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Enlightenment and Mystagogy: A Review

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

Since the earliest centuries, the Church has set aside the season of Lent as a particular time for repentance, conversion, and preparation for the sacraments. The RCIA process and celebration of baptism is centered on the Easter Vigil, with the rites of election and calling, scrutinies, and entire catechumenate scheduled in relation to that feast (RCIA 17, 20–26; CCC 1168; CIC 856).

Because repentance and conversion require personal and internal preparation, the Journey of Faith for Adults, Enlightenment lessons focus on guided, prayerful reflection. The lessons will assist the participants in their internal preparation for the sacraments, and encourage them to live out their faith in hands-on ways.

"[Enlightenment] is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance" (RCIA 139).

While the elect do not fully possess the graces and gifts of discipleship during the period of purification and enlightenment, they should feel ownership of their Christian faith. Baptized candidates, as members of the Christian Church, should begin to identify themselves as Catholic and express their faith in keeping with sacred Tradition.

The sessions and events during the enlightenment period should allow participants to experience Lent along with the parish community, whose members are also undergoing spiritual renewal and preparing to celebrate the paschal mystery more deeply (RCIA 138). At the Easter Vigil, the faithful will renew their baptismal vows as the participants profess their faith in Christ and the Catholic Church. This unity and integration will grow throughout the period of mystagogy, which usually corresponds to the Easter season.

Rites and Sacraments During the Period of Enlightenment

The enlightenment and purification period begins with the rite of election. Please refer to the Catechumenate Leader Guide and other Journey of Faith for Adults materials for details.

The Scrutinies

Rather than examination, interrogation, or harsh judgment, “the scrutinies...are rites for self-searching and repentance,” designed “to inspire in the elect a desire for purification and redemption” (RCIA 141, 143). The prayers and intercessions encourage the elect to strive for the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:24–28). Through the exorcisms, they “are freed from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil” (RCIA 144). Having previously been instructed in the nature of sin and expressed their desire and commitment to receive the sacraments of initiation, participants are strengthened and sent forth to make their discipleship a reality.

The questions, activities, journal prompts, and other material in these lessons help to prepare each participant for this stage in their faith journey. The bishop or priest will “question the candidates individually” in the formula for the profession of faith at the Easter Vigil (RCIA 224–25). Should participants express doubts or concerns about their conversion, meet with them privately to determine what additional support can be provided.

The Presentations

The Presentation of the Creed should be celebrated during the week following the first scrutiny and, whenever possible, within a Mass so that the faith community may be present (RCIA 157; CIC 837). It prepares the elect to memorize the Creed, for the Recitation of the Creed (see Preparation Rites), and to profess their faith on the day of their baptism (RCIA 148).

During the Presentation of the Creed:

- The prescribed readings, which replace the regular weekday readings, are proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word (RCIA 158).
- After the homily, the priest calls the elect forward to receive the words and mysteries of the Creed. The Nicene or Apostles’ Creed may be used, depending on the parish’s tradition (RCIA 160).
- The priest begins to recite the Creed, and the assembly joins in.
- The priest prays over the elect and dismisses them prior to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If they are to stay, he reminds them that they cannot participate fully, but that they remain “as a sign of our hope that all God’s children will eat and drink with the Lord...” (RCIA 163).
E1: Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

**Catechism:** 422–429, 618, 2464–74

**Objectives**
Participants will:

- Decide how they will respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow him.
- Consider the various responses to Jesus’ invitation in the Gospels.
- Connect saying yes to Jesus with the *rite of election* and the signing of the book of election.

