

Q What's next? Is it over now? Does Christian initiation ever end?

A At its heart, Christian initiation is about conversion—people turning toward God for the first time. But that movement of turning toward God continues after initiation. Disciples continue to turn more and more deeply toward God throughout their lives. That is why the privilege of accompanying seekers as they come to know Jesus Christ is so compelling and revitalizing for the baptized. We are always engaged in that movement of turning, of ongoing conversion.

The ninety-some days from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, from death to new life, are at the heart of Christian life and are an especially fertile time for ongoing conversion. The assembly makes this journey together each year with those who are coming to faith. Beginning in Lent, the paths of the elect and the assembly gradually grow

closer until at Easter neophytes and assembly are at last one in Baptism and share Eucharist together at the Lord's Table.

At the Easter Vigil, the baptized attend closely as the elect are called by name, rise from the font, and are told they are "a new creation." We watch as they are given a lighted candle, told

they have been enlightened by Christ, and reminded to walk as children of the light. These words take on a new meaning as the assembly hears them spoken to these adults. We see ourselves in the newly baptized. We recommit to bringing our baptismal garment unstained to Christ, to walking as children of light. We voice this recommitment by renewing our baptismal promises and are sprinkled with baptismal water. These days renew us in our baptismal identity, calling us to share the light of Christ in all the dark corners of our world.

Mystagogy during the fifty days of Easter is a school for Christian living—a school for neophytes and for all the



assembly. And it was a school through which Jesus' first disciples also learned. For forty days after he rose from the dead, the Risen Lord stayed with his disciples, opening the Scriptures for them, sharing meals with them, and assuring them of his everlasting presence. He commissioned them as Apostles and ascended, ten days later sending the Holy Spirit among them. The seven Sunday Masses of Easter Time echo that savoring, teaching, understanding, and commissioning.

After Pentecost, our daily living goes on, nourished by this journey. Whether neophyte or long-baptized, we will experience joys and sorrows in our lives ahead. We will stumble and rise, we will fall short of the baptismal life to which we are called. Yet the Risen Christ accompanies us, and we accompany one another, turning together toward the world still in need of Christ's light.

At every moment in the world, God is loving and leading people. Grace is flowing, hearts are stirring, and people are seeking. That is how initiation begins—with God's action—and disciples are needed to respond by being and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We do this simply by living our lives as faithful disciples, and we do not hesitate to give a reason for our hope when people want to talk—to share our joys and struggles as followers of Jesus Christ. We may never know the impact of our efforts to be a sign of encouragement, or we may have the joy of knowing that we helped to move someone along in their journey. Soon we will begin this initiation process again, with new experiences and with new seekers who will become new Christians. The Church's work of initiation never ends.

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