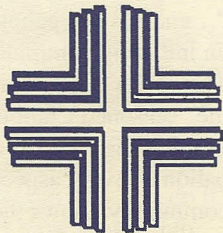


Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Office of Divine Worship, Archdiocese of Newark, Volume 26, No. 4, 2009

FATHER
MICHAEL SHEEHAN,
FORMER DIRECTOR
OF THE
CATECHUMENATE,
SHARES HIS
STORY

Rev. Thomas A. Dente
Director, Office of Divine Worship



Father Michael Sheehan is a tall man and could even be considered imposing if not for his gentle voice and pastoral demeanor which are instantly disarming. He is just settling into his new assignment as pastor of Saint Peter the Apostle Church, River Edge, after having served for thirteen years as pastor in the Church of the Annunciation, Paramus. With his move from Paramus to River Edge, he is also ending his fifteen year tenure as Director of the Catechumenate for the Archdiocese of Newark. This past March, he agreed to an interview for *Word on Worship* to discuss his years of service.

BEGINNINGS

In 1994, Father Michael Merlucci concluded his position as Director of the Catechumenate for the Archdiocese of Newark. Fr. Sheehan, motivated by a deep appreciation for the value of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), applied for the position and was appointed by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick.

When asked about his first experience of the RCIA, Father Sheehan recalls attending a workshop in the late 1970's led by Msgr. Thomas Ivory on the provisional text of the RCIA. At that time, the final text had not yet been promulgated and published. It was the last of the post-Vatican II rituals to be completed, and the Church took its time, experimenting and formulating the texts based on ancient rites and modern pastoral needs.

Father Sheehan obtained a copy of the provisional text and read it. "It really opened my eyes to the way things were going with Christian initiation," he recalls, but words in a ritual do not compare with the actual celebration of the rites, which were first experienced by Father Sheehan in his first assignment at Saint Philomena, Livingston. "Archbishop Peter Gerety himself came to Saint Philomena's to preside at the Easter Vigil and we initiated people into the faith. Archbishop Gerety really understood the rite and made it come alive. It made me see how effective it could be if these rites were celebrated well. It really made me appreciate the possibilities of the RCIA."

During the 1980s, Father Sheehan studied the RCIA, working and learning about the process of initiation most notably with two religious sisters, Sr. Patricia Brennan, OP, at Saint Philomena Church, Livingston, and Sr. Anna Tansits, IHM, at Immaculate Conception Church, Montclair. He also began his involvement with the North American Forum on the Catechumenate,¹ attending its institutes and gleaning everything he could about the steps and periods of the RCIA and the philosophy of this process.

IN THIS ISSUE: Father Michael Sheehan, Former Director of the Catechumenate, Shares His Story • Principles of Translating the *Missale Romanum*, Part 3 • Ten Commandments for the RCIA • Doing It Rite: Celebrating the Anointing of Catechumens, *A Minor Rite of the RCIA*

After attending several institutes, Father Sheehan interned with the North American Forum and is now a team member, giving workshops, talks and Forum institutes on the RCIA across the country. Closer to home, he has given workshops and talks on the catechumenate in the Dioceses of Metuchen, Paterson and Trenton.

As Director of the Catechumenate for the Archdiocese of Newark, Fr. Mike has spoken on many occasions to RCIA coordinators and their team members, as well as priests and deacons. "It's so important to build up relationships among the RCIA leadership so they can support and mentor each other. I have tried to do that as Director over the years, and there really are many outstanding people in Newark working with the RCIA."

Father Sheehan recalls the days before the RCIA when a priest would often meet one-on-one with a person seeking baptism. "You would meet with the person and read a book with them like, *What is the Catholic Church?* Then, any day the priest felt they were ready, they would be baptized 'privately' in the convent chapel. The next time Mass was celebrated, they would receive first Communion and when the bishop came to the parish for adolescent confirmation, they would be placed on the back of the line. They were initiated like children and there was no community participation. There was also no appreciation for the liturgical year."

