

# The Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens

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*This rite is celebrated only with inquirers (those who have not been baptized).*

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE RITE

The structure of the Rite of Acceptance is:

### 1. **Receiving the Inquirers (at the Threshold of the Church)**

The inquirers, their sponsors “and a group of the faithful” gather outside the church. The priest goes to meet them, as the assembly sings a song.

#### *Greeting*

The priest greets the inquirers, expressing the joy of the Church. There is room here for him to tell what brought these inquirers to this point.

#### *Opening Dialogue*

The inquirers are introduced to the assembly

#### *Inquirers’ First Acceptance of the Gospel*

Note that this is not the passing on of a book, but the embrace of a way of life patterned on the Good News. This is the principal expression by the inquirer that she or he does indeed wish to embrace a life of discipleship.

#### *Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly*

The sponsors and the assembly affirm that they are ready to help the inquirers find and follow Christ. The priest concludes with a prayer.

#### *Signing of the Inquirers with the Cross*

As a sign of their new way of life, the inquirers are signed with the cross on the forehead, as well as all the senses, and their hands and feet. From this point forward, they are called “catechumens.”

The priest concludes with a prayer.

#### *Invitation to the Celebration of the Word of God*

All enter the church for the Liturgy of the Word.

### 2. **The Liturgy of the Word**

#### *Instruction*

The priest gives a brief instruction on the dignity of God’s Word.

#### *Readings and Homily*

The Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual.

The scriptures proclaimed and preached are those of the day.

#### *Presentation of a Bible (or Book of the Gospels)*

A book containing the gospels is presented to the catechumens.

#### *Intercessions for the Catechumens*

A litany of prayer is prayed for the catechumens.

#### *Prayer Over the Catechumens*

#### *Dismissal of the Catechumens*

The catechumens are dismissed from the assembly with a catechist, signifying that their formation in the Word has begun.

### **3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.

## 1. Receiving the Inquirers

*The inquirers and their sponsors, gather “outside the church.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Instead of the customary procession of ministers to the front during the gathering song, consider having the priest and other ministers gather with the assembly and simply take their places before it is time to begin.*

*Leave the main doors to the church open. Be sure a microphone (preferably cordless) is available, so that the responses of the inquirers can be heard clearly.*

*When it is time to begin, an appropriate gathering song begins. All stand, and the priest, along with the deacon or lector carrying the book of the gospels, a minister carrying the processional cross, process to the entrance. If the church is constructed so that there is a good degree of visibility from the body of the church to outside (e.g., if there is a glass wall), they may even go outside to where the inquirers are gathered.*

*As the song ends, the priest faces and greets the assembly:*

**Presider: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

A: Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> The rite gives a great deal of leeway, continuing “(or inside at the entrance or elsewhere) or at some other site suitable.” (RCIA, 48). The intent of the rite, however, is one of the assembly going out to greet these newcomers. This will need to be adapted in each parish, as some more contemporary churches have commons or plazas ideally suited to the rite; others are limited to a crowded vestibule. In smaller assemblies, it may be quite possible to lead the entire assembly to the commons, the plaza, or a parish hall.

Use as your inspiration here the solemn procession on Passion Sunday. If it is impractical for the assembly to process out, is there a way to gather at least a representative part of your assembly outside the church for this rite, and then lead them into the Church with the catechumens at the appropriate time?

**Presider: The Lord be with you.**

A: And with your spirit.

**Presider: My brothers and sisters, this truly is a day of joy! As we do each Sunday, today we gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit, as we give thanks and praise to God for the gift of Jesus Christ, the anointed one, to whom we offer our love, our honor, our thanks, our entire lives.**

**Today, we will welcome new inquirers into the catechumenate. Over the coming year, they will prepare for their initiation into the Christian faith by baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. You are very important in this rite, for it is the entire Church – those in this community as well as the entire Body of Christ beyond the walls of this place – that accepts these inquirers as persons who intend to become members.**

*He turns to the inquirers.*

**Greeting**

**Presider: Who seeks entrance into this faith community?**

*A member of the RCIA team answers:*

T: There are inquirers here, who during the past months have heard the living God proclaimed, and they have encountered Jesus Christ, sent for the salvation of all. As a result of this initial conversion, they have begun to change their lives, and be transformed in the life of Christ. Today they come seeking entrance into this faith community, where they wish to continue to grow as disciples of the Lord. We give thanks to God for them, as they seek to begin the Catechumenate period of their faith journey. They are:

## **OPENING DIALOGUE**

*The inquirers are named.*

*As each is named, he or she steps forward. Then, their sponsor comes forward from the group of faithful gathered at the entrance, and joins her or him. The sponsor brings the inquirer to the priest, who asks the inquirer:*

**Presider: N., What do you ask of God's Church?**

I: Faith.<sup>2</sup>

**Presider: What does faith offer you?**

I: Eternal life.

