

## **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)**

### **What we are doing now.**

The catechetical process consists of four periods leading to receiving the sacraments of initiation and beyond into a final period called the neophyte year or mystagogy. Recently, we celebrated the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming. Our catechumen and our candidates have entered the second Period of the Catechumenate. The Catechumenate is an extended period during which the participants are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. It is during this time that the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey, eager to take part in celebrations of the Word of God and to receive blessings and other sacramentals.

Catechumens are now part of the household of Christ, since the Church nourishes them with the word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations. These catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds and to practice love of neighbor. They should learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith.

Candidates too, are welcomed into the community and acknowledged to be part of it because they have already been marked with the seal of baptism. They will receive further catechetical formation to prepare for the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. The preparation of these adults also requires a considerable time, during which the faith infused in baptism must grow in them and take deep root through the pastoral formation they receive. These Candidates are preparing for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. These baptized but uncatechized Christians who are not Catholic are now called "*candidates for catechetical instruction leading to reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.*"

A thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life is provided by the team during this period. While presenting Catholic teaching we try also to enlighten faith, direct the heart toward God, foster participation in the liturgy, inspire apostolic activity and nurture a life completely in accord with the Spirit of Christ.

The initiation of catechumens/candidates is a gradual process that takes place within the community of the faithful. By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously.

While the Rites of Acceptance and Welcoming declare the inquirers' decision to enter the Church (or complete their initiation), the Rites of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion which conclude this Period of the Catechumenate herald the participants' readiness for this tremendous, life-changing event to occur in the very short term.

### **Catechism for All of Us...**

A recent catechetical session was the day before the feast day of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was also the topic of the evening.

Father George quickly dispelled the common misconception about Catholics: that we worship Mary. He spoke of *Latria*, which is a Latin term used in Catholic theology to mean adoration, which is the highest form of worship or reverence and is *directed only to the Holy Trinity*. *Latria* is sacrificial in character and may be *offered only to God*. Catholics offer other degrees of reverence to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Saints; these non-sacrificial types of reverence

are called Hyperdulia and Dulia, respectively. Hyperdulia is essentially a heightened degree of dulia provided only to the Blessed virgin. (Wikipedia, Latria) So the Catholic Church does not teach that Mary is divine. She is no goddess but a creature like all of us, who has been made by almighty God. *God alone is to be adored and worshipped.*

We heard about the five dogmas of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A dogma is a doctrine or an official teaching on faith or morals that's divinely revealed. Catholics consider the Assumption of Mary and the Immaculate Conception infallible teachings, because they involve the solemn, full, and universal papal authority.

Mary was born of two saintly parents, St. Joachim and St. Ann in Nazareth. God always intended to ask this young Jewish virgin to cooperate in his saving plan. Through her faithful assent, she becomes truly the Mother of God. All Christians are her children, and we are to love and honor her. Mary is our mother in the order of grace and is our model for faith, obedience and holiness. She is the model of what the Church is called to become: spotless, without stain or blemish.

**Mary was conceived without original sin, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.** God promised that the Savior would be born of a woman wholly at enmity with Satan. The Immaculate Conception is Mary's conception in the womb of her mother, St. Ann. Immaculate simply means without sin. From the moment of her conception, Mary was kept free from original sin by the power of divine grace so that she could give Jesus a completely untainted, spotless and immaculate human nature. The angel's greeting implicitly recognized Mary's freedom from sin: "Hail Mary, full of grace". (It would not be possible for her to have the fullness of grace if even the slightest amount of sin were present.) Mary being a mere mortal could not be kept free from sin on her own- she also needed a Savior. She was preserved from sin by anticipation of the merits of her Son, receiving the grace of his redemptive acts at the moment of her conception. God could redeem Mary in this way because he is outside of time. The Immaculate Conception has nothing to do with the conceiving of Jesus within the womb of Mary.

Last year Father George shared some remarks from an address on the very same day as our session by Pope Benedict XVI to those gathered in St. Peter's Square. Here it is paraphrased: The mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception...reminds us of two fundamental truths of our faith: in the first place original sin, and then the victory of Christ's grace over it, a victory that shines sublimely in Mary Most Holy. The existence of what the Church calls "original sin" is, sadly, a crushing truth, suffice it to look around us and above all in our interior. The experience of evil is, in fact, so consistent, that it imposes itself and makes us ask the question: If God, who is absolute goodness, has created everything, where does evil come from?