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as we have it today was promulgated in 1986, and it has taken some time for parishes to make full use of it. In many ways it is still just in its beginning phase. "In the Archdiocese of Newark, most parishes are making use of it, and the laity have a growing appreciation for the Rite. In fact, we are now in the process of teaching the second generation of ministers working with the RCIA since it was first promulgated. The most important thing they need to keep in mind is to take their time with learning and implementing the Rite, and to realize it is meant to have an impact on the prayer life of the entire community, not just on the individuals going through the process."

ONE-YEAR CATECHUMENATE

The RCIA is not without its ongoing challenges. "The Period of the Catechumenate needs to be longer than just a few months," laments Father Sheehan. "Too many parishes are still following the 'school model' of entering the catechumenate in the fall and being fully initiated just a few months later at Easter. This does not take into account the complex process of faith development and conversion that a person needs to go through while a member of the catechumenate."

For the past several years, he has worked to implement a minimum one-year catechumenate in the Archdiocese of Newark. "People celebrating the Rite of Acceptance into the Catechumenate in September should not be fully initiated until at least a year and a half later.

Discernment is the issue, and it takes serious time to grow in your faith life and to be ready for such a big commitment as joining the Church and becoming a disciple of Christ." The one-year catechumenate is in compliance with the Rite² itself and the US Statutes on the Catechumenate³, and has also been of particular concern to the Archbishop of Newark, John J. Myers.

When asked directly how he knows if catechumens are ready for initiation, Father Sheehan says it is when he notices that they have taken on a sense of their own role of ministry; when they realize they have a role to play in the Church. This past Holy Week, he gave a homily on Palm Sunday in which he commented on the man who gave his donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. As a modern analogy, he said it would be like lending your car or truck to Jesus for his use. With a smile, he recognizes that "Everyone has a donkey to give! Everyone has a way to participate in the life of Christ and contribute to the life of the Church. Once a catechumen realizes that, he or she is ready for initiation."

SEPARATING THE RITES

Another challenge with the development of the RCIA is the unintended effects of the combined rites. The combined rites were added to the RCIA ritual to allow a parish with both catechumens (unbaptized) and baptized candidates (for confirmation, Eucharist, etc.) to celebrate the

sacraments together. Although well intentioned, this has caused no end of confusion for the initiates, the assembly and the formation process. The answer to the confusion? "Separate them," says Father Sheehan. He is happy to report that "most parishes do not do the combined rites any more."

During his tenure, the Archdiocesan celebrations of the Rite of Election (for catechumens) and the Call to Continuing Conversion (for candidates) have been separated. These rites, celebrated each year in the cathedral during Lent, were once combined, blurring the line between those who were baptized and those who were not. This is also why permission to confirm adult baptized Catholics is not given for the Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil is reserved for baptism.

By urging the separation of the rites, Father Sheehan sought to establish not only the ritual distinctions between catechumens and candidates, but also the methods of formation and catechesis for each. "There is an altogether different approach when ministering to the needs of the baptized and the unbaptized, and it is of great importance that we do not treat baptized people as if they had not received the sacrament of baptism."

THE INITIATING COMMUNITY

One of the most outstanding features of the RCIA, according to Fr. Sheehan, is its public setting within the community of the faithful. When parishes celebrate the dismissals, scrutinies and initiation within the context of the Sunday assembly, it "...enables our people to see their role as an initiating community in a new way." The parish community is where you find the "seasoned Catholic Christians," says Fr. Sheehan, and the catechumen's participation in every aspect of the life of that community allows the parish to mentor and apprentice new members into the faith. "Formation in the faith is about living as a disciple. We don't learn to be disciples by learning facts, but by living a life of community."

Not only does the RCIA have a profound effect on the catechumens and candidates, but it also has an effect on the entire parish community. "Everything in a parish is about continuing conversion. The *General Directory for Catechesis*⁴ states

that the RCIA should be the model for all catechesis." Sacramental preparation for children and young people, adult education and formation, and even parish retreats should all be modeled on the catechumenate.