*The priest greets the inquirer(usually with an embrace).*

*That inquirer steps aside, and the next inquirer is named and brought forward.*

*This process is repeated for each inquirer.<sup>3</sup>*

## **INQUIRERS' FIRST ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOSPEL**

*When all have been named and questioned, the priest continues:*

**Presider: N. and N., God gives light to everyone who comes into this world; though unseen, he reveals himself through the works of his hand, so that all people may learn to give thanks to their Creator.**

**You have followed God's light, and the way of the Gospel now lies open before you. Set your feet firmly on the path, and acknowledge the living God, who**

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<sup>2</sup> The rite clearly allows inquirers to answer in their own words. Especially if there are only a few inquirers, a heartfelt, well-thought out one or two sentences would have a stronger impact.

<sup>3</sup> The rite does allow, if there is a large number of inquirers, that the questions may be asked only once of all the inquirers.

**truly speaks to everyone. Walk in the light of Christ, and learn to trust in his wisdom. Commit your lives daily to his care, so that you may come to believe in him with all your heart.**

**This is the way of faith along which Christ will lead you in love toward eternal life. Are you prepared to begin this journey today, under the guidance of Christ?<sup>4</sup>**

**I:** I am.

**AFFIRMATION BY THE SPONSORS AND THE ASSEMBLY**

**Presider: Sponsors, you present these inquirers to us; Are you ready to help these inquirers by being witnesses to the living Christ, and accompanying them on the journey of discipleship?**

**S:** We are.

**Presider: Members of this assembly, these sponsors have spoken in your name, but I ask you as well, for it is your responsibility to journey with them. Are you ready to journey with these inquirers, helping them to know and follow Christ?**

**S:** We are.

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<sup>4</sup> Other options for the acceptance of the Gospel may be found in RCIA, 52.

*With hands joined, the priest prays/sings<sup>5</sup>:*

**Presider: God of mercy,  
we thank you for these your servants.  
You have sought and summoned them in many ways,  
and they have turned to seek you.**

**You have called them today,  
and they have answered in our presence:  
we praise you, Lord, and we bless you.**

A: We praise you, Lord, and we bless you.

*If the arrangement is such that visibility is poor, consider reprising the gathering song at this point, and leading the inquirers into the midst of the assembly. When they are in the church, the priest continues:*

SIGNING OF THE INQUIRERS WITH THE CROSS

**Presider: Dear inquirers, your answers mean that you wish to  
share our life and hope in Christ. To admit you as  
catechumens, we now mark you with the sign of  
Christ's cross. The whole community welcomes you  
with love, and stands ready to help you.**

*Then the celebrant makes the sign of the cross over all together, as a cross is traced by a sponsor or catechist on the forehead of each candidate. The celebrant says:*

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<sup>5</sup> This affirmation of the assembly and the following signing of the senses is the central element of this rite. Consider singing it. A good setting of the entire text can be found in *Who Calls You by Name: Music for Christian Initiation*.

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love. Learn to know and follow him.**

A: Christ will be your strength! Learn to know and follow him!<sup>6</sup>

*As the priest says each prayer, the sponsor traces the cross over the candidate as indicated.<sup>7</sup> The signing of each sense may be followed by an acclamation in praise of Christ, for example, "Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!"*

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

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<sup>6</sup> Various sung settings will have different responses for the assembly.

<sup>7</sup> If there are only a few inquirers, the priest may mark each candidate himself as he says the prayer, but then the sponsor follows with the same.



**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your hands,  
that Christ may be known in the work which you do.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

**Presider: Receive the sign of the cross on your feet,  
that you may walk in the way of Christ.**

A: Glory and praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

*Without touching them, the priest makes the sign of the cross over all the candidates at once<sup>8</sup>,  
(or, if they are few, over each individually), saying:*

**Presider: I sign you with the sign of eternal life, in the name of  
the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.**

A: Amen.

#### CONCLUDING PRAYER

**Presider: Lord, by the cross and resurrection of your Son,  
you have given life to your people.  
These catechumens have been signed with the sign of  
Christ's cross:  
make them living proof of its saving power,  
and help them to persevere in the footsteps of Christ.**

**We ask this through Christ our Lord.<sup>9</sup>**

A: Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> If it is the custom in your parish to present your catechumens with a cross, it would be appropriate for the sponsor to do this as the priest says this final blessing (RCIA, 59)

<sup>9</sup> Another option for this prayer is found in RCIA, 57.

**Presider: My dear catechumens, [come now with us into the Church, to] share with us now at the table of God's word.<sup>10</sup>**

## **2. The Liturgy of the Word**

*The gathering song may be repeated here, or another appropriate song sung, as the assembly leads the catechumens into the church for the liturgy of the word, led by the cross bearer. The deacon or lector, carrying the Book of the Gospels, followed by the priest, are the last in the procession. When the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar, the song ends, and everyone is seated. Then the priest addresses the catechumens again in these or similar words<sup>11</sup>:*

**Presider: Catechumens, during the Period of the Catechumenate, you will gather each week with the Church, and share with us the Liturgy of the Word. Listen to these scriptures carefully, for when the scriptures are proclaimed in Church, it is Christ himself who speaks. St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, encouraged us to "drink in" the scriptures we hear like a delicious beverage. He said, "Drink deeply of both beverages, the first testament and the second, because in each of them you are drinking Christ.**

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<sup>10</sup> If you've already brought them into the Church, you might say, "join us now and..."