The first pages of the Bible (Genesis 1-3) respond precisely to the fundamental question—posed by every human generation—with the account of creation and our parents' fall: God created everything so that it would exist, in particular he created man in his own image; he did not create death, rather, the latter entered the world because of the envy of the devil (cf. Wisdom 1:13-14, 2:23-24), who, rebelling against God, also attracted men with deceit, inducing them to rebellion. It is the drama of freedom, which God accepts totally out of love, but promising that there would be the son of a woman that would crush the head of the ancient serpent (Genesis 3:15).

Hence from the beginning, the "eternal counsel"—as Dante would say—has a "fixed term" (Paradise, XXXIII, 3): The Woman predestined to be mother of the Redeemer, mother of him who humbled himself to the extreme to lead us back to our original dignity. In God's eyes, this Woman has always has a face and name: "full of grace" (Luke 1:28), as the Angel called her when visiting her in Nazareth. She is the new Eve, spouse of the new Adam, destined to be the mother of all the redeemed. Thus wrote St. Andrew of Crete: "The Theotokos Mary, the common refuge of all Christians, was the first to be delivered from the primitive fall of our parents". And today's liturgy states that God has "prepared a worthy dwelling for his Son and, in anticipation of his death, preserved her from all stain of sin".

In Mary Immaculate we contemplate the reflection of the Beauty that saves the world: the beauty of God that shines on the face of Christ. In Mary, this beauty is totally pure, humble, and free of all pride and presumption. The Virgin showed herself in this way to St. Bernadette 150 years ago in Lourdes, and in this way she is venerated in so many shrines.

**Mary is invited to become the Mother of God.** We saw in that pivotal passage in salvation history in Luke's gospel that Mary is invited through the angel Gabriel to become the Mother of God. (Lk 1:38). Archangel Gabriel came to meet Mary where she was in Nazareth as God comes to meet us where we are today. The culmination of God's plan required Mary's free response of faith: Mary said, "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*" *Then the angel departed from her.* (Lk 1:38). The "yes" of Mary at the Annunciation, the culmination of the Immaculate Conception, undoes the disobedience of Eden and makes paradise a possibility once again for us. As Jesus is the New Adam, so Mary's obedient response of faith makes her the New Eve. Mary, pregnant with Jesus becomes the *new* Ark of the Covenant, who carries within her the Lawgiver not the Law, the Bread of Life not manna, and the eternal High Priest not the rod of Aaron.

**Mary is the Mother of God.** In Luke's gospel, Elizabeth calls Mary by her vocation. *And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Lk 1:43). Just as our mothers do not give us our personhood, Mary did not give Jesus his divine Personhood nor did she give him his divine nature, but she did give him his human nature. Since Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and because Jesus is truly God, Mary is the Mother of God.

**Mary is ever-virgin; she has perpetual virginity.** Mary remained a virgin, before, during, and after the conception and birth of Jesus. Jesus' "brothers" and "sisters" (James, Mt 13:55) are other close relations. The word used to mean brother in the Bible's original Greek was *adelphos*, which can mean relative, cousin, or kinsman as well as sibling. Mary's perpetual virginity flows from her espousal to the divine will through the Holy Spirit's overshadowing her, an act that sanctified her womb. The men in the St. Gertrude's Catholic Men's Fellowship often call each other "brother".

**Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven.** Mary's Assumption is participation in her Son's Resurrection and anticipates our own. This dogma does not address whether Mary died.

**Mary is the Mother of the Church and our spiritual Mother.** At his death, Jesus gives her to us as our Mother in the person of the beloved disciple. *When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.* (Jn 19:26-27) *Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.* (Rv 12:17) We are indeed in a serious spiritual battle.

In the public life of Jesus, Mary appears prominently; at the very beginning when at the marriage feast of Cana, moved with pity she brought about by her intercession the beginning of the miracles of Jesus. Mary said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." God willed that the revelation of the New Testament should include this important teaching: so influential is our Lady's intercession that God will listen to all petitions made through her; which is why Christian piety, with theological accuracy, has called our Lady "suppliant omnipotence". (From commentary, The Navarre Bible) As Queen Mother, Mary participates in the mediation of her Son's grace, intercedes for us and always leads us to her Son, so *we can and should pray to her.*

**Asked and Answered.** How does the Virgin Mary help the Church? After the Ascension of her Son, the Virgin Mary aided the beginnings of the Church with her prayers. Even after her Assumption into heaven, she continues to intercede for her children, to be a model of faith and charity for all, and to exercise over them a salutary influence deriving from the superabundant

merits of Christ. The faithful see in Mary an image and an anticipation of the resurrection that awaits them and they invoke her as advocate, helper, benefactress and mediatrix. (Compendium CCC).

**Read it for yourself.** CCC 148-149, 273, 411, 484-507, 721-726, 963-972, 2673-2679.