WORDS OF WISDOM

When asked about the pastor's role in the RCIA, Fr. Mike is quick to answer: "Enable people to celebrate the rituals; provide support and resources; be a member of the team. Teach and catechize and do your best to preach and celebrate the rites with enthusiasm and vigor." He adds a few more heartfelt words for all priests. "Priests have to realize that initiation is more than a part of our 'job;' it's why we are here, why we were ordained. The RCIA is not a program, it is a process. The better we get at initiating new people, the better we get at continuing the conversion of those already in our pews."

Words of wisdom from Fr. Mike for the next Director of the Catechumenate include strong encouragement to help parishes and support them in their work with the RCIA. "Meet with the RCIA leadership, encourage them to share their ideas. There is much wisdom and understanding that can occur when RCIA coordinators and leaders get together."

The Director of the Catechumenate's office is part of the Office of Divine Worship. Father Mike spoke of having learned much by interacting with such members of the Worship Office as Msgr. Richard Groncki, Sr. Sandy DeMasi, SSSJ and Fr. Thomas Iwanowski. "I have learned so much over the years from working with the Worship Office – how to be a priest, a good presider, and even how to be more faithful to my priesthood." He admits that, "When I was first ordained, I still had to learn the importance of good liturgy, how to help people pray and do it well. Over the years, I have grown into holiness because I learned how to pray the liturgy of the Church."

Fr. Sheehan also made clear his gratitude to Archbishop Myers who kept him on as Director of the Catechumenate after arriving here as Archbishop of Newark eight years ago. "I have personally taken the opportunity to thank Archbishop Myers for keeping me on as Director these past eight years. It has been a blessing to serve

in such an important ministry of the Archdiocese."

The current Director of the Office of Divine Worship (and author of this interview) acknowledges with gratitude the many years of service Father Michael Sheehan has given. The Worship Office will miss Fr. Mike as Director of the Catechumenate but knows he will remain a faithful friend for years to come. Good luck and God bless.

¹ www.naforum.org

² See RCIA, 7 & 76

³ See *National Statutes for the Catechumenate*, 6 (Appendix III in the RCIA ritual)

⁴ *General Directory for Catechesis (1998)*, 258



Words on Worship

2009 Easter Vigil Homily Pope Benedict XVI

According to the earliest practice of the Church, baptism had to be administered with water from a fresh spring. Without water there is no life. It is striking how much importance is attached to wells in Sacred Scripture. They are places from which life rises forth. Beside Jacob's well, Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman of the new well, the water of true life. He reveals himself to her as the new, definitive Jacob, who opens up for humanity the well that is awaited: the inexhaustible source of life-giving water (cf. *Jn* 4:5-15). Saint John tells us that a soldier with a lance struck the side of Jesus, and from his open side – from his pierced heart – there came out blood and water (cf. *Jn* 19:34). The early Church saw in this a symbol of Baptism and Eucharist flowing from the pierced heart of Jesus. In his death, Jesus himself became the spring... Jesus, however, prophesied something still greater. He said: "Whoever believes in me... out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (*Jn* 7:38). In Baptism, the Lord makes us not only persons of light, but also sources from which living water bursts forth. We all know people like that, who leave us somehow refreshed and renewed; people who are like a fountain of fresh spring water... Thanks be to God, we find them constantly even in our daily lives: people who are like a spring. Certainly, we also know the opposite: people who spread around themselves an atmosphere like a stagnant pool of stale, or even poisoned water. Let us ask the Lord, who has given us the grace of baptism, for the gift always to be sources of pure, fresh water, bubbling up from the fountain of his truth and his love!

Principles Of Translating the *Missale Romanum*, Part 3

(from the March 2008 Newsletter – © 2008 USCCB)

Continuing the series on principles surrounding the translation of the *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia*, we turn now to questions of person, number, and gender.