<sup>11</sup> What is provided here is an example of what might be said as an instruction to the catechumens, who are officially joining us at this point as "hearers of the word." RCIA #61 simply says that the priest "speaks to them briefly, helping them to understand the dignity of God's word, which is proclaimed and heard in the Church."

**Drink Christ because he is the vine.  
Drink Christ because he is the rock that gushes forth  
water.  
Drink Christ because he is the fountain of life.  
Drink Christ because he is the river, whose streams  
give joy to God's city.**

**Drink Christ because he is peace.  
Drink Christ because from his belly rivers of living  
water will flow.  
Drink Christ so that you can drink the blood that  
redeemed you.**

**Drink Christ so you can drink in his words.**

**Let the luscious syrup of God's word flood the veins  
of your mind, and take possession of your heart."**

*After an appropriate period of silence, the Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual, using  
the readings of the day.*

First Reading

Psalm Response

Second Reading

Alleluia

Gospel

Homily

Silent Reflection

## PRESENTATION OF A BIBLE<sup>12</sup>

**Presider: Would our Catechumens please come forward?**

*The catechumens come forward, accompanied by their sponsors, and face the assembly. Each sponsor carries a new Bible to present to the catechumen.*

*The priest joins the assembly, and addresses the catechumens.*

*As he says the first line, the sponsors present the bible in a way that is clearly seen by the assembly.*

**Presider: Catechumens, receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

*All stand as they respond in song:*

A: All God's children, all Christ's people, all you saints, receive this word! Claim the gift, the faith, the promise, build the body of the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

## INTERCESSIONS FOR THE CATECHUMENS<sup>14</sup>

*The priest addresses the assembly:*

**Presider: These catechumens, who are our sisters and brothers, have already traveled a long road. We rejoice with them in the gentle guidance of God, who has brought them to this day. Let us pray that they may press onwards, until they come to share fully in our way of life.**

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<sup>12</sup> An alternative is for the Priest or catechist to place the Book of the Gospels in their hands, to be symbolically received, using words such as, "..., receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which you have just heard proclaimed."

<sup>13</sup> "Build the Body of the Lord" by Lori True (© 2007, GIA Publications). Of course this is just one of many appropriate sung responses.

<sup>14</sup> Even if it is not your usual custom to sing intercessions, consider singing them for this rite.

M: That God our Father may reveal His Christ to them more and more with every passing day, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: That they may undertake with generous hearts and souls whatever God may ask of them, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: That they may have our sincere and unfailing support every step of the way, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: That they may find in our community compelling signs of unity and generous love, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: That their hearts and ours may become more responsive to the needs of others, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.

M: That in due time, they may be found worthy to celebrate the baptism of new birth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord:

A: Lord, hear our prayer.<sup>15</sup>

#### **PRAYER OVER THE CATECHUMENS**

**Presider: Please join me in blessing our catechumens [by  
extending both your hands in prayer over them].**

*All extend their hands in prayer over the Catechumens.*

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<sup>15</sup> Although RCIA 68 allows the general intercessions of the Mass to be inserted here, and even to omit the Creed after the catechumens are dismissed for “pastoral reasons,” consider keeping them separate. These are intercessory prayers for the catechumens. We will profess the Creed and pray the Prayers of the Faithful after they have left.

**Presider: Almighty God, source of all creation, you have made us in your image.  
Welcome with love those who come before you today.  
They have listened with us to the word of Christ:  
by its power refashion them,  
so that in time they may assume the full likeness of Christ,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.<sup>16</sup>**

**DISMISSAL OF THE CATECHUMENS**

*A catechist takes the Lectionary, and joins the Catechumens. The priest addresses the Catechumens:*

**Presider: My dear catechumens, this community now sends you forth to reflect more deeply on the word of God which you have shared with us today. Be assured of our loving support and prayers for you. We look forward to the day when you will share fully in the Lord's Table.**

**A: May the word of God strengthen you; may the word of God nourish you; may the word of God comfort you all your life.<sup>17</sup>**

*As the assembly repeats the sung refrain, the catechist, carrying the Lectionary, leads the catechumens out to lead them in an extended reflection on the word.*

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<sup>16</sup> Another option for this prayer is found in RCIA, 66.

<sup>17</sup> This response by Christopher Walker (*Celtic Mass*, OCP, 1996) is designed to be used for the weekly dismissal of Catechumens, so it's natural to use it here. Of course other sung responses are available and appropriate.

*Once the catechumens have left, the priest concludes the Liturgy of the Word with the*

**CREED AND PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

**3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

*The Liturgy of the Eucharist proceeds as usual.*