



Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

RCIA



Period of Purification and Enlightenment: The Journey to Initiation

Words of Introduction

Dear Fathers and RCIA Teams,

This year the RCIA process in parishes has taken on a very different complexion and parishes are dealing with challenging situations, some planning to initiate and receive at Easter and others looking at completing initiation and reception at later points in the year.

We hope that you will be able to celebrate the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion either on the First Sunday of Lent or six weeks before you intend to celebrate the sacraments of initiation later in the year, with the adapted liturgy you will have already received.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment, so important in the formation of the Elect and Candidates, will clearly have its own challenges, so in this document we aim to offer some support and guidance.

You will, of course, find it necessary to adapt the material here to suit your own parish situation. Do feel free to contact us if we can offer any further support.

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SUGGESTED ONLINE RESOURCES

The resources listed below give some useful tips and extra background information on the period of Purification and Enlightenment in an accessible and practical format

Liturgy Training Publications video 'The Period of Purification and Enlightenment'

<https://vimeopro.com/ltp/ltp-videos/video/217897987>

(Other videos covering various aspects of RCIA : <https://vimeopro.com/ltp/ltp-videos>

Catechumeneon webinar recordings <https://ltp.adobeconnect.com/a1081707727/recordings-2020-vcci-vdci/>

Team RCIA <https://teamrcia.com/2020/06/what-is-the-correct-rcia-rite-to-use-for-baptizing-the-elect-outside-the-easter-vigil/>

Contents

Guidance Notes:

For Celebrating The Period Of Purification And Enlightenment During Covid	4
Scrutinies	5
Presentations	6
Holy Saturday Preparation Rites	7

Liturgical Rites:

Scrutinies	8
First Scrutiny	8
Second Scrutiny	12
Third Scrutiny	16
Presentation of the Creed	20
Presentation of the Lord's Prayer	22
Holy Saturday Preparation Rites	23

Gospel Reflections	26
Jesus and The Samaritan Woman	27
The Man Born Blind	35
The Raising of Lazarus	43

Covid Guidelines for the Celebration of Initiation	51
Possible dates for celebrating Initiation at Other times of the Year	55

GUIDANCE TO CELEBRATING THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT DURING COVID

(RCIA 125-197 - Ritual Book for England and Wales, also RCIA Introductory Material – downloadable at <https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/RCIA.pdf>)

For those parishes planning to celebrate initiation at Easter, the Period of Purification & Enlightenment takes place, as usual, during the Lenten period. For those planning to initiate later in the year it takes place during the six weeks between the parish Rite of Election and the proposed date of initiation.

The **liturgical Rites** during this time are intended only for the unbaptised, the Elect. However, the spiritual preparation which is the focus of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment is intended for all who are preparing for reception or initiation.

For the **Reception of Non-Catechised Adults for Confirmation and the Eucharist** the RCIA states:

'The period of catechesis for these adults should be properly coordinated with the liturgical year. This is particularly true of its final phase, which should as a rule coincide with Lent. During the Lenten season penitential services should be arranged in such a way as to prepare these adults for the celebration of the sacrament of penance.' RCIA 384

For the **Reception of Baptised Christians** (from another Christian tradition) the RCIA states:

'...the candidate, according to his or her own conscience, should make a confession of sins beforehand, first informing the confessor that he or she is about to be received into full communion.' RCIA 395

RCIA Process during this Period

During this period the focus of the RCIA process moves towards the spiritual preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The emphasis is more on interior reflection than on catechetical instruction.

RCIA 126 uses these phrases:

- More intense spiritual preparation
- Interior reflection
- Intended to purify the minds and hearts as they search their own consciences and do penance
- Enlighten the minds and hearts with a deeper knowledge of Christ our Saviour

It is a time during which prayer and retreat opportunities are central. Online experiences of prayer and reflection have become very common during Covid and have been very successful. To offer a short time of retreat, perhaps a morning or afternoon, could be very fruitful, or even a couple of hours in an evening.

Even if it's not practicable for a parish to celebrate the Rites of the period, the experience of a time of purification and enlightenment in preparation for initiation is an essential part of the journey. Resources which may be useful will be found in this pack. (P26 – 50)

The Rites of this period, for the Elect, are the celebration of the Scrutinies and the Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and, on Holy Saturday, or the day before initiation later in the year, certain Preparation Rites.

In the context of the COVID restrictions in place this year adaptations will, of course be necessary.

Usually three Scrutinies are celebrated, on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, within the ritual Masses 'Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies'. **This year it may be more appropriate to celebrate just one Scrutiny, and parishes would want to make their own choice.** Suggested, adapted versions of all three are given in this pack.

The Presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, which are given orally, often at a Weekday Mass and sometimes within a gathering of the RCIA group could certainly happen this year, taking place within an RCIA session, either in person or even online, in a Liturgy of the Word. What is essential is that the celebrant and members of the community are there to orally 'entrust' them to the Elect.

PREPARATION RITES ON HOLY SATURDAY (RCIA 172ff) (Or the day before the sacraments of initiation are to be celebrated)

These rites offer a final preparation for the Elect prior to the Rites of Initiation.

THE SCRUTINIES

'The period of catechesis following the scrutinies is primarily a time of support and care for the elect (and candidates), helping them to see God's love operative in the midst of the painful naming of sin. The focus is on God's love, not on our sin. This is not a time to be preoccupied with wretchedness (in fact there is no wretchedness). Rather, it is a time to be preoccupied with the freedom of being a child of God, and anything that keeps us from living that vocation to its fullness.' Thomas H. Morris – *The RCIA: Transforming the Church* p.176)

Usually, the three scrutinies, on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, are the major events for the Elect. Preparation for the Scrutinies, and reflection after them, would be the main thrust of catechesis.

The words of the Rite indicate clearly that they are not scrutinies *by* the Church of the Elect, but a scrutiny *by the Elect of themselves*, within and supported by the community, thus interior reflection in preparation of the Elect is essential.

At present, even if a parish is unable to celebrate the Rite, this scrutiny of the Elect by themselves, through interior reflection is possible and desirable, with the support of the RCIA team, representing the community, by using the Gospel passages given for the Scrutinies.

The readings for the Masses at which the Scrutinies are celebrated are to be those of the Sundays of Year A. The other texts for Mass are from the ritual Masses, 'For the Conferral of the Sacraments of Initiation: 2. For the Celebration of the Scrutinies' (**See Roman Missal P1177 for further guidance**)

The gospels of these Sundays are John's narratives of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These are stories of coming to faith, to light and to life. They are conversion stories which are echoed in the lives of those coming to baptism, those who seek greater fullness of life.

As such, these gospels make more precise the nature of the invitation extended at the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent, (or whenever it is celebrated) calling the Elect to the Easter sacraments – in fact, calling them to faith, to light and to life.

One suggestion for catechesis during the Period of Purification & Enlightenment for the Elect, and also, in perhaps a differentiated way, for the Candidates is that it asks three questions, each with an element of strength and weakness.

1. What have you most drunk in of Christ? For what do you continue to thirst?
2. What have you seen that you never saw before? To what do you remain blind?
3. What is most life-giving in your new intimacy with Christ? What is still dead that needs resurrection?

This year, with the restrictions we have, and with the option to celebrate only one Scrutiny, parishes which are able to celebrate one of the Scrutinies will consider which to use of the three Scrutinies given in the Rite.

The Liturgy for each Scrutiny and material for catechesis and reflection are included in this pack. (Scrutiny Liturgies P8 -20; reflection material P 26-50)

PRESENTATIONS

THE PRESENTATIONS OF THE CREED AND THE LORD'S PRAYER (RCIA 134ff)

The presentations normally take place after the celebration of the scrutinies.

The Church entrusts to the Elect, who have completed their catechumenal formation, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts which express the heart of the Church's faith and prayer. They are presented in order to 'enlighten' the Elect.

The first presentation to the Elect is the **Presentation of the Creed**

The intention of the Rite is that this happens **during the Third Week of Lent** (or after the celebration of the First Scrutiny or around 3 weeks prior to initiation)

- They are to commit the Creed to memory
- They will recite it publicly prior to professing their faith in accordance with that Creed on the day of their baptism. RCIA 135 (one of the Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday)

The second presentation to the Elect is the **Presentation of the Lord's Prayer.**

The intention of the Rite is that this happens **during the Fifth Week of Lent** (or after the celebration of the Third Scrutiny or around 1 week prior to initiation)

- From antiquity the Lord's Prayer has been the prayer proper to those who in baptism have received the spirit of adoption.
- When the Elect have been baptised and take part in their first celebration of the eucharist, they will join the rest of the faithful in saying the Lord's Prayer. RCIA 136

The Rite indicates that both presentations should preferably be celebrated in the presence of a community of the faithful, within Mass, after the homily.

In the current situation this could perhaps happen as a Liturgy of the Word in a small group gathering or even online. What is important is the presence of a community of the faithful, who are able, with the celebrant, to orally present the Creed and Lord's Prayer.

- The Creed is recited by the celebrant and the faithful, while the Elect listen attentively. RCIA 147

As for the presentation of the Lord's Prayer it is the gospel itself (Matthew's version of the Our Father) the living source of faith for all Christians, which is the vehicle for presenting this prayer.

- At the Liturgy of the Word, after the First and Second Reading, those who are to receive the Lord's Prayer are called forward to listen 'to the gospel reading in which our Lord teaches his followers to pray'. RCIA 167

Liturgies of the Word for the Presentations, which may be adapted according to need, are included in this pack. (P20-23)

PREPARATION RITES ON HOLY SATURDAY

(RCIA 172ff) (or the day before the sacraments of initiation are to be celebrated)

These rites offer a final preparation for the **Elect** prior to the Rites of Initiation.

Holy Saturday, or the day before initiation, is to be a day set aside for prayer and reflection before the rituals of initiation and so these preparatory rites serve as focus for the coming events (of the Vigil). It is a time for the Elect to continue their spiritual preparation for their baptism.

The Rite states,

'The Elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday (or the day before initiation) they should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast.

When it is possible to bring the Elect together on Holy Saturday, or before the celebration of initiation, for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments: ... the 'return' or recitation of the Creed (nos. 180-183), the ephphetha rite (nos. 184-186), the choosing of a baptismal name (nos. 187-189), and the anointing with the oil of catechumens (nos. 190-194).' RCIA 172

At present it is perhaps possible only to celebrate the Recitation of the Creed,, the Anointing with Oil of Catechumens, if that has not already been done, and, if appropriate, the Choosing of a Baptismal Name. This could happen before a rehearsal of their part in the Easter Vigil, or celebration of initiation.

There is a model for this celebration at RCIA 181ff

Recitation of the Creed

The rite of the recitation of the Creed prepares the Elect for the profession of faith they will make immediately before they are baptised and instructs them in their duty to proclaim the message of the Gospel. RCIA 180

The choosing of a baptismal name

This recognises and reveals the life transforming power of initiation, wherein one leaves behind the old life and takes on the life of Christ. It is a powerful reminder of the seriousness and surrender involved in authentically living out the gospel.

The Rite of Choosing a Baptismal Name may be celebrated on Holy Saturday, or the day before initiation, unless it was included in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

The Elect may choose a new name, which is either a traditional Christian name or a name of regional usage that is not incompatible with Christian beliefs.

Where it seems better suited to the circumstances and the Elect are not too numerous, the naming may consist simply in an explanation of the given name of each of the elect. RCIA 187

LITURGICAL RITES

THE SCRUTINIES

This year parishes may wish to celebrate just one of the Scrutinies. The Rite for all three is presented here, any of the three may be used.

OUTLINE OF THE RITE

- Readings
- Homily
- Invitation to Silent prayer
- Intercessions for the Elect
- *Exorcism, involving:*
 - Presidential prayer
 - Extension of hands over individuals in silence.
 - Continuation of presidential prayer with extension of hands over all
 - Dismissal of the Elect
 - (the Rite gives a prayer of dismissal or, if the Elect are to remain, appropriate words of instruction)

FIRST SCRUTINY

Third Sunday of Lent (or 3rd week before initiation)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

150 When this rite happens on the Third Sunday of Lent, the texts and readings are from Third Sunday of Lent in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass-Cycle 'A'.