Paragraph 57b of *Liturgiam authenticam* (LA) notes that “in the translation of terms contained in the original text, the same person, number and gender is to be maintained insofar as possible.” This applies not only to the liturgical text but also to the original language of the biblical text as well. Thus the grammatical gender of a given word which denotes a spiritual or divine being such as God the Father or Christ should be translated as in the original text.

A particular exception is given with reference to the Holy Spirit. The masculine person is to be used for the Holy Spirit (i.e., Romans 8:16 “The Spirit *himself* bears witness”) and for the “Spirit” of God in the Old Testament as well. This is seen as consistent with the Latin tradition of biblical translation and liturgical prayer.

Explicit directions for our question are provided in LA no. 31. One should avoid resorting to mechanical substitution of words, the transition from the singular to the plural, the splitting of a unitary collective term into masculine and feminine parts, or the introduction of impersonal or abstract words, all of which may impede the communication of the true and integral sense of a word or an expression in the original text. This approach opens the door to theological and anthropological problems.

Specific attention is given to the term, “Son of Man.” LA no. 31b notes: “the fixed expression ‘Son of Man’ must be rendered faithfully and exactly. The great Christological and typological significance of this expression requires that there should also be employed throughout the translation a rule of language that will ensure that the fixed expression remain comprehensible in the context of the whole translation.” The *Ratio translationis* indicates as particularly apt the use of the inclusive “man,” in the singular or in the plural in contexts in which a clear delineation or parallel is being drawn between divine and earthly realms.

With reference to the Church, LA no. 31b indicates a preference for the feminine pronoun rather than the neuter.

Care also has to be taken when a different word replaces the inclusive “man.” Some suggest the use of “human being” or “person.” Because these words seem to be more proper to philosophical discourse, these words might be considered as inappropriate for a biblical context. The use of the word “humans” as a substantive raises some aesthetic concerns and might evoke a contrast not with God, but with animals. Other terms such as “mortal,” “one” or “people” all have some problematic aspects to them.

LA approaches this question from a very definite perspective. In paragraph 29 it notes:

...Similarly, it is the task of catechists or of the homilist to transmit that right interpretation of the texts that excludes any prejudice or unjust discrimination on the basis of persons, gender, social condition, race or other criteria, which has no foundation at all in the texts of the Sacred Liturgy. Although considerations such as these may sometimes help one in choosing among various translations of a certain expression, they are not to be considered reasons for altering either a biblical text or a liturgical text that has been duly promulgated.

Thus, when the final text appears proper catechesis will have to be provided for those expressions that need clarification in order to address any perceived prejudice or unjust discrimination.

For more information on the new translation of the Roman Missal visit
www.usccb.org/liturgy/missalformation

Office of Divine Worship
is pleased to welcome two nationally known speakers
on the topic of the

Third Typical edition of the Roman Missal

The Reverend Monsignor James Moroney
Former Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for Divine Worship

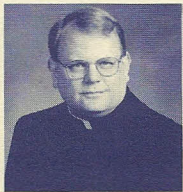
The Reverend Paul Turner, STD
Pastor, Liturgical Theologian and Author

The newly translated 3rd edition of the Roman Missal (Sacramentary) now nearing completion, could be published as soon as May of 2011. Over the next two years, the Office of Divine Worship will offer presentations, resources, and workshops for parish leaders to prepare for its implementation. In order to begin a program of implementation of the Roman Missal, third edition, in the Archdiocese of Newark, two presentations have been scheduled for the fall of 2009.

Both the Catholic and secular press have featured articles on the subject of the new Roman Missal, particularly its language. These offerings are opportunities to hear from the experts. Please mark your calendars and share this information with others. Both presentations will take place in the Archdiocesan Center, 171 Clifton Avenue, Newark, NJ 07104. On-line registering will be available at www.RomanMissalNewark.org. Admission is free.

Monsignor James Moroney will make a presentation to priests.

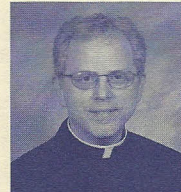
Fr. Paul Turner will speak to deacons and religious (brothers & sisters) and lay leaders.



