

THE PROCESS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION – CHRIST FORMS HIS DISCIPLES – OCIA

**Encounter
Christ**

**Follow
Christ**

**Changed
by Christ**

**Sent
by Christ**

PRECATECHUMENATE (INQUIRY): CATECHUMENATE: PURIFICATION: AND ENLIGHTENMENT MYSTAGOGY

"The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil". This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism. (General Directory for Catechesis, paragraph 59)

I. Encountering Christ (Inquiry)_

- The disciples were sought out and called by Christ, amidst their sin and weakness.
- That encounter compelled to make a decision – they dropped their fishing nets and followed.
- They didn't know where they were going, or even who they were following!

RITE OF ACCEPTANCE – This “dropping the nets” moment is ritualized in the Rite of Acceptance, where the inquirer accepts the Gospel, is marked with the sign of the cross, and initiated into the order of the Catechumens. Catechumen literally means “one who hears the voice.”

- We are also called to make an intentional decision – to leave everything behind for the sake of following Christ.

II. Following Christ (Catechumenate):

- The disciples followed Christ and listened to His teaching, which delighted, puzzled, and sometimes even angered them. • They still had many attachments to the world, and were called to truly leave them behind and trust in Him.

- This was a time of questions – a time to wrestle with the Truth, and to make a choice: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

RITE OF ELECTION – After a period of catechesis, the catechumen is called to make a choice to submit themselves to Christ. This submission to Christ's authority is ritualized in the Rite of Election, when the catechumen stands before the archbishop and asks, through Baptism, to die with Christ and be born again in the Spirit. They inscribe their names in the Book of Elect – they are no longer catechumens – they are now the Elect of God.

- We are also confronted with the person of Christ, who asks us to trust in Him and submit to His authority. To imitate Him. One way we do this is by practicing the spiritual disciplines of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer; which combats the worldly temptations of pleasure, possessions, and pride. We also meditate on the Scriptures, and actively educate ourselves on the teachings of the Church.

III. Changed By Christ (Purification and Enlightenment)

- The disciples, who expected Jesus to conquer the Romans and rule as the promised King of Israel (with them at His side), had to come face to face with their own false ideas, fleeing on the night of Jesus' arrest.
- Peter, who had vowed to die with Jesus if necessary, denies Him three times. After Peter's denial, Jesus looks at him – a single glance illuminating the darkness of his heart and causing him to repent with great sorrow (Luke 22:61-62). The look of Christ showed Peter both his spiritual poverty and his desperate desire for God.
- THE SCRUTINIES – This moment of recognition is ritualized in the three Scrutinies, in which the Elect open their hearts in order that they may be scrutinized by the Holy Spirit, who brings to light all the parts of them that are weak and sinful and imparts to them the strength of Christ while they wait for their rebirth through Baptism.
- We also must place ourselves under the gaze of Christ, who shows us our weakness and calls us to greater holiness. We too are called to continual conversion, being reconciled to Christ through Confession, and using the gifts we've been given to bring the good news of reconciliation to everyone we meet.
- After the Resurrection, Christ passes through locked doors to appear to his disciples and offers them true Peace. He reconciles with Peter and begins to equip him for his mission as apostle and witness.

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION – This transformative encounter with Christ is ritualized in the highest liturgy of the Church – the Easter Vigil – in which the entire history of salvation is recounted, culminating in the reception of the sacraments of initiation by the Elect. They are born again as children of God in Baptism, receive the Gift of the Spirit in Confirmation, and are united more intimately to Christ in the Holy Eucharist. They are no longer Elect – they are now Neophytes (literally, newly planted ones), and ready to receive their Mission.

- We too are called to an intimate relationship with Christ, who gives us Himself in the Holy Eucharist and invites us to participate in His mission of reconciliation in the world! Through the sacraments we are conformed more and more into His image – “Christians” (literally, “little Christs”)

IV. Sent By Christ (Mystagogy)

- After the resurrection, Jesus spends 40 days with the disciples, opening the scriptures and showing them the significance of His passion, death, and resurrection. He tells them to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit who will empower them to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.
- At Pentecost the disciples receive the Holy Spirit, and are sent out as witnesses to the Gospel. They are now truly apostles (literally “those who are sent”)! The world now encounters Christ in them.
- We too are given gifts and sent into the world as witnesses for Christ. Through our lives, we facilitate an encounter with Christ for others – and by doing so are often surprised to encounter Christ ourselves in new and unexpected ways! The cycle begins again – we encounter, follow, are changed, and sent anew!

How is the Rite of Christian Initiation a Model for ALL Formation?

It is centered in an encounter with a person that leads to a deepening of relationship.

The goal of formation is not increased knowledge – the goal is increased love.

It involves risk, and demands sacrifice – just like any relationship.

It is lifelong and all-encompassing – our faith forms us. It changes everything!

It is oriented towards mission – bringing others into an encounter with Christ: making disciples (Matt 28:18-20).