When at another time, the texts and the readings for Mass are always those given for the first scrutiny in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass among the ritual Masses, "Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies."

HOMILY

151 After the readings and guided by them, the celebrant explains in the homily the meaning of the scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and of the spiritual journey of the elect.

INVITATION TO SILENT PRAYER FOR ELECT

152 After the homily, if space allows, the elect with their godparents come forward and stand before the celebrant. It may be more appropriate during the current COVID restrictions that they stand in their places, with godparents appropriately distant

Celebrant: I now invite the Elect with their Godparents to come forward (to stand).

The celebrant first addresses the assembly of the faithful, inviting them to pray in silence and to ask that the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God.

The Celebrant addresses the assembly:

Today the Church calls the Elect to conversion.
To deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ
and to carry out the decision to love God above all.
Let us all pray at this time in silence for them
to be given a spirit of repentance,
a sense of sin,
and strength of will to live in true freedom as children of God.

The celebrant then addresses the elect, inviting them also to pray in silence and suggesting that as a sign of their inner spirit of repentance they bow their heads or kneel; he concludes his remarks with the following or similar words:

Celebrant: My dear Elect, I invite you to join your prayers to this community of faith,
and to kneel as we intercede to God on your behalf.

*The elect kneel, and all **pray for some time in silence.***

After the period of silent prayer, the celebrant invites the people to join in the intercessions.

During the intercessions godparents should stand behind the Elect, socially distant, during the intercessions.

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE ELECT

N.B. there are two series of the intercessions, 'A' and 'B'.

A

- Celebrant:** Let us pray for these elect whom the Church has confidently chosen.
May they successfully complete their long preparation
and at the Paschal Feast (or the date the parish has decided) find Christ in his sacraments.
- Reader:** That they may ponder the word of God in their hearts
and savour its meaning more fully day by day, let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That they may learn to know Christ, who came to save what was lost,
let us pray to the Lord
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That they may humbly confess themselves to be sinners, let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That they may sincerely reject everything in their lives that is displeasing and contrary to Christ,
let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That the Holy Spirit, who searches every heart, may help them to overcome their weakness
through his power, let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That the same Holy Spirit may teach them to know the things of God and how to please him,
let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That their families also may put their hope in Christ and find peace and holiness in him,
let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That we ourselves (in preparation for the Easter feast) *(exclude this if another date)* may seek a
change of heart, give ourselves to prayer, and persevere in our good works, let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**
- Reader:** That throughout the whole world whatever is weak may be strengthened,
whatever is broken restored, whatever is lost found, and what is found redeemed,
let us pray to the Lord:
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer.**

B

- Celebrant** Let us pray for these elect and candidates whom the Church has confidently chosen May they
successfully complete their long preparation and at the Paschal feast find Christ in his sacraments.
- Reader** That, like the woman of Samaria, our elect may review their lives before Christ and acknowledge
their sins, let us pray to the Lord :
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer..**
- Reader** That they may be freed from the spirit of mistrust that deters people from following Christ,
let us pray to the Lord :
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer..**
- Reader** That while awaiting the gift of God, they may long with all their hearts for the living water that
brings eternal life, let us pray to the Lord :
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer..**
- Reader** That by accepting the Son of God as their teacher, they may become true worshippers of the
Father in spirit and in truth, let us pray to the Lord :
- All** **Lord, hear our prayer..**

Reader That they may share with their friends and neighbours the wonder of their own meeting with Christ, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer..**

Reader That those whose lives are empty for want of the word of God may come to the Gospel of Christ, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That all of us may learn from Christ to do the Father's will in love, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

EXORCISM

N.B. there are two sets of the prayer of exorcism, 'A' and 'B'

A

The Celebrant faces the elect and, with hands joined, says:

Celebrant: God of power,
You sent your Son to be our Saviour.
Grant that these Elect,
who like the woman of Samaria, thirst for living water,
may turn to the Lord as they hear his word
and acknowledge the sins and weaknesses that weigh them down.
Protect them from vain reliance on self
and defend them from the power of Satan.
Free them from the spirit of deceit,
so that, admitting the wrong they have done,
they may attain purity of heart and advance on the way to salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

*Here the celebrant stretches his hands over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant: Lord Jesus,
you are the fountain for which they thirst,
you are the Master whom they seek.
In your presence
they dare not claim to be without sin,
for you alone are the Holy One of God.
They open their hearts to you in faith,
they confess their faults
and lay bare their hidden wounds.
In your love free them from their infirmities,
heal their sickness,
quench their thirst, and give them peace.
In the power of your name,
which we call upon in faith,
stand by them now and heal them.
Rule over that spirit of evil,
conquered by your rising from the dead.
Show your Elect the way of salvation in the Holy Spirit,
that they may come to worship the Father in truth,
for you live and reign for ever and ever.

All **Amen**

B

Celebrant: All-merciful Father,
through your Son you revealed your mercy
to the woman of Samaria;
and moved by that same care
you have offered salvation to all sinners.
Look favourably on these elect,
who desire to become your adopted children
through the power of your sacraments.
Free them from the slavery of sin,
and for Satan's crushing yoke
exchange the gentle yoke of Jesus.
Protect them in every danger,
that they may serve you faithfully in peace and joy
And render you thanks for ever

All: **Amen.**

*Here the celebrant stretches his hands over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant Lord Jesus,
in your merciful wisdom
you touched the heart of the sinful woman
and taught her to worship the Father
in spirit and truth.
Now, by your power,
free these elect from the cunning of Satan,
as they draw near to the fountain of living water.
Touch their hearts with the power of the Holy Spirit,
that they may come to know the Father
in true faith, which expresses itself in love,
for you live and reign for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

DISMISSAL OF THE ELECT

Celebrant: Although you cannot yet participate fully in the Lord's eucharist, stay with us as a sign of hope that all God's children will eat and drink with the Lord and work with his Spirit to re-create the face of the earth.

Mass then continues with the Profession of the Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful. 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 RCIA 143

SECOND SCRUTINY

Fourth Sunday of Lent (or second week before initiation)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

164 When this rite happens on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the texts and readings are from Fourth Sunday of Lent in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass-Cycle 'A'. When at another time, the texts and the readings for Mass are always those given for the second scrutiny in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass among the ritual Masses, "Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies."

HOMILY

151 After the readings and guided by them, the celebrant explains in the homily the meaning of the scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and of the spiritual journey of the elect.

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Celebrant: I now invite the Elect with their Godparents to come forward (to stand).

The celebrant first addresses the assembly of the faithful, inviting them to pray in silence and to ask that the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God.

The Celebrant addresses the assembly:

Today the Church calls the Elect to conversion.
To deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ
and to carry out the decision to love God above all.
Let us all pray at this time in silence for them
to be given a spirit of repentance,
a sense of sin,
and strength of will to live in true freedom as children of God.

The celebrant then addresses the elect, inviting them also to pray in silence and suggesting that as a sign of their inner spirit of repentance they bow their heads or kneel; he concludes his remarks with the following or similar words:

Celebrant: My dear Elect, I invite you to join your prayers to this community of faith,
and to kneel as we intercede to God on your behalf.

*The elect kneel, and all **pray for some time in silence.***

After the period of silent prayer, the celebrant invites the people to join in the intercessions.

During the intercessions godparents should stand behind the Elect, socially distant, during the intercessions.

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE ELECT

N.B. there are two series of the intercessions, 'A' and 'B'.

A

Celebrant: Let us pray for these elect whom God has called,
that they may remain faithful to him
and boldly give witness to the words of eternal life.

Reader: That, trusting in the truth of Christ, they may find freedom of mind and heart
and preserve it always, let us pray to the Lord:

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That, preferring the folly of the cross to the wisdom of the world, they may glory in God alone,
let us pray to the Lord:

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That, freed by the power of the Spirit, they may put all fear behind them and press forward with
confidence, let us pray to the Lord:

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That, transformed in the Spirit, they may seek those things that are holy and just, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That all who suffer persecution for Christ's name may find their strength in him, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That those families and nations prevented from embracing the faith may be granted freedom to believe the Gospel, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That we who are faced with the values of the world may remain faithful to the spirit of the Gospel, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That the whole world, which the Father so loves, may attain in the Church complete spiritual freedom, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

B

Celebrant Let us pray for these elect whom God has called, that they may remain faithful to him and boldly give witness to the words of eternal life.

Reader That God may dispel darkness and be the light that shines in the hearts of our elect, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer..**

Reader That he may gently lead them to Christ, the light of the world, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That our elect may open their hearts to God and acknowledge him as the source of light and the witness of truth, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That he may heal them and preserve them from the unbelief of this world, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That, saved by him who takes away the sin of the world, they may be freed from the contagion and forces of sin, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they may never fail to profess the Good News of salvation and share it with others, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That all of us, by the example of our lives, may become in Christ the light of the world, let us pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That every inhabitant of the earth may acknowledge the true God, the Creator of all things, who bestows upon us the gift of Spirit and life, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

EXORCISM

N.B. there are two sets of the prayer of exorcism, 'A' and 'B'.

The Celebrant faces the elect and, with hands joined, says:

A

Celebrant: Father of mercy,
you led the man born blind
to the kingdom of light
through the gift of faith in your Son.
Free these elect
from the false values that surround and blind them.
Set them firmly in your truth,
children of the light for ever.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen

*Here the celebrant stretches his hands over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant: Lord Jesus,
you are the true light that enlightens the world.
Through your Spirit of truth
free those who are enslaved by the father of lies.
Stir up the desire for good in these elect,
whom you have chosen for your sacraments.
Let them rejoice in your light, that they may see,
and, like the man born blind whose sight you restored,
let them prove to be staunch and fearless witnesses to the faith,
for you are Lord for ever and ever.

All Amen

B

Celebrant Lord God,
source of unfailing light,
by the death and resurrection of Christ
you have cast out the darkness of hatred and lies
and poured forth the light of truth and love
upon the human family.
Hear our prayers for these elect,
whom you have called to be your adopted children.
Enable them to pass from darkness to light
And, delivered from the prince of darkness,
To live always as children of light.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

*Here the celebrant stretches his hands over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant Lord Jesus,
At your own baptism
the heavens were opened
and you received the Holy Spirit
to empower you to proclaim the Good News to the poor.
Pour out the same Holy Spirit on these elect,
who long for your sacraments.
Guide them along the paths of right faith,
safe from error, doubt, and unbelief,
so that with eyes unsealed
they may come to see you face to face,
for you live and reign for ever and ever.

All Amen.

DISMISSAL OF THE ELECT

Celebrant: Although you cannot yet participate fully in the Lord's eucharist, stay with us as a sign of hope that all God's children will eat and drink with the Lord and work with his Spirit to re-create the face of the earth.

Mass then continues with the Profession of the Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful. 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 RCIA 157

THIRD SCRUTINY

Fifth Sunday of Lent (or week before initiation)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

171 When this rite happens on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the texts and readings are from Fifth Sunday of Lent in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass-Cycle 'A'. When at another time, the texts and the readings for Mass are always those given for the third scrutiny in the Missal and the Lectionary for Mass among the ritual Masses, "Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies."

HOMILY

172 After the readings and guided by them, the celebrant explains in the homily the meaning of the scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and of the spiritual journey of the elect.

INVITATION TO SILENT PRAYER FOR ELECT

152 After the homily, if space allows, the elect with their godparents come forward and stand before the celebrant. It may be more appropriate during the current COVID restrictions that they stand in their places, with godparents appropriately distant

Celebrant: I now invite the Elect with their Godparents to come forward (to stand).