Msgr. James Moroney
Roman Missal Talk for Priests

Monday, October 19, 2009
1:00-3:30 PM & 7:00-9:30 PM

Tuesday, October 20, 2009
10:00 AM – 12:30 PM (if needed)



Fr. Paul Turner
*Roman Missal Talk for
Deacons*

Monday, November 16, 2009
7:00–9:30 PM

*Roman Missal Talk for
Religious (brothers and
sisters) and Lay Leaders*
Tuesday, November 17, 2009
1-3:30 PM & 7-9:30 PM

Register now at www.RomanMissalNewark.org

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR THE RCIA



1. THOU SHALT USE THE PROCESS OF THE RCIA TO INITIATE ALL UN-BAPTIZED ADULTS.

Promulgated in 1972. Mandated in the USA in 1988. What's on your bookshelf?

2. THOU SHALT UNDERSTAND THE PROPER SEQUENCE OF THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION AS BAPTISM - CONFIRMATION - EUCHARIST.

"Christian initiation is accomplished by three sacraments together: baptism which is the beginning of new life; confirmation which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist which nourishes the disciple with Christ's Body and Blood for his transformation in Christ." (CCC, 1275)

"The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist." (CCC, 1322)

3. THOU SHALT NEVER CALL THE RCIA A "PROGRAM" BUT A "PROCESS."

RCIA is a process which leads to initiation. It conforms the faith life of the individual to the faith life of the Church. Never, never refer to those who have gone through the RCIA as "graduates." It is not a Masters in Theology program!

4. THOU SHALT INSIST ON A YEAR MINIMUM FOR THE CHUMENATE.

"The second period, which begins with the rite of entrance into the order of the catechumens and may last for several years, includes catechetical instruction and the rites connected with it." (RCIA, 7:2)

"The time in the catechumenate should be long enough to ensure the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong Christians." (RCIA, 76)

"The period of catechumenate...should extend for at least one year of formation, instruction and probation. Ordinarily this period should go for at least the Easter season of one year until the next; preferably it should begin before Lent of one year and extend until Easter of the following year." (Norms for the Catechumenate, 6)

5. THOU SHALT SEPARATE THE RITES FOR THE CHUMENS FROM THY CANDIDATES.

Whose idea was it to put all this stuff in one book, anyway? Imagine the RCIA rituals in separate books, the first for catechumens and the second for candidates. Ignore all of those "combined rites." Baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. Never, never celebrate the scrutinies, even if they are

Catholic. There can no longer be any treating of baptized people as if they were not baptized just for the convenience of the RCIA team! Prepare them separately.

6. THOU SHALT ADHERE TO A YEAR ROUND MODEL OF FORMATION FOR CATECHUMENS.

The Spirit moves year round. Inquirers who come forward in April should not be told to come back in September. Conversion does not take a summer vacation, either. Sure things may slow down in the summer months but there still needs to be ongoing formation.

7. THOU SHALT USE THE PARISH COMMUNITY TO APPRENTICE CATECHUMENS INTO THE FAITH.

“Christian initiation during the catechumenate is not the concern of catechists or priests alone, but of the whole community of believers...so that from the outset the catechumens will have a sense of being part of the people of God.” (*Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, 14)

“...the people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ.” (RCIA, 9)

Apprenticing others into the faith helps

the faith life of the community, too.

8. THOU SHALT NOT USE THE RCIA BUT LET THE RCIA USE YOU.

The rites of the Church are not to be manipulated by users for their own agenda. The rites of the Church are meant to form and shape us into the Body of Christ. When we pick things out of the RCIA ritual to match our “program” we are forming people into our own image instead of God’s.

9. THOU SHALT FULLY INITIATE CHILDREN OF THE AGE OF REASON AND OLDER.

Just because she is twelve does not mean you do not prepare her for full initiation. Anyone seven years of age or older who is not baptized is to be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil, but they may require several years in the catechumenate, especially if they are only seven or eight years old! Use this as an opportunity to help families and parishioners to get on board with the proper sequencing of the Sacraments of Initiation!

