

rites belonging to the period of the catechumenate

(RCIA 81-104 - Dark Blue Book for England and Wales)

The period of the catechumenate offers a number of opportunities to celebrate and encourage catechumens on their journey. All can be celebrated within the catechetical session or with a small group of the faithful very simply. As well as strengthening the catechumens as they grow in knowledge and love of God they introduce them to different forms of prayer and liturgy in the Church and are moments to celebrate the joy and discovery of the journey.

Each of the rites can be celebrated more than once during the catechumenate period. Perhaps you could consider a celebration of the Word of God every second week and include one or other of the other rites as part of the celebration. If you look at options for the exorcisms you will see that, when carefully chosen, they are clearly progressive. As well as using the blessings at the conclusion of a celebration of the Word, the prayers of blessing can given at the end of a catechetical session. You might also consider using the rites at a parish Mass, Sunday or weekday, a reminder to the parish community of the continuing journey of those they saw becoming catechumens. Such reminders may also help the parish community to reflect on their own life of faith and ready them for the renewal of their own baptism during Lent.

From the beginning the vision of the RCIA was that Christian initiation is a process which involves the whole parish community in prayer, support, reflection and renewal. Quite simply, the liturgical rites of the process of initiation are the right of the catechumens and the responsibility of the baptised.

The suggested rites are:

- Celebrations of the Word of God
- Minor Exorcisms
- Blessings of the Catechumens
- Anointings of the Catechumens

The minor rites are envisioned as a manifestation of the care of the Church for the Catechumens

‘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 strengthen 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.’ RCIA 75,3

CELEBRATIONS OF THE WORD OF GOD (RCIA 81 ff)

Are in accord with the liturgical year

Contribute to the instruction of the Catechumens

Contribute to the needs of the community

Their main purpose is to:

Implant in the hearts of the catechumens the teachings they are receiving

Give an experience in different ways of prayer

Explain the signs, celebrations and seasons of the liturgy

Prepare them gradually to enter the worship assembly

There are three types:

Those specific to the Catechumens

Those that are part of the Sunday liturgy

Those celebrated during catechesis

For the celebrations of the word of God that are held specially for the benefit of the catechumens (see RCIA 82), the following structure (RCIA 86-89) may be used as a model.

Song: An appropriate song may be sung to open the celebration.

Readings: One or more readings from Scripture, chosen for their relevance to the formation of the catechumens, are proclaimed by a baptised member of the community.

Homily: A brief homily that explains and applies to the readings should be given.

Concluding Rites: The celebration of the word may conclude with a minor exorcism (RCIA 94) after the homily or with a blessing of the catechumens (RCIA97) or with both; if a rite of anointing (RCIA 101-102) is adopted as an option, it may replace the minor exorcism and may also be followed by one of the blessings (RCIA 97).

MINOR EXORCISMS (RCIA 90)

An exorcism is a prayer that acknowledges the darkness or void of sin, calling upon the very presence of God to breathe life where there is only death. Once properly explained, minor exorcisms can be especially effective following a catechetical gathering during which time a great deal of pain and anguish has been uncovered. Normally the minor exorcisms take place within a Liturgy of the Word and/or the catechetical session.

Their purpose is to draw attention to:

The real nature of Christian life

The struggle between flesh and spirit

The importance of self-denial

The unending need for God's help

They take place within a celebration of the Word

Catechumens bow or kneel

They may be used on several occasions

The prayers are progressive e.g RCIA 94 - B, E, I, K

Celebrant – priest or deacon

BLESSINGS OF THE CATECHUMENS (RCIA 95)

They are a sign of God's love and of the Church's tender care

They bestow courage, joy, peace for the difficult journey

The celebrant stretches hands over the catechumens then lays hands on each individually

Celebrant – priest or deacon

ANOINTINGS OF THE CATECHUMENS (RCIA 98)

Anointing with the oil of catechumens may be celebrated whenever this seems beneficial or desirable

Celebrant – priest or deacon

Celebrant anoints on breast, or on both hands or on even other parts of the body

They symbolise the need for God's help and the strength to overcome evil and to profess faith