The celebrant first addresses the assembly of the faithful, inviting them to pray in silence and to ask that the elect will be given a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin, and the true freedom of the children of God.

The Celebrant addresses the assembly:

Today the Church calls the Elect to conversion.
To deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ
and to carry out the decision to love God above all.
Let us all pray at this time in silence for them
to be given a spirit of repentance,
a sense of sin,
and strength of will to live in true freedom as children of God.

The celebrant then addresses the elect, inviting them also to pray in silence and suggesting that as a sign of their inner spirit of repentance they bow their heads or kneel; he concludes his remarks with the following or similar words:

Celebrant: My dear Elect, I invite you to join your prayers to this community of faith,
and to kneel as we intercede to God on your behalf.

*The elect kneel, and all **pray for some time in silence.***

After the period of silent prayer, the celebrant invites the people to join in the intercessions.

During the intercessions godparents should stand behind the Elect, socially distant, during the intercessions.

INTERCESSIONS FOR THE ELECT

N.B. there are two series of the intercessions, 'A' and 'B'.

During the intercessions godparents should stand behind the Elect, socially distant, during the intercessions.

A

Celebrant: Let us pray for these elect whom God has chosen.
May the grace of the sacraments conform them to Christ
in his passion and resurrection and enable them to triumph
over the bitter fate of death.

Reader: That faith may strengthen them against worldly deceits of every kind,
let us pray to the Lord:

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That they may always thank God, who has chosen to rescue them
from their ignorance of eternal life and to set them on the way of salvation, let us pray to the Lord:

All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That the example and prayers of catechumens who have shed their blood for Christ may encourage these elect in their hope of eternal life, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That they may all have a horror of sin, which distorts life, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That those who are saddened by the death of family or friends may find comfort in Christ, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That we, too, at Easter may again be confirmed in our hope of rising to life with Christ, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader: That the whole world, which God has created in love, may flower in faith and charity and so receive new life, let us pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

B
Celebrant Let us pray for these elect whom God has chosen.
May the grace of the sacraments conform them to Christ
in his passion and resurrection
and enable them to triumph over the bitter fate of death.

Reader That these elect may be given the faith to acknowledge
Christ as the resurrection and the life, we pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That they may be freed from sin and grow in the holiness
that leads to eternal life, we pray to the Lord:
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That they may be filled with the hope of the life-giving
Spirit and prepare themselves thoroughly for their birth to new life,
we pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That the Eucharistic food, which they are soon to
receive, may make them one with Christ,
the source of life and of resurrection, we pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That all of us may walk in newness of life and show to
the world the power of the risen Christ, we pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Reader That all the world may find Christ and acknowledge in
him the promises of eternal life, we pray to the Lord :
All **Lord, hear our prayer.**

EXORCISM

N.B. there are two sets of the prayer of exorcism, 'A' and 'B'.

The Celebrant faces the elect and, with hands joined, says:

A

Celebrant: Father of life and
God not of the dead
but of the living,
you sent your Son to proclaim life,
to snatch us from the realm of death,
and to lead us to the resurrection.
Free these elect
from the death-dealing power of the spirit of evil,
so that they may bear witness
to their new life in the risen Christ,
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever.
R. Amen

*Here the celebrant stretches his hand over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant: Lord Jesus,
by raising Lazarus from the dead
you showed that you came that we might have life
and have it more abundantly.
Free from the grasp of death
those who await your life-giving sacraments
and deliver them from the spirit of corruption.
Through your Spirit, who gives life,
fill them with faith, hope, and charity,
that they may live with you always in the glory of your resurrection,
for you are Lord for ever and ever.

All Amen

B

Celebrant Father, source of all life,
in giving life to the living you seek out the image of your glory
and in raising the dead you reveal your unbounded power.
Rescue these elect from the tyranny of death,
for they long for new life through baptism.
Free them from the slavery of Satan,
the source of sin and death,
who seeks to corrupt the world you created
and saw to be good.
Place them under the reign of your beloved Son,
that they may share in the power of his resurrection
and give them witness to your glory before all.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

*Here the celebrant stretches his hand over the head of each of the candidates in silence.
Then, with hands outstretched over all of them, he continues:*

Celebrant Lord Jesus, by raising Lazarus from the dead you showed that you came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Free from the grasp of death those who await your life-giving sacraments and deliver them from the spirit of corruption. Through your Spirit, who gives life, fill them with faith, hope, and charity, that they may live with you always in the glory of your resurrection, for you are Lord for ever and ever.

All Amen.

DISMISSAL OF THE ELECT

Celebrant: Although you cannot yet participate fully in the Lord's eucharist, stay with us as a sign of hope that all God's children will eat and drink with the Lord and work with his Spirit to re-create the face of the earth.

Mass then continues with the Profession of the Faith and the Prayer of the Faithful. 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 RCIA 164

PRESENTATION OF THE CREED

RCIA 144ff (adapt according to need)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 6:1-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 18(19):8-11— Resp.: *Lord, you have the words of everlasting life*

SECOND READING: Romans 10:8-13

OR: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8a

VERSE BEFORE THE GOSPEL: God loved the world so much, that he gave his only Son; everyone who believes in him has eternal life

GOSPEL: Matthew 16:13-18

OR: John 12:44-50

HOMILY - explaining the meaning and importance of the Creed in relation to the teaching the Elect have already received and to the profession of faith that they must make at their baptism and uphold throughout their lives.

160. After the homily, the celebrant says:

Let the elect now come forward to receive the Creed from the Church.

Before beginning the Apostle's Creed (option A) or the Nicene Creed (option B), the celebrant addresses the elect in these or similar words.

My dear friends, listen carefully to the words of that faith by which you will be justified. The words are few, but the mysteries they contain are great. Receive them with the sincere heart and be faithful to them.

A APOSTLES' CREED

The celebrant alone begins:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

As the elect listen, he continues with the assembly of the faithful.

Creator of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

At the words that follow, up to and including 'the Virgin Mary', all bow.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died and was buried;

he descended into hell;

on the third day he rose again from the dead;

he ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;

from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and life everlasting. Amen.

B NICENE CREED

The celebrant alone begins:

I believe in one God,

As the elect listen, he continues with the assembly of the faithful.

the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

At the words that follow, up to and including 'and became man', all bow.

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE ELECT

The celebrant, with hands outstretched over the Elect, says:

Lord,
Eternal source of light, justice and truth,
Take under your tender care your servant(s) Sophie and Christopher.
Purify them and make them holy;
Give them true knowledge, sure hope and sound understanding,
And make them worthy to receive the grace of baptism.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Celebrant: Go in peace, and may the Lord remain with you always.

All: Thanks be to God

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

(RCIA 165; adapt according to need)

LITURGY OF THE WORD

READINGS

FIRST READING: Hosea 11:1b, 3-4, 8c-9

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 22(3):1-3a, 3b-4, 5,6, Resp: The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:14-17, 26-27

VERSE BEFORE THE GOSPEL

You have received the Spirit which makes us God's children, and in that Spirit we call God our Father.

GOSPEL READING (PRESENTATION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER)

Celebrant: Let those who are to receive the Lord's Prayer now come forward.

The celebrant first addresses the following or similar words to the Elect

Listen to the gospel reading in which our Lord teaches his followers how to pray.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

At that time Jesus said to his disciples:

"Say this when you pray:

'Our Father,

who are in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done on earth

as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil."

HOMILY – *explaining the meaning and importance of the Lord's Prayer.*

PRAYER OVER THE ELECT

Celebrant: Let us pray for these elect, that God in his mercy may make them responsive to his love, so that through the waters of rebirth they may receive pardon for their sins and have life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All pray in silence

The celebrant, with hands outstretched over the Elect, says:

Almighty and eternal God,

You continually enlarge the family of your Church.

Deepen the faith and understanding

Of these elect, chosen for baptism.

Give them new birth in your living waters,

So that they may be numbered among your adopted children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Go in peace, and may the Lord remain with you always.

All: Thanks be to God.

PREPARATION RITES ON HOLY SATURDAY

READING John 6:63-71

Jesus said:

“It is the spirit that gives life,
the flesh has nothing to offer.
The words I have spoken to you are spirit
and they are life.

“But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, “This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him.” After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.

Then Jesus said to the Twelve, “What about you, do you want to go away too?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.” Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, you Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil.” He meant Judas son of Simon Iscariot, since this was the man, one of the Twelve, who was going to betray him.

HOMILY

RECITATION OF THE CREED

Depending on the version that was entrusted to them at the presentation, they recite either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed.

The celebrant with hands outstretched, says:

Celebrant Let us pray.
 Lord,
 we pray to you for these elect,
 who have now accepted for themselves
 the loving purpose and the mysteries
 that you revealed in the life of your Son.
 As they profess their belief with their lips,
 may they have faith in their hearts
 and accomplish your will in their lives.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

At the words that follow, up to and including 'the Virgin Mary', all bow.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

NICENE CREED

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

At the words that follow up to and including and became man, all bow.

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate
of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son
is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen

ANOINTING WITH THE OIL OF CATECHUMENS

Using the oil blessed by the bishop at the chrism Mass in the cathedral earlier in the week and explaining its significance, the celebrant says:

Celebrant We anoint you with the oil of salvation
in the name of Christ our Saviour.
May he strengthen you with his power,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

The celebrant should approach each candidate with a separate pre-prepared cotton bud infused with the Oil of Catechumens. He should anoint the hands of the candidates with the bud at arm's length to ensure a clear distance between himself and the candidate and then withdraw to a social distance.

The candidates should rub the Oil of Catechumens into their hands.

CONCLUDING RITES

Prayer of Blessing

With hands outstretched over the elect:

Celebrant Let us pray.
Father,
through your holy prophets
you proclaimed to all who draw near to you,
'Wash and be cleansed,'
and through Christ you have granted us rebirth in the Spirit.

Bless these your servants
as they earnestly prepare for baptism.
Fulfil your promise:
sanctify them in preparation for your gifts,
that they may come to be reborn as your children
and enter the community of your Church.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

Celebrant May the Lord be with you
until we gather again
to celebrate his paschal mystery

All **Amen.**

GOSPEL REFLECTIONS

Journeying to Initiation in Story and Prayer

The resource that follows is an adaptation of a resource originally published by the Diocese of Lancaster Education Centre by Dympna Magee (date unknown). They are based on the 3 'scrutiny' gospels of Year A for the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent. They are offered for either group or personal/individual use. Illustrations are taken from Cerezo Barredo's page <http://servicioskoinonia.org/cerezo/>

The Process

There are 2 sessions on each story. Two ways of approaching the stories are offered:

1. The Story in the Scriptures (Reflecting on the Story)

The first way attempts to deepen our appreciation of the stories in their scriptural setting, while allowing for reflection on our personal faith stories and journeys.

Background material is included. This is most useful for group situations and aimed at the group leader. It is not essential for the session itself but may prove useful for all reflecting on these stories.

Reflection Questions are given to help focus on various aspects of the stories. These questions are meant to be a help to either share as a group or to form the basis of a journal. Move on to the next question should nothing come from a particular question.

2. Praying the Stories

The second way of approaching these stories seeks to make us more aware of their significance in relation to Easter/celebration of the sacraments of initiation and our baptism, and gives suggestions to how this can be done, in personal and shared prayer.

You will need a copy of the story (located in a Bible or missal, or from apps such as [Universalis](#))

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman John 4:1-43

Reflecting on the Story

Read John 4:1-43.

Allow a few moments of reflection

Read again.

Share or jot down any word/phrase/thought which strikes you.

Background to the story

Reflection Questions

- In the light of what you have just read about John's gospel, can you name one or two points in the story which seem significant?
- Jacob is mentioned more than once in this story: what might the writer be telling us about Jesus, by these references? How would you describe Jesus from this story??
- Can you name any other stories about Jesus' relationship with women? What might these stories be saying to the Church of today? How do you feel about this?
- The woman immediately goes to tell others 'the Good News': Has this story anything to say to the Church especially in in her mission of evangelisation?
- For the woman, this is an encounter which changes her life, because she comes to know who Jesus is. Can you name a person or an event that has made a difference to you on your faith journey, by helping you to know who Jesus is?



