

Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate

RECEIVING THE SEEKERS

The seekers, their sponsors, and a group of the faithful gather outside the church (or inside at the entrance, or elsewhere) or at some other site suitable for this rite. As the priest (and deacon), wearing the vestments for Mass, goes to meet them, the assembly of the faithful may sing a psalm or an appropriate song.

- *Group of the Faithful? Who could this be? The other ministers for Mass, the catechist, Director/Coordinator of OCIA, family of the Candidate, catechists...*
- *Gather outside the church, inside at the entrance, or elsewhere? PLACE is important here. This is a ritual of “entrance”. How can we express the idea of “entrance”? Doors, thresholds, etc.*
- *The priest goes to meet them – during this “gathering” there may be music (perhaps the first verse of the Opening Song or couple of refrains of a psalm. If there is music, the KEY: THE ASSEMBLY MAY SING A SONG.)*

GREETING

The celebrant greets the seekers in a friendly manner. He speaks to them, their sponsors, and all present, pointing out the joy and happiness of the Church. He may also recall for the sponsors and friends the particular experience and religious response by which the seekers following their own spiritual path, have come to this first step.

- *Notice – we haven’t gone into the sanctuary yet – we are still in the back of church – or a place where most people can see the rite unfold.*
- *Note: there is no sign of the cross here to begin (that comes later). This is an informal welcome on behalf of the whole parish by the Pastor.*
- *Since no text is provided in the ritual, the presider is free to make it up. On these occasions, it’s always good to write the text out and have it in front of the presider.*

Then he invites the sponsors and seekers to come forward. As they are taking their places before the celebrant, an appropriate song may be sung.

- *This is most likely crossing the threshold into the back of church – but not moving all the way to the front of the church. Depending on space (or lack of space), the seekers may already be near the celebrant, so any movement here might not need to happen.*
- *Music MAY be played here, but this movement is probably very short so as not to require music.*

OPENING DIALOGUE/QUESTIONS

- *The introductory rites of baptism of infants are connected to this. Think about the questions the priest asks the parents when they come to the church to have their baby baptized. Two options (the first option – posing the question - reflects the baptismal rite better).*

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

or

The priest/deacon calls out the name of each candidate, who answers "PRESENT."

- *The next two questions can be asked individually or just once for multiple seekers to answer at the same time. The question can also be adjusted by the celebrant. And the answer doesn't have to be a rote answer; perhaps let the candidate answer in his or her own words. The second question is based on whatever the first answer was:*

- WHAT DO YOU ASK OF GOD'S CHURCH? Candidate(s): Faith
- WHAT DOES FAITH OFFER YOU? Candidate(s): Eternal Life

SEEKERS' FIRST ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

- *Three options for texts, which can be modified to fit the answers given above. Each option concludes with a single question to the seekers as to whether they are ready to accept the Gospel and continue on the journey toward initiation.*
- *Seekers, if there are more than one, answer together.*

AFFIRMATION BY THE SPONSORS AND THE ASSEMBLY

Then the celebrant turns to the sponsors and the assembly and asks them whether to assist the seekers in their journey of faith.

After receiving the answer of the sponsors and the assembly, the celebrant offers a prayer of thanksgiving and the people respond with a sung or spoken acclamation.

- *Note the position of the celebrant. He may need to turn to the sponsors and the assembly so his back isn't to the assembly when he is meant to be speaking to them.*
- *The prayer of thanksgiving recognizes that the candidate's journey thus far is a RESPONSE to God's call. Faith is not on our own initiative, but it is already a response to God's invitation to be in relationship.*
- *The final acclamation is important – again – the assembly's own voice to the prayer of thanksgiving. The assembly says more than just "Amen." This acclamation can be repeated later in the ritual. Consider how the assembly will be clued into what to say (worship program, verbal cue, or both. A verbal cue can sound something like "As church, we say..." say the acclamation and then have the assembly repeat it).*

SIGNING OF THE SENSES

- *There are four parts to the Signing of the Senses. The first and last part (signing of the forehead and concluding prayer) are required. The other two parts (signing of the senses, and sign of the cross over seekers) are optional, but if opted for, both optional parts must be done together.*
 - *[Required]: Signing of the Forehead: is done either by the priest or the sponsor. If the other senses are not signed, both the priest and sponsor make the sign of the cross on the seeker's forehead.*
 - *If the priest traces the sign of the cross on the seeker's forehead, he invites them to approach him with their sponsor and says a prayer while he traces the cross on their forehead. If the other senses are not signed, the sponsor then also traces the cross on the seeker's forehead.*
 - *If only the sponsor traces the sign of the cross on the seeker's forehead, the priest says a few words of introduction to the ritual and then makes the sign of the cross OVER the seeker(s) and says a prayer while the sponsor physically traces the sign of the cross on the seeker's forehead.*
 - After the forehead is signed, the assembly responds with a sung suitable acclamation (if not sung, the acclamation can be omitted). Perhaps the acclamation from before?*
 - *Optional: Then, the other senses may be signed by the sponsor as the priest is saying the formularies for each sense. The ears, eyes, lips, breast, shoulders, hands, feet are signed. The same acclamation of praise can be sung after each sense is signed.*
 - *Optional: Then, without touching them, the celebrant alone makes the sign over the seekers at once (or, if they are few in number, over each individual), while blessing them:*

- *Required: Concluding Prayer to the Signing of the Senses. There are two options given.*

Some considerations:

- *Location not specified. Considering doing this in the midst of the assembly, halfway down the aisle. Or have the ministers and priest process to the front of the church. The seekers and sponsors then can line the center aisle or be on the steps of the sanctuary. Again, allow the assembly to see the signing of the senses.*
- *Let the gestures on the sense be big. And sign each sense: meaning if you are going to sign eyes, sign BOTH of them. BOTH feet. BOTH hands. For EYES, EARS, LIPS, HEART – do not touch the person, but make a sweeping gesture over each sense. For SHOULDERS – turn the person around and sign both shoulder blades. For HANDS – take their hands, palm up, into yours and sign both. For FEET – kneel down on the ground and sign both their feet. After the Feet – stand up, and turn them toward the presider so they can see him give the blessing.*
- *The catechumens and sponsors remain where they are standing for the concluding prayer that follows.*

PRESENTATION OF A CROSS _____

The invitation to the celebration of the word of God may be preceded or followed by additional rites signifying the reception into the community, for example, the presentation of a cross or some other symbolic act.

- *The presentation of the cross is an optional part of the Rite, but if you decide to do it, it would be best situated here, after the concluding prayer of the Signing of the Forehead/Senses. This ritual then ties closely to the Signing of the Senses. One way to do it: the sponsors wear a simple wooden cross around their neck. At this time, they silently remove the cross from their neck and place it around the neck of his or her catechumen. This ritual is done while the celebrant says a prayer.*

INVITATION TO THE CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD, GLORIA, COLLECT _____

The celebrant next invites the catechumens and their sponsors to enter the church using the text provided or similar words.

During the entry (whether from the back of the church or elsewhere in the church), an appropriate song is sung (the text recommends singing Psalm 34). If the ministers are still in the back of the church (i.e. they didn't come forward for the Signing of the Senses, they process forward during the song).

Note: in the revised rite, it specifies that the Gloria is to be sung (when it is prescribed) after the priest invites the catechumens to enter the church. It can be sung here as the catechumens and sponsors move to their seats and the ministers go to the sanctuary or it can be sung after everyone is in place.

Note: in the revised rite, the Collect of the Mass follows.

After the Collect, the priest speaks to the catechumens briefly, helping them to understand the dignity of God's word, which is about to be proclaimed and heard in the church. The new ritual may provide a text here that can be adapted.

LITURGY OF THE WORD ---

- *Outside of the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, Solemnities, Ash Wednesday, the Octave of Easter, All Souls Day, and Holy Week, the readings can be taken from either the Mass of the Day or the special readings assigned to the Rite of Entrance (see Lectionary, no. 743). On the days mentioned above, the readings of the day must be used. The homily follows.*

PRESENTATION OF THE BIBLE ---

A book containing the Gospels may be given to the catechumens by the celebrant. A cross may also be given, unless this has already been done as part of the additional rites.

- *See note above about the recommended timing for the Giving of the Cross.*
- *A brief introduction for the assembly might be helpful: "As we have heard the scriptures proclaimed to us, we now present the Book of Scriptures to our Catechumens so that they may read and study God's Word in preparation for becoming Catholics through the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist."*
- *It is also helpful to invite the Catechumens forward to receive the bible: "Come forward now to receive the Word of God."*

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE CATECHUMENS ---

Then the sponsors and the whole congregation join in the intercessions. The way the ritual is laid out, there are two sets of petitions that occur at different points in the Mass. This first set only mentions the catechumens and the OCIA process. The catechumens are then dismissed, and Mass continues with the second set of petitions, which are the usual ones for Mass.

- *However, both sets can be combined into a slightly extended set of petitions and done here. One suggestion: put three or four of the intercessions for catechumens FIRST – beginning each petition with: "For our catechumens, that..." After these, list the regular intercessions for Mass.*

PRAYER OVER THE CATECHUMENS ---

- *The concluding prayer of the intercessions serves as the prayer over the Catechumens. Two options.*

DISMISSAL OF THE CATECHUMENS ---

If the Eucharist is to be celebrated, the catechumens are normally sent forth from the assembly at this point by use of a dismissal (two options given). If the catechumens are to stay for the celebration of the Eucharist, a third option (instructing them to stay in the assembly) is provided.

- *Why dismiss? OCIA, 75.3: The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthens them with God's blessing. Celebrations of the word of God are arranged for their benefit, and at Mass, they may also take part with the faithful in the Liturgy of the Word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Ordinary, however, when they are present in the assembly of the faithful, they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins (unless their dismissal would present practical or pastoral problems). For they must await their baptism, which will join them to God's priestly people and empower them to participate in Christ's new worship). (old translation of text)*

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST ---

When the Eucharist is to follow, intercessory prayer is resumed with the general intercessions for the needs of the Church and the whole world, but for pastoral reasons these general

intercessions and the profession of faith may be omitted. The liturgy of the Eucharist then begins as usual with the preparation of the gifts.

- *This is an odd rubric because it creates repetition and breaks the ordinary structure of the Mass. If strictly following the rubric, the structure would be:*
 - *Homily, Presentation of the Bible, Intercessions for Catechumens (with appropriate introduction), Prayer over the Catechumens, Dismissal of Catechumens, The Rest of the Intercessions (with appropriate introduction and concluding prayer), Creed...*
- *Suggestion: putting all the intercessions in one place (see above) and omitting the Creed (as it is ordinarily omitted when other "rites" take place in the middle of the Eucharistic liturgy).*