10. THOU SHALT REMEMBER THAT THE EASTER VIGIL IS FIRST AND FOREMOST FOR BAPTISM.

Save all those candidates for confirmation and first Communion for one of the other Sundays of Easter or Pentecost. Don’t overburden the Vigil – it has always been the premiere liturgy to celebrate full initiation – baptism, confirmation *and* Eucharist!

DOING IT RITE: CELEBRATING THE ANOINTING OF THE CATECHUMENS A MINOR RITE OF THE RCIA

Rev. Thomas A. Dente, Director
Office of Divine Worship

Each year during Holy Week at the Chrism Mass, three oils are blessed by the bishop: sacred chrism, oil of the sick and oil of the catechumens. The most celebrated of the three is the sacred chrism which is used for the anointings during infant baptisms, confirmations, presbyteral and Episcopal ordinations and dedications of churches and altars. The oil of the sick is also frequently used as it is required for the celebration of the sacrament of the sick.

Of the three oils, it is probably safe to say that the oil of the catechumens is the one to least exit the ambry. For infant baptism, this oil is used (optionally) to anoint the child prior to the actual baptism with water. Adult catechumens often do not make contact with this oil until very late in the period of the catechumenate, if at all. This is lamentable since there are many times during the period of the catechumenate in which the catechumens ought to be anointed with this special oil.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is first and foremost a rite of the Church, a ritual. All of these rites, including the "minor rites," should be employed in the catechumenal process. No one would bring an unbaptized person into church at the Easter vigil and initiate them without proper catechesis and formation. Why would we not also take advantage of the RCIA's minor rites and neglect one of the most powerful means of forming people in the faith?

Good ritual celebration immerses the catechumens in the world of ritual and symbol, and together with good catechesis can endow them with a lasting appreciation for the language of ritual. In a Church that derives its identity from its liturgical life, this is a key element in the formation of the faithful. No amount of classroom handouts or lectures can form one as deeply as celebrating the rites well.¹

All catechumens spend at least one year in the catechumenate, some even longer. During this time, they are to be strengthened and encouraged with celebrations of the minor rites, such as the "Anointing of the Catechumens." (See RCIA 98-103) This "Doing It Rite" article will take a detailed look at this particular ritual to see how it can best be celebrated. Before looking at the rite itself, questions such as who can anoint and when it can be done need to be

addressed.

Q & A

Who may anoint catechumens with the oil of catechumens?

"The presiding celebrant for such a first anointing of the catechumens is a priest or a deacon." (RCIA, 98) Only a priest or deacon may anoint with the oil of catechumens.

Who may bless the oil of the catechumens?

The oil used for this rite is to be the oil blessed by the bishop at the chrism Mass, but for pastoral reasons a priest celebrant may bless oil for the rite immediately before the anointing. (RCIA, 101)

Ordinarily, the oil of catechumens which was blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass would be used by the priest or deacon to anoint the catechumens. "For pastoral reasons a priest celebrant may bless oil for the rite..." Pastoral reasons would be, for example, a lack of availability of the oil of catechumens when celebrating the rite.

The priest would bless oil using the prayer found in RCIA, 102, option B. The rubric indicates that this may only be done immediately prior to its use, and therefore only enough oil for a particular occasion should be blessed. A priest should not bless a large amount of oil of catechumens for use at a later time.

A deacon may not bless oil of the catechumens. If no blessed oil is available, then the deacon would not be able to celebrate the anointing of the catechumens.

When and how often may the anointing of the catechumens take place?