Share or journal your responses.

Jesus and Women in the gospels: (see background notes, 9)

Prayer

- Read (aloud) vv 5-14 or vv16-25, or vv27-43
- Pause for silent reflection
- Recall for a moment in silence the person/event that helped you know who Jesus is. Bring that to God in thanks.
- Say:
Lord Jesus,
because of your words,
we believe that you are the saviour of the world.

Background Notes for The Samaritan Woman: Reflecting on the Story

John's Gospel

1. The Gospel of A Community

John's Gospel was the last of the gospels to be written, as we now have them. No one is exactly sure when it was written, but there is general agreement among scholars that it was at the end of the first century AD, and probably in the town of Ephesus.

The gospel is believed to have had its beginning in the apostle John but, as with all four gospels, it went through stages of development (known as editing or 'redaction') before it took on the form we have today. It is therefore more accurate to think of this gospel as the product of a group within John's community, who reflected on and developed his teaching and his experience of Jesus.

As with all the gospels, the experiences of the community in which the gospel took shape, influenced the writing and the picture of Jesus which is presented to the hearer.

The early communities were essentially missionary, and the message was shaped according to the needs of the people to whom they brought 'the Good News', as well as their own faith in the risen Jesus. The community from which the gospel comes, shows itself to be knowledgeable of many aspects of Jesus' life and teaching, and reflects on its own inner life, in the light of that knowledge.

The Johannine community, as it is called, looked above all for the truth of Jesus Christ as Risen Lord, and how that truth spoke to them in their lives. They were influenced by Greek thought (e.g. the idea of 'logos' [Word] comes from this). They were also influenced by Jewish tradition. John uses many images from Judaism e.g. the paschal lamb, manna, water.

2. Jesus in John's Gospel

Jesus is the WORD of God, the one who reveals the Father, in what he says and does. (see below: Teaching and Signs). This is mentioned in the opening verses of the gospel:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;

and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of God.' (John 1:1 & 14)

Jesus is the LIGHT of the world, who brings light in the darkness, which the darkness cannot overcome. He is the *'...true light that enlightens every man.'* (1:9)

But Jesus is very human, experiencing grief (over his friend Lazarus), anger (in the Temple), enjoying a wedding at Cana. He shows deep knowledge of 'what makes people tick' e.g. the Samaritan woman.

Jesus comes to do 'the will of the Father' and there are frequent references to this in John.

Sometimes, they are indirect, as in the story of the Samaritan woman, where we are told that Jesus 'had to pass through Samaria'. Certainly, going through Samaria was the most direct route from Judea to Galilee, but there were others. The phrase indicates that Jesus went that way because it was the Father's will that he reveal himself to the Samaritans through his meeting with the woman.

Jesus is however always the risen Lord, the exalted one, the king, even in his passion and death. This is his 'hour'.

Jesus is glorified in his death, when he, who is the judge of the world and the king of glory, is raised on the cross.

'I AM'

The most significant term which uses of himself in John's Gospel is: I AM.

In 6:35, Jesus says *'I am the bread of life'*.

In 10:11, *I am the good shepherd.'*

In 8:58, *'Before Abraham was I am.'*

This phrase 'I am' was understood by the Jews as referring to the one true God, who had revealed himself to Moses. Jesus' use of the term brought the wrath of the Jewish authorities upon him. These 'I am' statements summed up the faith in the person of Jesus of the Christians in John's community.

3. Teaching and Signs

Word

Jesus teaches about the Father, his relationship with the Father, and the presence and work of the Spirit in several long discourses, throughout the gospel. These are creative words, like the creative words of God in calling all things into being: *'In the beginning...'*

Although these discourses contain highly developed theology, they arise from concrete human situations, e.g. the feeding of the five thousand or his conversation with the woman at the well.

Life

He also gives 'signs' which point to the life God gives. These are miracles, creative signs, as his words are creative. Some of these, e.g. at the wedding feast in Cana, and the raising of Lazarus, are found only in John. Again these arise from everyday situations in which people find themselves, and into which Jesus comes.

4. The Purpose of John's Gospel

'The basis for true worship in the Johannine community is the confession of Jesus as prophet, Messiah, Saviour of the world and equal to God.' (New Jerome Biblical Commentary, published by Geoffrey Chapman, 1992)

And this is why John tells his hearers (that is us) all these things, so *'...that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing you might have life in his name.'* (20:30-31)

5. The Significance of this Story in John's Gospel

It is thought that this story was inserted into John's gospel as a reflection on the conversion of the Samaritans, mentioned in Acts 8.

We know from the Acts of the Apostles, and from some of Paul's letters, that there were bitter disputes in the early Church about those who could be accepted into the community, and on what terms.

It is possible that some in the community wanted the newly converted Samaritan Christians to accept worship in the Jerusalem Temple. To expect this was to misunderstand the true nature of worship ('in Spirit and in truth') and the new age inaugurated by Jesus.

6. The Story As A Drama

This is a beautifully constructed story, set out in three scenes as in a drama.

In the first scene, the plot is initiated by Jesus and worked out through the dialogue between him and the woman. Jesus draws her towards an understanding of who he is. She acts upon her growing understanding, and goes into the town to tell the people about Jesus. Faith calls for action.

The second scene shifts to Jesus and the disciples, who in some ways also need to be taught about Jesus and his mission.

The coming of the townspeople to Jesus and their acknowledgement that he is the saviour of the world is the final scene. At one level this is surprising, because they are foreigners, but it fits in well with the situation and the thinking behind John's gospel.

7. The People in the Story

The Samaritans

The Samaritans were the descendants of two groups: those people left in Israel after the deportation following the fall of Israel in 722 BC, and colonists brought in later by the Assyrians. They were considered as neither ethnically nor religiously pure by the Jews. In addition, the Samaritans refused to acknowledge the priority of the Temple in Jerusalem, and indeed, put obstacles in the way of its restoration after the Exile.

Mount Gerizim was the sacred place for them. (cf 'this mountain' in the dialogue between Jesus and the woman.) They did not accept the writings of the Jewish prophets, although like the Jews, they looked to Moses as the great figure. Their expectation of a messiah was not based on the promises made to David's line, nor the visions of Isaiah, but in the hope that a leader like Moses would come. The woman mentions this hope, in the course of speaking to Jesus.

Rabbinical teaching, which contained many warnings to men about being led astray by women in general, was very strong on avoiding contact with the Samaritan kind, for fear of instant seduction!

The Five Husbands

Some interpreters say that Jesus' remark about the woman's five husbands, is a reference to the fact that the Samaritans were tainted by worshipping the Baals, the false gods of the pagans who had overrun Samaria all those years before. Others think it is a sign of Jesus' insight, not human nature in general, and this woman's situation in particular.

One commentator offers another possibility:

'However, the Jacob theme may still be implicit in this passage, since the well is the place of courtship in the Jacob story. Jesus replaces the numerous 'husbands' the woman has had.' (New Jerome Biblical Commentary)

8. The Scene of the Story: Meetings at Wells

The story is set at Jacob's well, and the woman asks Jesus, *'Are you greater than our father Jacob...'*

'Jacob's well' is situated at a major fork in the road to Galilee through Samaria. It is not actually mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures, but in Gen 48:22, a field or piece of land near Shechem is mentioned as being given to Joseph by Jacob. Obviously, traditions have become intertwined at this point in the story.

But the reference to Jacob 'our father' is worth noting. The woman is tapping into the common inheritance of the Jews and Samaritans.

In addition, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, after his encounter with God at the ford of the Jabbok (Gen 32:22-32). The people of Israel, the sons and daughters of Jacob, were to become God's choice, in all the earth. Jacob/Israel was (and still is) God's son.

Many stories in the Hebrew scriptures take place at wells. Jacob meets and falls in love with Rachel at a well. Abraham's servant, sent to find a suitable wife for Isaac, fulfils his master's command (with God's help) by finding Rebecca at a well and asking her for a drink.

None of this should surprise us. Wells, in the ancient world (and in the Middle East and other parts of the world today) provide, in addition to water, a meeting place and a social life for those who gather at them. This is especially true for women.

The woman in this story evidently has some reason for going to the well at the 'sixth hour', which is noon, and certainly not the usual time. It would seem to indicate that her unusual lifestyle (i.e. having five husbands) has put her outside the community. It is all the more amazing that she leaves her jar and goes at once to people who despise her with the news that she may have found the Messiah.

9. Jesus and Women in the Gospels

We read in this story that the disciples 'marvelled' or 'were surprised' to find Jesus talking to a woman. There may be several reasons for this. No respectable Jewish woman would have spoken in public with a man to whom she was not related by family or marriage. So, perhaps the disciples came to their own conclusions about what kind of woman she was.

It could be that they recalled the Jacob and Rachel story, and wondered what exactly was happening.

The fact is that the gospels give strong clues that Jesus' attitude to women was quite revolutionary for his time. Some of his actions must have been shocking for his contemporaries. There are two stories where Jesus allows a woman to wash and anoint his feet in public (Luke 7:36-50, and John 12:1-8). In doing this, he was welcoming a very intimate service from a woman. He clearly numbered women among his friends, as we can see from his visits to the home of Martha and Mary: *'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.'* (John 11:5)

The same two women are named in Luke's gospel (Luke 10:38) and Mary is described as sitting at his feet and listening to him – the action of a disciple.

Luke's gospel, at the beginning of chapter 8, lists the women who travelled around with him, *'...who provided for him out of their means.'*

This statement, so simply made, masks the full impact of this highly unusual and possibly shocking situation. The fact that women are actually named is, in itself amazing, because they simply didn't count! They could not be called as witnesses in first century Palestine.

One of the women named by Luke is *'Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.'* It is this same Mary who, in John's gospel (20:18), first finds the empty tomb, and to whom the risen Lord appears and send to the apostles with the astounding news that Jesus is risen. She is in fact 'the apostle of the apostles'.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman John 4:1-43

Praying the Story

Read John 4:1-43.

Allow a few moments of reflection

Read again.

Allow some time for quiet, personal reflection.

Background to the story in the context of preparing Easter (celebration of the sacraments) (see background notes)



Reflection Questions

- Water plays a very significant part in the Rite of Baptism
Have there been any experiences in your own life when water played a significant part?
Can you see any connection between these experiences and baptism?
- When the woman goes back to the town, she goes as someone who has changed.
Have you had any experiences or met people who 'changed your life'?
Was it easy to change? difficult? for yourself? others?
Does this story help you to reflect on that experience?
- The woman goes through several stages in her journey in faith.
How have your images/ideas of Jesus changed in your own faith journey?
- (For personal reflection only):
The woman leaves her jar at the well. We see this as a sign of her leaving behind her old life, of her conversion. What would you name, in your own life, as a symbol of your conversion?

Imaginative Prayer

(Hint for personal/individual use: Pre-record this section, by reading it slowly and leaving pauses at the end of each line. or have someone else read it out)

Close your eyes and relax as much as possible.

Take a few moments to decide if you want to enter into the character of Jesus or the woman.

Imagine the scene, the heat, the dust, your weariness from walking...

As Jesus, what are your feelings when you see the woman? How does she look at you?

As the woman, what are your feelings when you see Jesus? How does he look at you?

Recall as much of the dialogue as you can.

How do you feel as you come to know who the other is, as you let yourself be known?

How do you feel when the disciples come?

As Jesus, what do you want the disciples to understand?

As the woman, how do you feel as you go back to the town?

What do you hope for? What do you expect?

As Jesus or the woman, what do you feel at the end of the story?

When you are ready, open your eyes and become aware again of the room you are in. Share/journal any feeling or thought about the prayer.

