

## Q What is the final period of initiation, and what goes on in it?

**A** When we experience something significant, we want to remember and savor it. Those who experience Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil want to savor and explore what they have experienced. It is breathtaking and inspiring—especially powerful because it takes place in a highly symbolic and expressive celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection. For the initiates, it all goes by so fast! Our Church helps the newly baptized (the “neophytes,” a word meaning “newly planted”) relive and ponder these experiences during the fifty days of Easter. It is a time called *Mystagogy*, meaning “the unfolding of the mysteries.”

The most important setting for *Mystagogy* is the seven Sunday Masses of Easter Time. The worshipping assembly gives neophytes a “full and joyful welcome into the community” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 246), at these liturgies. As assembly members grew in faith by witnessing the initiation of the neophytes, they will also grow by worshipping with them now. As the neophytes first did at the Easter Vigil, they now participate fully in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, exercising their baptismal priesthood along with each member of the assembly. They rejoice as they publicly profess their faith, pray for the world, and share Eucharist with their Church family.

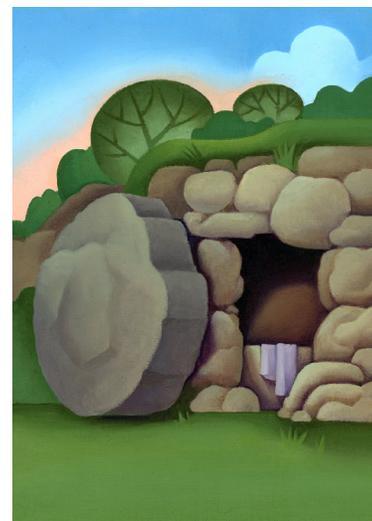
So great is the Paschal Mystery experienced at the Easter Vigil that the Church devotes the entire season of Easter to reflecting on it from different angles. The readings and homilies we hear, the prayers we pray, the music we sing, the flowers and incense we smell, and the symbols we see help all of us (neophytes and assembly members) meditate on some aspect of Jesus’ life, death, and Resurrection.

The Scriptures of Easter Time lead us deeper into the mystery of belonging to Christ through Baptism. The Sunday Gospels tell of Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearances to his disciples, his commissioning them as Apostles, his Ascension, and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Readings from the Acts of the Apostles demonstrate the Apostles’ courageous and energetic sharing of faith—with the people of Jerusalem and, ultimately, to the ends of the earth. The Apostles’ proclamation of the Gospel reminds neophytes, especially, that the Easter sacraments are not the end of the story but the beginning of their new life in Christ.

All of the liturgy’s sights, sounds, and smells help the neophytes recall and reflect on the meaning of that night of

their Baptism and their new responsibilities as baptized Christians. At gatherings outside of Mass they will share with each other the experience of their new faith. They will remember, savor, share insights, and hear the Church’s wisdom about the power of these Sacraments. They will discuss how the Mass empowers and sends disciples out through works of charity to bring the Risen Christ’s new life to the world. They will put that into practice through service with other members of the community.

For neophytes, the fifty days of *Mystagogy* are a joyful and rich time to savor their experience of initiation at the Easter Vigil, to explore what God has done for them in Christ, and to begin to grasp the mission this entails. The worshipping assembly, by opening their arms and hearts to welcome the newly initiated and continuing to model the life of faith, strengthens the Body of Christ to be light for the world. In witnessing and in welcoming, the assembly assists neophytes to forge lasting bonds with their Church family and to take up the responsibilities of discipleship.



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