The anointing ordinarily takes place after the homily in a celebration of the word of God (See RCIA, 89), and is conferred on each of the catechumens; this rite of anointing may be celebrated several times during the course of the catechumenate. Furthermore, for particular reasons, a priest or a deacon may confer the anointing privately on individual catechumens. (RCIA, 100)

During the period of the catechumenate, a rite of anointing the catechumens, through the use of the oil of the catechumens, may be celebrated whenever this seems beneficial or desirable. (RCIA, 98)

Clearly the rite envisions repeated use of the anointing of the catechumens. It could also occur on Sundays (outside of Mass) or during the week when catechumens gather for catechetical formation. It is evident that the rite requires this anointing to occur in relation to a celebration of the word of God. A priest or deacon should not show up at a meeting and anoint the catechumens without first breaking open the word and making sure the catechumens have an understanding of the meaning of the anointing.

In short, this minor rite can be celebrated at almost any time during the period of the catechumenate in conjunction with the word of God. Ironically, the disadvantage to a rite that can be celebrated at any time is that it is often never celebrated! Priests and deacons associated with the RCIA ought to be conscious of the need to celebrate this rite with the catechumens on a regular basis. RCIA coordinators may need to make arrangements for a deacon or priest to celebrate this rite.



This anointing can be celebrated virtually any time throughout the period of the catechumenate, but it could be especially appropriate:

- If the Scripture being of the day references anointing
- At regular intervals during the catechumenate
- In conjunction with particular liturgical seasons or feasts (Advent, Lent, Epiphany, Pentecost)
- If a catechumen is going through a particularly difficult time.

THE ANOINTING OF THE CATECHUMENS

1. PRAYER OF EXORCISM OR BLESSING OF OIL

“When anointing with oil already blessed by the bishop, the celebrant first says the prayer of exorcism...” (RCIA, 102) He may use the prayer given as option A (see below) or any of the prayers of exorcism found in RCIA, 94.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ,
sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit,
when you read in the synagogue at Nazareth,
you fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah
that proclaimed liberty to captives
and announced a season of forgiveness.

We pray for these your servants
who have opened their ears and hearts to your word.
Grant that they may grasp your moment of grace.

Do not let their minds be troubled
or their lives tied to earthly desires.
Do not let them remain
estranged from the hope of your promises
or enslaved by a spirit of unbelief.
Rather let them believe in you,
whom the Father has established as universal Lord
and to whom he has subjected all things.

Let them submit themselves to the spirit of grace,
so that, with hope in their calling,
they may join the priestly people
and share in the abundant joy of the new Jerusalem,
where you live and reign for ever and ever.

R: Amen.

When hearing the word “exorcism” some people conjure up images of a demon-possessed individual levitating off their bed, head spinning, while a priest nearby shouts “The power of Christ compels you!” It is no wonder that many shrink from the idea of celebrating a rite of the same name with catechumens: the last thing one wants to do with a newcomer interested in the Church is to tell them that they need to be exorcised from evil spirits. However, as Michael

Marchal explains:

First, we are not discussing demonic possession. Such situations require a solemn exorcism through a delegate of the bishop. What we are discussing is the role of the simple exorcisms that form part of the process of initiation and which presume nothing more than the general flaws bound up with being human – or at most demonic temptation.²

The potential for evil is readily apparent in both society and in every individual. When reflecting on the sin and evil that enters all of our lives, catechumens can be brought to see the need for anointing with the accompanying prayers which are meant to help them turn from sin and embrace Christ.

If the priest celebrant does not have oil already blessed by the bishop, he may use another prayer provided in the rite (RCIA 102, B) to bless the oil himself.

2. ANOINTING

In the ancient church, before being baptized, catechumens were anointed with what was originally called the “oil of exorcism”³ from head to toe. This was no minimal anointing, but was applied generously. The theology of this anointing has very much to do with leaving behind what is evil and being strengthened for the journey ahead. Not unlike for athletes of the same time period, the anointing with the “oil of exorcism” was meant to strengthen catechumens. This strengthening, however, was not to win a race in a stadium, but to win the race against evil, leaving their old sinful lives behind in order to cross the finishing line of salvation.