Prayer

Read aloud:

God of power, you sent your Son to be our Saviour.
Grant that we, who, like the Samaritan woman,
thirst for living water, may turn more and more to you
as we hear your word and acknowledge all the sins and weaknesses that weigh us down.
Lord Jesus, in your presence,
we dare not claim to be without sin,
for you alone are the Holy One of God.
We open our hearts to you in faith,
laying bare our hidden wounds.
In your love, heal all our ills,
quench our thirst and give us peace.
Show us the way of salvation,
that through your Holy Spirit,
we may come to Easter (the sacraments) with faith and hope renewed.

Read the prayer again silently.

Is there any word or phrase in the prayer which strikes you?
Share or journal this, saying why if you feel you can.

Name any person or situation to be brought in prayer.

Intercessions

Let us pray for those who are preparing for Baptism, or to be received into full communion with the Church.
May they complete their long preparation and find Christ in his sacraments.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May they ponder the word of God in their hearts, and come to know Christ who came to save the lost.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May the Holy Spirit of truth, help them to overcome their weaknesses and rely on God's love.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May their lives be an example of faith, to their families, neighbours and all they meet.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May we, in preparing for Easter (celebrating the sacraments), seek a change of heart, and give ourselves more to prayer and care of those in need.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May all those who seek the face of God be brought to see to a vision of his glory.

Lord, hear our prayer.

May whatever is broken in the world be healed, whatever is weak be strengthened, whatever is lost found.

Lord, hear our prayer.

End with singing/listening to 'Let All Who Thirst' (Come to the Water') by John Foley or similar

Background Notes for The Samaritan Woman: Praying the Story

1. Water

*'O let all who thirst, let them come to the water,
and let all who are weary, let them come to the Lord.'* (John Foley)
says the hymn, recalling the words of Isaiah (55:3)

Water features strongly in this story. It is to draw water that the woman comes to the well. Jesus uses the opportunity to ask her for a drink and offers her 'living water'.

Water as a symbol

The first thing of which we need to remind ourselves, is how precious a commodity water is, and how difficult to obtain for many people in the world. We are occasionally aware of this when there is a water shortage here, or when we are warned about the diminution of natural water supplies.

When we see garden plants limp for lack of rain, we may appreciate a little more what life is like for those who have to look daily for water just to sustain life.

Life in fact depends on water, and so water is a universal symbol.

But water can also be extremely destructive. Those who have experienced their homes being flooded don't need to be told that! Even if we are fortunate enough never to have had this experience, we can be appalled or deeply moved by pictures on our television screens of floods in other parts of the world.

Water in the Hebrew Scriptures

Water is often mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures.

The greatest event in the history of Israel was the Exodus, and, within that, the crossing of the Red Sea, when the people were saved from their enemies.

In the desert, Moses, at God's command, strikes the rock to get water for the people of Israel who are convinced that they are going to die of thirst.

The psalms speak of yearning for God, as the deer longs for streams of water. God sends the rain and the sun to bring the harvest, but in times of drought, people die. The prophet Elijah is able, by invoking God's power, to bring rain on the earth.

Because of all these experiences, water became a symbol to the people of Israel of God's care for them.

In addition, the concept of 'living water' grew up in both the wisdom and prophetic traditions of Israel. Jeremiah speaks of God himself as *'the fountain of living waters'* (Jeremiah 2:13). The Essenes, the desert community of Jesus' own time, wrote of the Law as being living water.

When Isaiah spoke of the water which gives life, he was using the symbol of water to speak of God's wisdom, as life-giving.

Yet it is God's spirit (breath) which gives life from the very moment of creation. The Spirit of God hovers over the waters of chaos, as creation begins. It is that spirit which keeps the waters under control.

Frequent connections are made between Spirit and water, as the sign that the Messianic age has come. One of the works of Jesus, which cause the disciples in Mark's gospel to wonder who Jesus is, is the calming of the storm. *'who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'* (Mark 4:41)

Water and Spirit in the New Testament

This connection between water and Spirit is taken up in the New Testament.

In John's account of the death of Jesus, water flows from his side when all his blood is spent. And so the exalted, crucified Jesus becomes the source of living water.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul says: *'One Spirit was given to us all to drink.'*

Luke in the Acts of the Apostles describes the Spirit as the 'Gift of God' (Acts 2:38 & 8:20)

All of this theology and reflection are behind this story.

There is nothing wrong with the water in Jacob's well, but it has been supplanted by the water which Jesus offers, which wells, springs, leaps up to new life.

2. Baptism and the Easter Vigil (Celebration of the Sacraments)

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman comes almost immediately after Jesus' dialogue about baptism with Nicodemus (3:1-21), and is introduced by a short passage about baptising. Therefore, we make the obvious connection between this story and our baptism. In the story we have set before us, one of the central paschal (Easter) themes.

Water is one of the great symbols of Baptism. Above all we associate the pouring of water in Baptism as symbolic of the new life we are given, by and in the Spirit of God, his gift to us in love.

When we are reminded of our baptism, we are not just recalling something which happened in the past. Being baptised in the living water means that we, like the Samaritan woman, are called to go with joy and share our faith with others, to make Christ known in our world, and our community, wherever that may be.

Since the early years of the Church, the Easter Vigil has been the time to celebrate baptism. Whether we are welcoming new members to the community or renewing our own baptismal commitment, it is the most appropriate time to reflect upon what it means to be baptised, in the living waters of the sacrament.

Blessing of Water Old words:

Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power...

In Baptism we use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament...

Let this water remind us of our baptism; let us share the joy of our brothers and sisters who are baptised this Easter.

Blessing of Water, New words:

O God, who by invisible power accomplish a wondrous effect through sacramental signs and who in many ways have prepared water, your creation, to show forth the grace of baptism....

May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your Only Begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image, and washed clean through the sacrament of Baptism... may be found worthy to rise to the life of new born children through water and the Holy Spirit....

3. A Personal Journey in Faith

What John describes for us in this story, are the stages of this woman's personal faith journey. She begins as an outcast from the community in which she lives, and ends by being the one who brings them the good news.

At first, she sees Jesus simply as a Jew, with whom her people have 'no dealings'. Nevertheless, she is intrigued, and sufficiently attracted by him to enter into a conversation with him. When Jesus asks her to go and fetch her husband (why? we might ask ourselves), she answers him very honestly. Her candour brings no judgement or condemnation from Jesus, but approval of her truthfulness.

But his obvious insight into her way of life moves her to recognise him as a prophet, (by this she means someone like Moses). Her heart is so open to the words of Jesus, that, as she listens to him, she begins to see that he might even be the expected Christ.

Jesus confirms her newfound faith.

The return of the disciples, (who are not reported as saying anything to her) prompts her to go back to the town, leaving her jar there at the well. She calls the people to come to Jesus. She is still not fully sure who he is, 'Can this be the Christ?', but she wants to bring others to him.

This pattern of personal conversion to, or recognition of, Jesus is found elsewhere in John's gospel; eg Andrew brings his brother Simon Peter to Jesus, saying: 'We have found the Messiah.' Philip, having been called to follow Jesus, goes and brings Nathanael to him (John 2:40ff)

The personal encounter with Jesus cannot end there. Like the woman, all who hear this good news must share it with others.

The Man Born Blind John 9:1-41

Reflecting on the Story

Read John 9:1-41.

Allow a few moments of reflection

Read again.

Share or jot down any word/phrase/thought which strikes you.

Background to the story (see background notes)

Reflection Questions

- Spent a few minutes naming and reflecting on anything which particularly strikes you in what you have just read/heard in the background notes.
- Can you think of any other stories in which Jesus comes into conflict with the authorities? And with what results?
- Read v. 35.
What does the first half of this verse tell us about Jesus?
What could this be saying to us, the Church, about how we treat those who are on the edges of society?
- How would you describe Jesus from this story?
What do you find attractive about him?
What do you find challenging about him?
- What does this story teach us about faith?



Share or journal your responses.

Recognition Stories: (see background notes)

Share stories and situations from the gospels of people recognising who Jesus is for them.

Prayer

- Read (aloud) vv 4-5; vv35-38
- Pause for silent reflection
- Recall for a moment the responses made to Jesus by the people who believed in the signs which Jesus gave and 'received him' e.g. Thomas, Simon Peter, Mary Magdalen, Andrew, the blind man.
What phrase/sentence (of your own or from these stories) would sum up your faith in Jesus? Pray this aloud or in silence.
- Say:
Lord Jesus Christ,
grant that we may see thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly,
day by day.

Background Notes for The Man Born Blind: Reflecting on the Story

1. The Setting of the Story in John's Gospel

a. The Book of Signs

We read at the end of John's Gospel:

'...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name.' (20:31)

Although this is the main theme of this gospel, it is usually divided into two parts: the 'Book of Signs' (chapters 1-12) and the 'hour of Jesus' (chapters 13-20)

In the Book of Signs, where we find this story, the community witnesses to its faith in Jesus by proclaiming these signs as the proof that Jesus is the one sent by God to bring life to the world. Those who believe accept the signs; those who do not, become more and more hostile to Jesus.

b. The Placing of the Story

The story of the man born blind, and the story of the raising of Lazarus (5th Sunday Lent) are to be found in that part of John's gospel where there is increasing conflict with 'the Jews'. The previous four chapters are essentially about Jesus' coming and being well received, (even though Nicodemus has some reservations: see chapter 3). From chapter 6 onwards, however, Jesus is the recipient of hostile questioning of his mission, and especially of who he claims to be. The rejection of him which we see in this story, is progressive and eventually leads to his death.

This is already signalled in the Prologue to the gospel:

'He came to his own home and his own people received him not.' (1:11)

In John's gospel, there is only one issue which causes conflict: belief or unbelief in the identity of Jesus. It is not with the forces of nature, or demons, or the misunderstanding of his disciples that Jesus wrestles, but with the refusal of 'the Jews' to believe in him.

Although the story is complete in itself, some scholars think that it has been deliberately placed at this point in the gospel, after a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jews, set around the Feast of Tabernacles. It highlights Jesus' growing distance from the Temple. The Temple, for the Jews, was the place of God's presence among his people, and so symbolised the covenant between God and Israel and everything which that implied. For the early Christian community, Jesus himself is the new covenant.

At the end of the previous chapter, we read:

'So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.' (8:59)

In this story, Jesus is certainly not hiding, but he is once again in conflict with 'the Jews.'

2. The Johannine Community and the Story

This situation may well mirror that of the Johannine community, who were in effect, regarded by the Jews as an heretical sect. Towards the end of the first century, those Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, were expelled from the synagogues. This state of affairs is brought forward in this story into the time of Jesus' mission. The parents of the blind man almost disown him, because *'they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.'* (8:22)

To be put out of the synagogue was very serious, for it meant being expelled from the community, becoming an outsider. It is unlikely that such severe measures were taken against the disciples in Jesus' own time. Indeed, there were many references in the Acts of the Apostles to the disciples and apostles preaching and praying in the synagogue and Temple, after the Ascension. So here we have a very good example of the concerns of the Christian community influencing the telling of a story.

3. 'The Jews'

Unfortunately for many centuries, people who claim to be followers of Jesus have deliberately misused some references in the gospels, and especially in John's gospel, to justify anti-Semitism, often with appalling consequences. It is essential, therefore, to try to understand what the phrase 'the Jews' means in this context.

The term 'the Jews', occurs about seventy times in John's gospel.

It means different things in different situations:

- i. Sometimes, as when Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman, (a foreigner), it means simply a national religious group.
The same meaning is intended when the customs and laws of 'the Jews' are described.
- ii. It can also mean Judeans (i.e. not Galileans). Some of these believed in Jesus, and some were his enemies.
- iii. But most generally, it is a kind of technical term used for the religious authorities, (Pharisees and Sadducees) especially those who were very powerful in Jerusalem, and who were hostile to Jesus. (e.g. 5:10 & 5:16; 7:32-36; 10:31ff)

John does in fact distinguish between 'the Jews' and 'Israel', which is a term of favour as in the case of Nathanael (see 1:47)

To understand John's use of the expression 'the Jews' we must remember the historical circumstances in which the gospel was written (see 2 above).