**Leader Meditation**
*John 21:1–19*

Jesus Christ has made you a fisher of men and women. The participants in your class are the fish in your net, the net you dropped at the Lord’s command, the net you hauled up and have carried to shore. It is time to present the fish to the Lord. Imagine that you are Peter. Jesus is asking: Do you love me? Every day, you have the opportunity to say “yes” to the Lord. In this passage, the Lord asks Peter if Peter loves him. The first time Peter says “yes,” Jesus tells Peter to feed the Lord’s lambs. The second time, the Lord tells Peter to tend to the Lord’s sheep. The third time, the Lord says to Peter to feed his sheep. In doing these things, Peter will act on his love for Jesus Christ. You are like Peter. In this lesson, you will bring the sheep to the Lord, and he will invite them to say yes to him. Pray for the necessary grace to lead the participants well and for sufficient grace that they will respond with a firm yes.

**Related Catholic Updates**
- “The Lord’s Supper: Ancient Story, New Beginning” (C1104A)
- “Light of Faith: Key Themes From Pope Francis’ First Encyclical” (C1310A)
- “How God Invites Us to Grow: Six Stages of Faith Development” (C8710A)
- “Lent: Giving Our Hearts to God” (C9702A)

**Leader Preparation**
- Read the lesson handout, this lesson plan, the Scripture passage, and the *Catechism* sections.

**Welcome**
Greet participants as they arrive. Check for supplies and immediate needs. Solicit questions or comments about the previous session and/or share new information and findings. Begin promptly.

**Opening Scripture**
*John 21:1–19*

Light the candle and read the passage aloud. Share with participants that this lesson is all about Jesus “popping the question.” He is proposing to us, and it is the greatest proposal of all time. He waits for our yes with more love than any bridegroom has ever had. Invite participants to think about how they would respond to Jesus’ call as you begin the lesson.

“From this loving knowledge of Christ springs the desire to proclaim him, to ‘evangelize,’ and to lead others to the ‘yes’ of faith in Jesus Christ.”

*CCC 428*
Election: Saying Yes to Jesus

- Discuss the rite of election. Compare election to the moment a man proposes marriage, or (as not all participants will be called to marriage) to receiving a job offer. It’s a formal process, and it’s filled with meaning and significance. Saying “yes” sets us on a new path in life. Jesus is inviting the catechumens to a new path—the path that leads to eternal life.

- Remind participants that while the rite of election marks the final stage of preparation for full reception into the Church, as an engagement or job offer letter marks the beginning of a final stage of a process, it is just the beginning of a faith journey. After as wedding comes a lifelong commitment to the marriage. After accepting a job comes the day to day task of working. The process of faith and saying “yes” to Jesus does not end here.

- Offer participants time to respond to the two reflection questions in their prayer journal. Think about where Jesus has lead you, and where he is leading you now. Share any relevant experiences with the group and encourage participants to share as well.

“I Will...but First...”

- Discuss the many excuses those in the Gospel stories used to postpone their journey with Jesus.

- One man wanted to wait until his father had died, putting his perceived obligation to his father ahead of his faith (Matthew 8:21 and Luke 9:59). Another would follow the Lord only after finishing business at home (Luke 9:61).

- Emphasize that our family life, career, and personal relationships take on their true meaning only when following Christ is our highest priority. Discuss those examples from the previous question, and have participants offer scenarios where those obligations to family, work, or the home are kept while still giving Jesus a wholehearted “yes.”

- Ask participants to consider their own situations of “I will but first...” Allow those who feel comfortable to share.

- Offer participants time to respond to the reflection question silently, or discuss it as a group. Think of your own example of an “I will” disciple who inspires you to share with the group. (This can be someone you know personally, or a saint you’ve found inspiring.)
“This Saying Is Hard…”

- Emphasize that some Church teachings will be more difficult for participants to accept than others. What is easy for one catechumen to accept may be difficult for another. What is a “hard teaching” for one may make perfect sense to another catechumen. Our “yes” is an affirmation of our trust in Christ as well as a promise to follow Christ. However, we are free to say “no” to this invitation, as did some of his disciples. Sacred Scripture is clear. The one who walks away from the invitation does so in sorrow. But Jesus Christ gives us the freedom to choose.