Care is to be taken that the catechumens understand the significance of the anointing with oil. The anointing with oil symbolizes their need for God’s help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unfalteringly throughout their lives. (RCIA, 99)

According to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the sanctification of participants in the liturgy occurs through “signs perceptible to the senses.” (SC, 7) This means that just as God took on flesh through the Incarnation, he still seeks to be with us through the sacraments and sacramentals in incarnate, tactile ways. Therefore, the more richly we celebrate the rites of the Church, the more likely participants are to have a rich experience of the presence of Christ in their lives.

The rites of the Church should have a significant impact on the human senses as well as the human spirit. That is why baptisms are best done through immersion; bread and wine should look and taste like bread and wine; and anointings should be lavish and thorough. Just as the anointed athlete could slip past his opponents, the anointed catechumen should be able to slip through the hands of the devil and

escape his snares. This sign value is diminished when only a smudge of oil is used to anoint rather than an abundance of oil.

After the Prayer of Exorcism (or, if necessary, the Blessing of Oil by a priest), the presiding minister anoints the catechumens.

Facing the catechumens, the celebrant says:

We anoint you with the oil of salvation
in the name of Christ our Savior.
May he strengthen you with his power,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Catechumens: Amen.

The celebrant anoints each catechumen with the oil of catechumens on the breast or on both hands or, if this seems desirable, even on other parts of the body.

[If there are a great many catechumens, additional priests or deacons may assist in the anointing.]

The anointing may be followed by a blessing of the catechumens. (RCIA 103)

Michael Marchal adds these thoughts to the anointing of catechumens:

What part of the body is anointed? Paragraph 103 suggests the chest as the first possibility – probably to be true to the rite’s origins in antiquity where such rubbing with oil was part of an ordinary athletic regimen...the second suggestion, anointing both hands, seems to be the common choice with adults...the gesture can seem very natural and – if done with sincerity and a generous amount of oil – can express both human concern and a desire for strengthening in many areas. The third suggestion is to anoint other parts of the body if this seems desirable.⁴

3. PRAYERS OF BLESSING

The celebrant, having just anointed the catechumens, with hands outstretched over them, says one of the nine prayers^v listed in RCIA, 97. For example:

Lord of all,
through your only begotten Son
you cast down Satan
and broke the chains that held us captive.

We thank you for these catechumens
whom you have called.

Strengthen them in faith,
that they may know you, the one true God,

and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Keep them clean of heart and make them grow in virtue,
that they may be worthy to receive baptism
and enter into the holy mysteries.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R: Amen. (RCIA 97, option F)

4. LAYING ON OF HANDS

According to the rubric also found in RCIA 97, "After the prayer of blessing, if this can be done conveniently, the catechumens come before the celebrant, who lays hands on them individually. Then the catechumens leave."

An important element to this rite is touch. The anointing with oil may require the minister to touch the catechumen, and if the prayer of blessing with the laying on of hands is used at the end, there is additional contact. These moments of physical contact can be powerful times for the catechumen in which he or she feels the presence of Christ through sacramental touch.

It should be noted here that touching another person, even for ritual purposes, must be handled with great care and a conscious awareness of what is appropriate. It should never engender feelings of discomfort on the part of the catechumen in any way. Use of the option for anointing the hands is undoubtedly given for this purpose.

¹ Michael Novak, "There's Nothing Minor about the Minor Rites" (*Catechumenate A Journal of Christian Initiation*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago) May 2008.

² Michael H. Marchal, "Strengthened with God's Power: The Role of the Anointing of Catechumens in the Catechumenal Process" (*Catechumenate A Journal of Christian Initiation*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago) September 2007.

³ See the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, EC Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (SPCK, London, 1993) p 3.

⁴ Ibid., Michael H. Marchal.

⁵ With such an extensive variety of prayers to choose from, the rite obviously envisions frequent use of these prayers to bless the catechumens.



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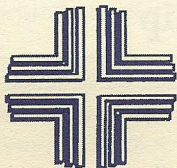
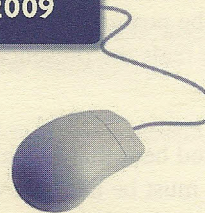


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