4. The Sabbath

When Jesus cures the blind man, it is the Sabbath. According to Jewish law, healing was allowed on the Sabbath if life was in danger. Clearly, this is not the case here. In addition, he was breaking other Sabbath laws from the tradition of the rabbis.

The Sabbath day was indeed very sacred to the Jews, and rightly so, because it reminded them of who they were: God's liberated and chosen people.

Once they were slaves in Egypt and not able to keep the Sabbath rest ordained by God. Keeping the Sabbath was a sign of their freedom. But it had been made a burden, by the addition of many laws and precepts.

In the other three gospels, there are examples of Jesus healing on the Sabbath and incurring the wrath of the Pharisees, but Jesus reminds them that '*...the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*' People are more important than laws.

5. Contrasts

This is a story with many contrasts which underlines a number of the themes in John's gospel.

Jesus is the **Light of the World**. At the beginning of the story, in reply to the disciples' question, he says, '*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*' (v5)

The blind man lives in darkness because of his blindness, but the contrast is really with the darkness of the Pharisees, who deliberately choose their condition. Linked closely with this is the opposition of day and night (v4).

Doubtless, there are implications here of the coming passion and death of Jesus when the night, symbolising the power of his enemies, will appear to overcome him. (see 13:30: '*...he (Judas) immediately went out; it was night.*')

The word 'blind' is used 17 times in the story. Sight and blindness are in fact metaphors which point to the most significant contrasts in the story: belief and unbelief, which as we have already noted, are at the heart of John's teaching about Jesus.

Each of these contrasted words is used with tremendous skill by the writer to underscore his message in the telling of this story.

6. The Intention of the Writer

In this story, Jesus' enemies are using the healing on the Sabbath merely as an excuse to get at him. This can be seen in their interrogation of the man. They are not interested in the truth, but in trapping the man into saying something which they can use against Jesus.

The real interest of the writer is indicated by the attention devoted to the interrogation of the man. Only a few verses are given to the miracle itself. The meaning of the sign is given before the miracle, that '*the works of God might be made manifest in him.*'

John wants his hearers to become aware that as the man grows in his faith in who Jesus is, the Pharisees ('the Jews') become more and more fixed in their unbelief.

7. Some Recognition Stories

John's Gospel has a variety of stories and situations in which people articulate their recognition of who Jesus is for them.

In the very first chapter of John, we find Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, telling him: *'We have found the Messiah (which means Christ)'*

In the resurrection stories, Mary Magdalen, recognising the risen Jesus, calls him 'Rab-boni' (which means teacher). Thomas (the 'unbeliever' who demands proof of the resurrection), having been given that proof, worships Jesus and calls him 'my Lord and my God.' (20:28)

However, the other three gospels have ample examples of such recognition in faith. In Luke 5, after the miraculous catch of fish, Simon Peter cried out, *'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'*

The same Peter speaks for all the apostles, in reply to Jesus' question: *"But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."* (Mark 8:29)

But, the writers of the gospels tell us, it is not just those in the inner circle of Jesus who recognise who Jesus is. John give us this story of the man born blind who declares his faith in Jesus as Lord and worships him. The centurion whose servant is dying, recognises the authority of Jesus without ever having met him; Blind Bartimaeus, on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, calls Jesus 'Son of David' and 'Master' and follow him 'on the way'. The Canaanite woman, who begs Jesus to cure her demon possessed daughter, calls him 'Son of David' and 'Lord'. (Matthew 15:21-28)

When we hear these stories, and reflect on our lives in the light of them, we too are being asked to recognise who Jesus is for us, and to worship him

The Man Born Blind John 9:1-41

Praying the Story

Short prayer (eg Taizé, *The Lord is My Light*)

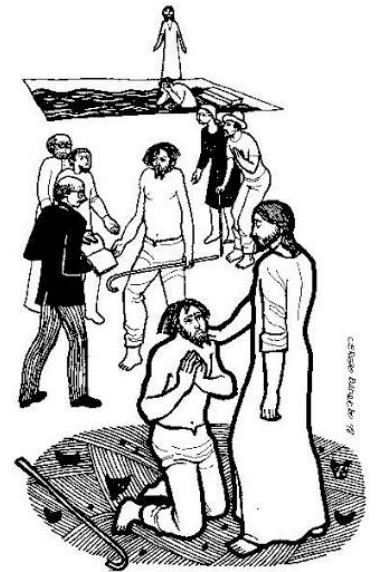
Read John 9:1-41

Allow time for quiet, personal reflection.

Background to the story in the context of preparing for Easter (see background notes)

Reflection Questions

- When the man is healed, he speaks out and tells the truth about Jesus.
Can you name a situation in your own life where you are called to speak out for the truth?
- Look at the excerpt from the Exsultet (see background notes).
Does any word or phrase strike you? Can you say why?
What does it teach you about Easter?
- The Pharisees put obstacles in the way of the man's faith.
Can you name obstacles in the way of faith which Christians face today?



A Profession of Faith

- Write a profession of faith which you think could be suitable for initiation or reception. e.g. A short statement of faith about each of: the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. A very simple example could be:
 - I believe in the Father who sent Jesus.
 - I believe in Jesus who is the Light of the world.
 - I believe in the Holy Spirit who gives life.
- Can you name three things to be renounced, in the same way?
 - e.g. I renounce my judgement of people, which diminishes me and them
 - I renounce the blindness of prejudice.
 - I renounce false values which make me blind to your light.

Praying Our Lives

If possible, darken the room and light a candle (or some other dim light, such as a small lamp)

Hint for personal/individual use: Maybe an idea to pre-record the following in italics if you're on your own, speaking slowly with pauses, then play back to pray the prayer.)

Focus on the light for a few moments.

Close your eyes and become as relaxed as possible.

Ask Jesus for the light to see any area of blindness in your life, for example your relationships with others or with God.

Name this blindness, in the silence of your own heart, and ask for it to be healed.

Prayer

Father of mercy,
you led the man born blind
to the kingdom of light
through the gift of faith in your son.
Grant that we too may be led
from the false values
which surround us,
to a new vision of your truth.
Let us rejoice in your light
and be true witnesses
to the faith you give us.
Lord Jesus,
the true light that enlightens the world,
free us from all that enslaves us,
and give us the power to proclaim to the world,
the good news of light and life which you bring to all.

Silent Reflection

Profession of Faith

If you are meeting as a group:

Share some of the statements of faith and renunciations of evil. Response by the group after each statement of faith: **Lord, we believe.**

Intercessions

For all those who are preparing for Baptism and to be received into full communion with the Church.

May they remain faithful to God who has called them, and give witness to him in their lives.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

May they trust in the truth of Christ, and so find freedom in mind and heart.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

May God gently lead them to Christ, the light of the world.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

May they, through the power of the Holy Spirit, profess the good news of salvation, and share it with others.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

May we, as we prepare for the celebration of the sacraments, renew our faith in Jesus, who brought us the light at our Baptism.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

May all of us reject all that is unfaithful to the truth of Christ.

Let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear our prayer.

Hymn/Song

Either sing or find a recording of a hymn such as The Light of Christ, Christ Be Our Light, Walk in the Light, The Lord is My Light (Taizé)

Background Notes for The Man Born Blind: Praying the Story

1. The Story in the Scrutinies

From very early times, this story was used as a reading in the preparation of those catechumens, who had been accepted as worthy of the gift of baptism. As the practice of having three scrutinies developed, this story was read on the day 'of the great scrutiny.'

And so it is part of the scrutinies as we have them today in the RCIA.

It now comes after the Presentation of the Creed, although it is believed that in early times, the 'Elect' recited the Creed after hearing this story, which has its climax in the man's profession of faith: 'Lord, I believe.'

2. A Baptismal Story

This story is understood to be a lesson on baptism. Two of the gestures which Jesus uses, anointing (smearing the clay on the man's eyes) and the use of spittle, became part of the baptismal ceremony (though we no longer use clay nor spittle!)

Anointing

The Greek root for the word 'smearing': 'epichriein', is related to the words 'chrism' and 'christen'. At baptism we are anointed with chrism; we are 'Christed', we become part of Christ and of his body, the Church.

In the Old Testament, anointing was a sign that someone or something was set aside for God's work. We read of *prophets* being anointed by God to speak out fearlessly in his name (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

In the book of Exodus, there are long accounts of the anointing of Aaron as *priest*, as well as the altar, the vessels, etc. which are to be used for the worship of God. (see Exodus 30:30)

In 1 Samuel 16, and 2 Samuel 5, David is anointed *king* of Israel.

Jesus is all of these – prophet, priest and king.

In his first letter, St Peter, quoting Isaiah, speaks to the whole people of God as '*... a holy nation, a people set apart.*' (1 Peter 1:9)

Since the Second Vatican Council, great emphasis has been placed on the idea that all the baptised are anointed prophet, priest and king that we may serve the Kingdom of God in the world, as we witness to the presence of Jesus in our lives.

As **prophet**, we are to speak God's truth boldly and fearlessly, just as the healed man does in the story, to those especially who do not want to hear it.

As **priest**, we are to make the world holy, by being holy (ie 'whole') which is God's desire for all creation.

As **king**, we are to serve the world, in imitation of Jesus who '*...came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*' (Mark 10:45)

A New Creation

When Jesus uses earth and spittle on the man's eyes, the man receives his sight. he is re-created, able to live a new life. So this story reminds us of the account of creation in Genesis 2, when God creates man from his own breath and the dust of the earth. In baptism, we are empowered to live a new life. We too are 'a new creation.'

3. The Story and the Easter Vigil (Celebration of the Sacraments)

a) Light

The motif of light, and Jesus as the light of the world, so central to this story, is one of the powerful symbols of the Vigil. We light the paschal fire, and from it the paschal candle, the symbol of Christ himself. As the candle is carried into the Church, we sing three times, the solemn acclamation 'Christ our Light! Thanks be to God!'

The Exsultet

This wonderful hymn of thanks and praise to the risen Christ reminds us why this is the night of nights, when all creation rejoices and gives glory to God.

*'...Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her,
ablaze with light from her eternal King,
let all corners of the earth be glad,
knowing an end to gloom and darkness.
Rejoice, let Mother Church also rejoice,
arrayed with the lightning of his glory,
let this holy building shake with joy,
filled with the mighty voices of the peoples....'*

*'...This is the night
of which it is written:
The night shall be as bright as day,
dazzling is the night for me,
and full of gladness.'....*

*'...May this flame be found still burning
by the Morning Star:
the one Morning Star who never sets,
Christ your Son,
who, coming back from death's domain,
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,....'*

b) Water

Jesus sends the man to wash in the pool of Siloam, so the baptismal symbol of water is also central to this story. Jesus is the one sent by the Father to be the source of life-giving water to all who come to him (see Background notes to 'Reflecting on the Story')

But we can also note that the letter to the Hebrews (6:4), speaks of baptism as 'enlightenment', and one of the early Fathers of the Church, speaks of washing in baptism as enlightenment, linking the symbols of water and light.

4. Easter Faith

We already noted in 'Reflecting on the Story' that the real interest of the Pharisees in questioning the man, is not in finding out the truth about what happened, but about trapping him into saying something which could be used against Jesus.

The man, however, as a result of the questioning, becomes much clearer about who Jesus is: he grows in faith. First, he simply describes Jesus as 'the man Jesus'. Under interrogation, he then says that Jesus is a prophet. The Pharisees revile him by calling him a disciple of Jesus. (They may well be implying that he is a follower of someone who is illegitimate – no small insult in that world.)

This does not upset the man. Rather he taunts them because they, who are so learned, don't know where Jesus comes from, even though he is able to heal a man born blind.

He is quite certain that Jesus is from God. It is after Jesus himself finds him again, that the man is able to make his declaration of faith, 'Lord, I believe.'

