awareness of these blessings,
and renew your gift of life within us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever. Amen.
(Opening Prayer, Second Sunday of Easter)

Lord,
through faith and baptism
we have become a new creation.
Accept the offerings of your people
and of those born again in baptism
and bring us to eternal happiness.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Prayer over the Gifts)

Almighty God,
may the Easter sacraments we have received
live forever in our minds and hearts.
(Prayer after Communion)

THE SUNDAYS OF EASTER

Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of post-baptismal 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. Besides being occasions for the newly-baptized to gather with the community and share in the mysteries, these celebrations include particularly suitable readings from the Lectionary, especially the readings for Year A. Even when Christian initiation has been celebrated outside the usual times, the texts for these Sunday Masses of the Easter season may be used (RCIA 247).

On all the Sundays of Easter season, the following options are recommended to those who prepare the liturgy:

- Include the neophytes and their sponsors in the opening procession.
- Seat them in pews which are visible to the assembly or in pews scattered throughout the nave. Their presence now is in stark contrast to their dismissal during the catechumenate period.
- Use the sprinkling rite each Sunday of the season. (It is prescribed for the Second Sunday of Easter.) Use the symbol of water lavishly.
- Include the neophytes in the homily and in the general intercessions each Sunday and weekday.
- The following intercessions might serve as examples:
For all who were initiated at the Easter Vigil, that by the grace of the sacraments they will courageously persevere in the Christian life, we pray.
For our neophytes and for all who have joined the Church in this Easter Season, that the joy of the resurrection may show forth in their lives, we pray.
For all who have joined us at the Lord's table in this Easter Season, may they continue to be fed by the love of the Lord and may their lives give witness to the sacrifice of Christ, we pray.
- Have the neophytes present the gifts.
- Let the neophytes evangelize the assembly. Few Catholics are as eager to share their faith as a neophyte. Their conversion is so fresh and their enthusiasm so contagious. Let them give witness at least one weekend, but preferably at all the Masses of the Easter season. One neophyte may be invited to speak at each of the Masses. This talk takes place after the Prayer After Communion and lasts no longer than five minutes. If possible, avoid using the ambo.
- Observe Easter for fifty days. Keep the joy of Easter and the thrill of receiving new members always in front of the parish.

If you haven't already done so in the catechumenal period, provide catechesis on the Mass. Avoid interrupting Mass with various "explanations." On a weeknight, provide instruction on the history and structure of the Mass; this might be followed with a celebration of the Mass. Another technique would be to celebrate Mass and then provide time for mystagogical reflection on it. Recommended resources include Edward Foley's excellent, five part CD series *Eucharist as Mystagogy* (WLP); *The Mystery of Faith* by Lawrence J. Johnson (FDLC); and *Visions of Liturgy and Music for a New Century* by Lucien Deiss (The Liturgical Press).

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YEAR A

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 42-47

1 Peter 1: 3-9

John 20: 19-31

All who believed were together and held all things in common.
God has given us new birth ... hope through the resurrection
Peace be with you...whose sins you shall forgive... Thomas

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 22-33

1 Peter 1: 17-21

Luke 24: 13-35

Impossible for Jesus to be held by death... we are all witnesses
You were saved with the precious blood of Christ... the Lamb
Road to Emmaus...recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 1, 4a, 36-41

1 Peter 2: 20b-25

John 10: 1-10

God made Jesus both Lord and Christ.. 3000 persons added that day
He bore our sins... you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls.
The sheep hear the shepherds voice... I am the gate for the sheep

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 6: 1-7

1 Peter 2: 4-9

John 14: 1-12

Choosing seven men as deacons
You are living stones... you are a chosen race a royal priesthood
I am the way and the truth and the life

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

[The second reading and gospel may be taken from the 7th Sunday of Easter]

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17

1 Peter 3: 15-18

John 14: 15-21

Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit
Christ was put to death in the flesh... raised in-the Spirit
The Father will send you an Advocate

ASCENSION

Acts 1: 1-11

Ephesians 1: 17-23

Matthew 28: 16-20

In my first book, Theophilus... Jesus ascends into heaven
God seated Jesus at his right hand
All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Go baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

PENTECOST (VIGIL)

Genesis 11: 1-9

Romans 8: 22-27

John 7: 37-39

Tower of Babel [one of several options]
The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness
Rivers of living waters will flow

PENTECOST (DAY)

Acts 2: 1-11

1 Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13

John 20: 19-23

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak
In one spirit we were all baptized into one body
As the Father sent me, so I send you... receive the Holy Spirit