- Pause in the lesson and give participants an opportunity to complete the activity with a partner or their sponsor or godparent. Allow time for participants to share any new realizations or discoveries.

- Discuss the cost, and difficulty, of giving Jesus a fully realized “yes.” Emphasize that the Twelve were asked to accept difficult teachings and that the Samaritan woman was asked to look critically at her own life and choices. Ask participants to reflect on the moments in their own lives Jesus is asking them to reconsider in the light of faith.
“He Went Away Sad…”

Perhaps the most poignant of Jesus’ conversations was with a rich young man who asked:

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?... All of these [commandments] I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.”

Mark 10:17-22

Although the young man had observed all the commandments, his first allegiance was to his wealth. It gave him a sense of identity and security.

The rich young man didn’t realize that true identity and security come from Christ. He wasn’t sure what he’d find in Christ would compensate for surrendering his possessions. So he left saddened.

In contrast, consider the generosity of the woman who “came with a alabaster jar of perfumed oil... and poured it on his head” (Mark 14:3). This perfume was worth “three hundred days’ wages,” yet that sacrifice didn’t stop her. She gave generously out of love. For that reason, Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mark 14).

“I Do Not Know Him…”

Probably the saddest loss for Jesus came after his arrest. Just when Jesus needed his closest friends the most, they ran away. Peter, who’d sworn he would die with Jesus, denied Jesus three times: “I do not know him” (Luke 22:57). John was the only one of the Twelve Apostles who attended Jesus’ crucifixion and burial.

“I Do Not Know Him…”

Discuss with participants the kind of situations where we can be tempted to deny Jesus or run from his teachings and ways we can reaffirm our faith in moments like these.

Our Response to Jesus’ Call

Emphasize that Jesus has been calling us for our entire lives. Participants will have felt it most clearly and acutely these past few weeks and months as they’ve inquired about the Church and become part of the community. Now is the time to examine their lives in relation to what Christ asks.

“Ask participants to discuss some ways we can rediscover (or discover for the first time) the person God is calling us to become.

Some of these ways may include an ongoing practice of prayer or spiritual journaling, meeting with a trusted Catholic advisor or spiritual director, or reading Scripture or writings from the saints.

“His Went Away Sad…”

As a group, discuss possible responses to the reflection question. Emphasize that when we feel our identity is tied to the things we possess it can be especially difficult to be willing to let those things go and follow Jesus.

Things that give us a sense of security can be anything from our bank accounts, to our job, to long-term friendships, to not getting involved in difficult conversations. We can get our identity from our work, our family and our children, our position in the community, even the things we own.

- How ready am I to say, “I’ve calculated the cost and am ready to follow Christ?”
- What is God asking of me today (possible sacrifices, costs of discipleship)?
Journaling
If you have time at the end of this session, read 2 Corinthians 1:18–20 and Luke 14:28 as a group. Then allow participants some time to silently reflect on, or write, their responses to the journal questions provided at the end of the lesson.

Closing Prayer
Play recording of “Lord, I Need You” (Matt Maher, from All The People Said Amen, Essential Records). End with a few moments of silence and ask for petitions. Close with this simple prayer.

Lord,
It is a blessing to know that you are Lord, creator, and savior. You love us with an eternal love. It is difficult to comprehend this kind of love for you have given us the gift of free will, knowing that we may choose to walk away from your love or we may choose to receive this love and say yes to it. Give us the grace to say yes, for it is our heart’s desire to love you, to know you, and to serve you.
Amen.

Looking Ahead
Lesson E1: Election: Saying Yes to Jesus is the beginning of a lifelong journey with our Lord and his Church. Each catechumen who says yes to the journey is ready to enter Lent and complete the final path to Easter Vigil. As participants prepare to enter into the Lenten season, ask them to begin examining their lives with the eyes of faith, noting areas where they could improve and offering thanksgiving for areas where they clearly see God’s influence at work.