John wants us to realise that the coming of Jesus has divided those people who truly see who Jesus is, from those who say they can see, but who are really blind to who Jesus is.

At the Easter Vigil (celebration of the sacraments) when we proclaim our faith, we are saying that we belong with those who can really see, and can acknowledge, through the graciousness of the Father, that Jesus is Lord.

The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-46

Reflecting on the Story

Read John 11:1-46.

Allow a few moments of reflection

Read again.

Share or jot down any word/phrase/thought which strikes you.

Background to the story



Reflection Questions

- John gives this story as the final reason for the authorities' decision to get rid of Jesus.
Why would this miracle, of all the things Jesus said and did, prompt them to this decision?
- In what ways does this story remind you of the man born blind?
Which of the main themes of John'?
- Does this story remind you of any other scripture stories?
- In this story, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead to new life.
What might this story be saying to us, the Church, about our activity in the world and in people's lives?
What does this story teach us about faith?
- What does this story tell us about the relationship between Jesus and the Father?
How can this help us to reflect on our relationships with the Father?

Share or journal your responses.

Recognition Stories: (see background notes)

Thoughts on Jesus and the Father, the Themes of Light and Life, other stories of raising from the dead (see 6,7 & 8 at the end)

Prayer

- Read (aloud) vv21-27; or vv38-44
- Pause for silent reflection
- If you can, recall a time when something seemed hopeless.
Who or what helped you through?
Thank God for that.
If you feel you were not helped through, put it now in God's hands.
- Listen to and/or sing the Taizé chant 'Adoremus te, Domine'

Background Notes for The Raising of Lazarus: Reflecting on the Story

1. The Story in John's Gospel

The raising of Lazarus is Jesus' seventh 'sign' in John's gospel, and his greatest miracle, the restoration of life to a dead man. It is most appropriate that it should be the seventh, for seven was a 'perfect number' to the Jews, and this miracle is, in a sense, a perfect rounding off of this part of the ministry of Jesus. (Look back to the background notes for The Man Born Blind : The Sabbath)

As with the cures which Jesus does, and like the opportunities which he takes to teach about the living water or the bread of life, this miracle arises from a concrete situation of daily life. Which of us has not been thirsty or hungry? longed for a sickness to be cured? wept over the death of a loved one? John's gospel is rooted in the realities of life.

The story acts as bridge to the Book of Glory, which forms the second part of the gospel.

Almost from the opening verses, there is an air of danger. Jesus has gone away to the other side of the Jordan river, apparently to escape stoning and arrest (see 8:31-40). When he says that they should return to Judea because of Lazarus, the disciples are anxious and afraid. It becomes quite obvious that Jesus intends to go anyway.

When Thomas says, *'Let us also go, that we die with him'*, we are given a clear indication of the seriousness of the situation, and why they have every reason to be so afraid. In view of the fact that John's readers already knew that when Jesus was eventually arrested, his disciples, almost to a man, deserted him, there is some irony in Thomas' remark.

According to John, it is the raising of Lazarus which finally causes the Sanhedrin, the Council of the Jews, to decide *'that one man should die for the people.'* In his gospel, Luke cites all the mighty works which Jesus did as the reasons for the authorities getting rid of him.

Perhaps for his own teaching purposes the writer of John's gospel chooses this one miracle as representative of all that Jesus did.

So this story is placed here, at what is basically the end of the public ministry of Jesus. Some scholars think that the story in its original telling, was not fixed in any chronological sense, and so the evangelist places it here for his own purpose.

2. The Family in Bethany

The writer assumes that his readers already know who Martha and Mary are. we are all familiar with the story of Jesus' visit to their home as Luke records it in his gospel (Luke 10:38-42)

What is interesting here, is that the two characters as they appear in that story fit very well with John's picture of them here. Martha, the busy one rushes out to meet Jesus, while Mary stays sitting in the house, just as she is said to do in the Lucan story. when she does come out to speak to Jesus, Mary falls at his feet, the same attitude of discipleship which Luke describes her as taking.

Lazarus is not mentioned by Luke, and his identity here comes from his sisters. But the story mentions several times how much Jesus loves him.

This has led some commentators to believe that this points to the community of Christian disciples, who are so much loved by Jesus.

In John 15:13-15, Jesus calls his disciples 'friends', so the term was used in the Johannine community.

When we recall that the community from which this gospel comes, was being persecuted and under threat of death, we may understand that this story may have offered them the consolation that Jesus was with them to overcome all the dangers, even death itself.

3. Martha's Profession of Faith

Martha, like many ordinary Jews of her day, believes in the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. This belief had been held in Jewish thought for less than two hundred years, and was disputed by the Sadducees.

In common with the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, Martha declares her faith in Jesus. She calls him 'Lord'. This could be just a courtesy title, like 'sir', but it was the designation used by the early Church ie. by those who were disciples, as a sign of their faith in Jesus as Risen Lord. Doubtless, the writer wants it to be heard in this way on Martha's lips.

After Jesus has spoken of himself as the resurrection and the life, he asks Martha to affirm her faith, and she does so by professing Jesus to be Lord, Son of God and Christ.

These are the three central beliefs about Jesus in John's gospel. But, like the Samaritan woman, Martha does not fully understand who Jesus is.

He is himself, the LIFE.

4. I Am The Resurrection and the Life

This is one of the great I AM statements of John's Gospel. In saying this, Jesus is claiming power over life and death. He is promising life to those who believe in him.

We need to understand two aspects of this. It does not simply mean a new life after death, though that in itself is hardly simple! It also means a quality of life in this world. eternal life does not begin after death. because Jesus has already come, those who believe in him, already participate in his life.

'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.' (10:28)

The physical life given to Lazarus is a sign of Jesus' power to give eternal life on earth, and a promise that he will raise the dead on the last day.

5. The Miracle

The story of the actual miracle is very brief, like the cure of the man born blind. *This is because it is not the event itself which is of interest to the writer, but what it symbolises.*

As in the case of the blind man, Lazarus' death happens so that the glory of God may be seen, and the 'Son of Man be glorified by it'. (11:4)

In John 5:28-29, Jesus says:

'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement.'

This promise is now enacted in the raising of Lazarus, showing the power over death of the Father in Jesus. This will be fully seen of course after Jesus himself is raised from the dead by the power of the Father.

6. Jesus and the Father

As Jesus comes to Lazarus' tomb, he lifts his eyes to heaven, in prayer.

The form of his prayer is the classical Jewish one, which always begins by thanking God. His prayer, like all prayer, is expressive of a relationship with God.

His words remind us of Martha's faith that God will grant him whatever he asks. But they tell us also that Jesus' relationship with the Father is so total, that he can be utterly confident that his prayer will be heard. Because, as he says to the disciples at the well, his food is to do the Father's will, his prayer and his life are one and the same. Because he is one with the Father, his life is continuous prayer.

7. The Themes of Light and Life

This story has much in common with the story of the man born blind, not least of all, because, as we have already noticed, what the miracle points to (the glory of God in Jesus) is of more significance than the miracle itself.

What further links the two stories, is the intertwining of two of the central themes of John's gospel: light and life. In the Prologue of John's gospel, he says about the Word of God:

'In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.' (1:4 & 5)

8. Other Stories of Raising from the Dead

In the Hebrew scriptures Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, (who at the end of his life did not die, but was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot) was given the power by God to bring back to life the son of the widow who shared her last bit of bread with the prophet (1 Kings 17)

A story in similar vein is told about Elisha in 2 Kings 4. It is by the power of God that they are able to restore life, for only God has power over death.

Everyone is familiar with the stories of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the widow's son at Naim. These are stories of both the compassion and the power of Jesus. In both these instances, the people who are brought back to life, have just died. This is clearly so in the story of Jairus' daughter, and as burial in Palestine took place on the day of death, it is true also of the widow's son.

In the story of Lazarus, the writer goes to considerable trouble to emphasize that Lazarus has been dead for some time. This is underlined by the statement made twice that Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days and the addition of the graphic detail that there will now be a bad smell.

Because he has been in the tomb for four days, no-one could question the fact that Lazarus has been brought back from the dead.

The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1-46

Praying the Story

Read John 11:1-46.

Allow time for quiet personal reflection on the story.

Read again.

Background to the story in the context of preparing for Easter/celebration of the sacraments

Reflection Questions

- From what you have just read, what connections can you see between this story, Easter and our Baptism?
- Can you name some situations of 'death' or despair in the world today? How might reflecting on this story of Lazarus help us bring life to them?
- Can you say what people or situations give you life? Can you say why this is so?
- Can you see any links/connections between this and what we celebrate at Easter?



Share or journal your responses.

Imaginative Prayer

(Hint for personal/individual use: pre-record this and play back or have someone else to read it out.)

Close your eyes and become as still as possible.

Recall a situation when you felt helpless, 'bound', in the dark.

In your imagination, go into the tomb with Lazarus. become aware of the darkness, the silence, the feeling of being bound.

The shaft opens. Hear the voice of Jesus, What does he say to you? How does he say it? Does he speak your name? How do you feel when he says your name?

You are able to come out. How does it feel to be able to move? To see the light? Who or what do you see?

What do you want to say to Jesus?

When you are ready, open your eyes and become aware again of your surroundings.

If you wish, spend a few moments sharing or journaling any thought or feeling about the prayer.

Prayer of Intercession

Silently recall the situations of death and despair which you named earlier.

Perhaps, name the person or situation for which you want to pray, or bring them to God in the silence of your own heart.

Let us pray for those who are preparing for Baptism or to be received into full communion with the Church. May they be strengthened in their faith in the risen Christ as the great moment of Easter (celebration of the sacraments) draws near. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May they walk in the newness of life which our God and creator desires for all. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May they thank God who has set them on the way to salvation. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May they acknowledge Christ as the resurrection and the life. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May we all be freed from sin, and grow in holiness and fullness of life. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May we at Easter be confirmed in our hope of rising to life with Jesus. Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

May all those who mourn the loss of family and friends be comforted by Christ and his people. Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

Father of life and God not of the dead but of the living,
your Son came to save us from the power of death,
and to proclaim life through your spirit.

Grant that we may be freed from all that brings death,
and gladly bear witness to the life you give.

May we celebrate Easter with great joy,
and come at last to see you face to face.

Reflect for a few moments on the phrase: 'Father of life and God not of the dead but of the living.'
what does this mean to you? who is the God of Easter for you this year?

End with the 'Our Father..' '

Background Notes for The Raising of Lazarus: Praying the Story

1. 'Come and See'

In the first chapter of John's gospel, we read:

'The next day again John the Baptist) was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him "Rabbi (which means teacher), where are you staying?" He said to them "Come and see." (John 1:35-9)

Jesus is inviting them and all who hear his call to come to him, who is the source of light and life. In 11:34, Jesus says to the people mourning Lazarus, *'Where have you laid him? They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.'*

Here, the situation is the complete reverse of that in chapter 1. Here, Jesus is being invited to the tomb, the place of darkness and death. But to the darkness and death, he brings light and life.

2. The Emotion of Jesus

In this story, we are told of several emotions which Jesus experiences. He says that he is glad that Lazarus has died, because it provides an opportunity for the disciples to grow in faith.

Jesus also shows courage. The situation which he faces in Jerusalem is obviously a dangerous one, for Thomas says to the others: *'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'*

When Jesus meets the weeping Mary and sees the tears of the people with her, he is 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled' and 'Jesus wept'.

This may simply be an absolutely human response, to weep with those who are bereaved out of sympathy with their own pain. This is what could be expected of the compassionate Jesus. But it can also imply anger and emotional distress at the domination of evil and death.

It may be the same kind of feeling which Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33) as the struggle with death and the powers of evil drew nearer.

3. Stone, Tomb and Bandages

The tomb in which Lazarus was buried was probably a vertical shaft with a very large stone laid across the top to keep out animals. It would have been outside the town, to prevent the Jews becoming ritually unclean, by contact with a dead body.

The bandages were used to wrap the body in, possibly following some embalming, although this was not always done. In the story of the empty tomb of Jesus, as in this story, a separate cloth around the head or face is also mentioned.

All of these objects in the story, are associated with death, and are symbols of death and being cut off from the human community.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the dead were said to go to 'Sheol'. This idea (as for all ideas of this kind) went through some development over many centuries. Sometimes, it could mean the out or grave, or the underworld, the abode of the dead.

It was the place where death reigned, and from whence there was no return. It was not a place of punishment as such, just a state of something like forgetfulness.

The psalms often speak of Sheol (eg Ps 85:5-13; Ps 16:10; Ps 46:19), not just as death, but as any life-threatening situation.

The implication of being cut off from the community of the living was always there.

But God and God alone, though he is not present in Sheol, has power over it in all its forms.

The taking away of the stone, and the voice of Jesus crying aloud to Lazarus, who walks out despite being bound, are symbolic of the power of Jesus to unbind not only Lazarus, but all humankind from the power of death in all its forms.

4. The Story, Easter and Baptism

This is the third and last of the stories read in the Scrutinies. we are now drawing very near to Easter (celebration of the sacraments) when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, and our own rising to new life in Baptism.

Liturgy of the Word

One of the ways in which this is highlighted (in the Vigil) is in the liturgy of the Word.

Seven readings from the Hebrew scriptures are suggested, from which it is usual to choose three or perhaps four or five. If only ONE is chosen, however, it must be the account of the Crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:15-15:1).

Of all the mighty deeds which God did on behalf of his chosen people, this is the greatest: to bring them through the waters of the sea, from slavery to freedom, from death to life.

One of the prayers which follows this reading says:

*'O God, who by the light of the New Testament
have unlocked the meaning
of wonders worked in former times,
so that the Red Sea prefigures the sacred font
and the nation delivered from slavery
foreshadows the Christian people,
grant, we pray, that all nations,
obtaining the privilege of Israel by merit of faith,
may be reborn by partaking of your Spirit.'*

The explicit theme of Baptism is taken up in the first New Testament reading of the Vigil, from the letter to the Romans.

Paul's understanding of baptism is that we have been baptised in the death of Jesus:

'... in other words, when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection.' (Romans 6:3-5)

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The Father raised Jesus from the dead, and through their resurrection, we are able to rise to new life in the waters of Baptism. This is the promise of Easter.

GUIDANCE FOR ADULT BAPTISM, RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH AND ADULT CONFIRMATION

(Please note: this may be subject to future revision and needs to be read in conjunction with current general guidance governing Places of Worship)

Introduction

The Government has announced that from 4th July 2020, communal acts of worship will be allowed in our Catholic Churches. This guidance, issued by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales for the Celebration of Adult Baptism and Reception into the Church, assumes that the general guidance published by the Conference, based on Government Guidance on the safe opening of Places of Worship for individual prayer, is in place.¹ In particular, the maximum safe operating capacity of the church, based on social distancing guidelines, should be clearly signposted at the door and the number and position within the church of people attending at any one time should be overseen by volunteer stewards. The Guidance offered by the Bishops' Conference for the Celebration of Mass should also be observed as these rites take place within the context of Holy Mass.

Social Distancing - IMPORTANT

The Government maintains that the 2m social distancing requirements should be applied where possible. The Government has said it is possible to go to "1m plus;" this means you can space people more closely (with a minimum of 1m) providing a mitigation of risk is also applied. In the case of our churches, this would mean the compulsory wearing of a face covering for members of the congregation. If those on the sanctuary are sufficiently distant from the congregation, there is no need to wear face coverings.

Worshippers should limit their interactions with anyone they are not attending church with, i.e. if they are attending corporate worship with one other household, wherever possible they should maintain social distancing with anyone outside of this group.

Priests should remain mindful of their own personal situation with respect to potential exposure to virus transmission. It is permissible for those in the 70+ age group, and those who are vulnerable to infection, to celebrate Mass, but it is strongly advised that they do not distribute Holy Communion and take particular care to be constantly socially distant from the congregation. They should return to the sacristy directly after Mass is ended.

Face Coverings

Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and will be mandatory in shops and in supermarkets from 24th July 2020. People are also strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in enclosed public spaces where there are people they do not normally meet, such as a church.

Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

As these celebrations take place, by necessity, outside of the usual time, that is the Paschal Vigil or Eastertide, care should be taken so that they have a markedly paschal character. The General Instruction for Christian Initiation notes that the Ritual Mass "Christian Initiation: Baptism" from the Roman Missal is used, and the readings are chosen from those given in the Lectionary for the Mass "Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil."

Again, by necessity, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults takes place within the context of the Parish Mass and as such the number of people who can attend will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building. People attending must remain within their groups of six and observe strict social distancing between each separate group. This is especially important for supporting families and sponsors.²

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>

² This paragraph as per Bishops' Conference document of 23rd September 2020.

Before the Mass

Everything required for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and of the Mass should be prepared with care. The person preparing the sacred vessels and other items for the celebration of the rites should wash their hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser, or wear gloves, before touching anything to be used during the Rite.

The priest should prepare as many cotton buds infused with the Oil of Catechumens as needed for one per candidate. Those to be baptised should bring their own white garment, and the celebrant should leave their baptismal candle easily accessible for them to pick up. They should bring their own towel with them as well to dry their heads after the water of Baptism has been poured over them.

Celebration of Adult Baptism

A minimum number of servers should assist with these rites. Care should be taken to ensure that there is good social distancing throughout the celebration.

The Mass continues as normal, applying the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass for the Liturgy of the Word, until after the Homily.

The Presentation of the Candidates

The priest moves to the baptismal font and calls those to be baptised. According to the geography around the font, the candidates should move, with their godparent, to a place around the font, but being aware of social distancing. It may be more practical at this time for them to remain in their places in the congregation.

The Litany of the Saints and the Prayer over the Water

The Litany should be said, or sung by a single cantor, socially distanced and with additional mitigations. The people should not respond verbally if sung, but prayerfully in their hearts. The font should be pre-filled with water and covered before these rites begin. The priest prays the prayer over the water extending his hand over the font but not touching the water.

The Renunciation of Sin

The priest directs the questions to the candidates, and they answer together whilst standing in their places.

Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens

The priest should approach each candidate with a separate pre-prepared cotton bud infused with the Oil of Catechumens. He should anoint the hands of the candidates with the bud at arm's length to ensure a clear distance between himself and the candidate and then withdraw to a social distance. The candidates should rub the Oil of Catechumens into their hands.

The Profession of Faith

The priest directs the interrogative form of the Apostles' Creed to the candidates, and they answer together whilst standing in their places.

The Baptism

The candidates approach the font, one by one, with their godparent carrying the candidate's towel. They should place their head over the font so that the water in the font can be poured over their foreheads. The priest, using a shell or jug, should pour the water over the candidate's head whilst reciting the sacramental form. Care should be taken to avoid excess splashing of the water. The godparent should wipe the head of the newly baptised with their own towel.

The Clothing with the White Garment

The godparent places the white garment on the shoulders of the newly baptised whilst the priest recites the prescribed formula.

The Presentation of a Lighted Candle

The godparent should light the baptismal candle from the Paschal Candle whilst the priest says the associated formula and give it to the newly baptised.

Reception of Christians into Full Communion with the Church

The Invitation

Those to be received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church should be called by name by the priest. They should either enter the Sanctuary and join the newly baptised or remain in their places. Their Sponsor joins them at this point. The priest then says the words of Invitation.

The Profession of Faith

The candidates then make the Profession of Faith using the formula in the Ritual. It is advised that each candidate should have their own printed copy of this which they should take with them when they leave.

The Act of Reception

After the Profession of Faith, the candidates with their sponsors, one by one, approach the priest who receives them into the Church saying the prescribed formula. There should be no physical contact at this point, but a gesture of welcome should be made.

Celebration of Confirmation

The place of Confirmation should be around the baptismal font or in the sanctuary of the church. It is advised that this should take place wherever the celebration of baptism has taken place to minimise the movement of people around the church.

The Invitation

The priest says the Invitation to Confirmation to those who have just been baptised. He then asks the congregation to pray for them silently.

The Laying On of Hands

The priest should extend his hands towards the newly baptised without touching them and pray the associated prayer.

The Anointing with Sacred Chrism

The candidates for Confirmation should approach the celebrant, maintaining social distancing. The anointing of the forehead, at the same time as the speaking of the words prescribed in the liturgical books for the valid celebration of the sacrament, may be administered by means of the use of an instrument, such as a cotton swab, and that the use of such an instrument for the anointing does not affect the intended validity of the sacrament.

In this case, one cotton swab/cotton bud should be used for each candidate and then placed in a bag and later burnt because of the presence of Sacred Chrism.

The sponsor should stand behind the candidate with his/her hand outstretched to touch the shoulder of the candidate and maintain social distance from the priest.

Face coverings should be worn because of the close proximity between the priest and the candidate to be anointed.³

The priest should offer the peace of Christ to the newly confirmed without physical contact.

The Mass then continues, and the Guidance for the Celebration of Mass should be applied. Those who are newly Confirmed may participate in the Prayer of the Faithful, but they should sanitise their hands before and avoid touching the book or the microphone.

Although it is desirable that the newly Confirmed receive Holy Communion under both kinds, at this time it is recommended that they receive only under one kind, in the hand. The newly Confirmed should receive Holy Communion first, and then a sacred silence should be held before Holy Communion is distributed to the congregation so they may pray for the neophytes.

³ See CDWDS letter 1st October 2020; sent to all clergy and parishes by Bishop John Sherrington, 17th October 2020

After the Celebration of the Mass

Baptisms and Receptions are celebration of joy for those being initiated, their families and the whole Church. Any photographs of the event should be taken with care to ensure social distancing between households and those in social bubbles. All should be done so that this does not detract from the happiness of the occasion.

The priest should place the used altar linens into a receptacle for laundry. All sacred vessels should be washed in hot water with a little neutral soap and dried completely before storing. The cotton buds used for the catechumenal anointing and the tissues used for cleaning the priest's thumb should be burned. Any discarded printed materials should be removed and bagged for disposal.

The church should be closed after the Mass has finished in order to clean the space according to the Bishops' Conference guidelines on individual prayer. If there is cause for concern regarding the possible contamination of clerical vestments worn during the celebration of these rites, these should be washed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, using the warmest water setting allowed for the fabric and allowing time for them to dry completely.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas

21st July 2020

Revision 2 (incorporating relevant updates)

POSSIBLE SUNDAYS FOR CELEBRATING INITIATION OUTSIDE OF EASTER VIGIL

The Penitential Act and Creed are omitted (cf. Roman Missal, Ritual Masses: 3. For the Conferral of Baptism)

Feast Days

Baptism of the Lord

Presentation of the Lord

Any Sunday of Easter

Pentecost

Trinity Sunday

Corpus Christi

Triumph of the Cross

Christ the King

Sundays Year B in Ordinary Time

These Sundays may lend themselves to the celebration of initiation at other times of the year where readings of the day may be suitable, particularly where only receptions into the Church are to be celebrated. Otherwise, readings from 'Lectionary of the Mass: Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation apart from the Easter Vigil' should be used.

13th Sunday

15th Sunday

18th Sunday

19th Sunday

20th Sunday

21st Sunday

22nd Sunday

23rd Sunday

24th Sunday

28th Sunday

30th Sunday

Example Framework with the goal of celebrating initiation on 18th Sunday:

Taking into account the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, an example framework for the Elect could look like:

11th Sunday: Rite of Election, beginning of Purification and Enlightenment

14th Sunday: Scrutiny 1 (During the week Presentation of Creed)

15th Sunday: Scrutiny 2

16th Sunday: Scrutiny 3 (During week Presentation of The Lord's Prayer)

17th Sunday: Retreat

18th Sunday: Initiation