

Q What is the Rite of Acceptance, and what happens during this rite?

A The first public ritual for the unbaptized inquirer is the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. Whenever a number of inquirers are ready the rite may be celebrated and the inquirers will become catechumens. It is usually celebrated on a Sunday, and two or three celebrations of this rite can be set during a year (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, 18).

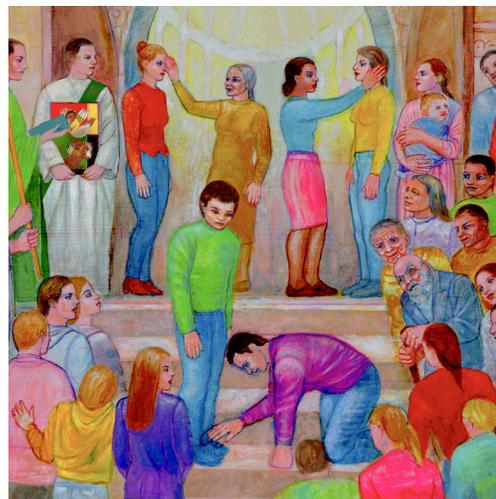
Prior to the celebration, the pastor, catechists, and others who have been working with the inquirers help them to discern their readiness to take the next step. The rite itself celebrates what has taken place in the Period of Evangelization and Precatechumenate: inquirers have begun to walk in an intentional relationship with God in faith and to learn how the community lives its faith. Inquirers have begun or deepened their private prayer life and have regularly worshiped with the community. They have become acquainted with some basic features of the Catholic faith, they wish to move on in the process, and the community is willing to pledge their prayer and support to them.

This beautiful rite expresses eloquently the Church's joy in welcoming inquirers (for the first part of the celebration they are called "candidates"). It also expresses the assembly's solemn intention to hand on the treasures of the faith. At the very beginning of Mass the priest or deacon goes outside to meet the candidates and their sponsors. After greeting the newcomers, the celebrant asks their names and what they ask of God's Church. He then asks them if they are prepared to live the Christian life, to accept the teachings of the Gospel. They answer as individuals, "I am," and the celebrant asks the sponsors and the entire assembly if they are willing to help the candidates "find and follow Christ." After the responses, "We are," the celebrant offers a prayer and all sing an acclamation.

Next the candidates are signed with the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands, and feet, claiming every sense and faculty for Christ. Now they shall be known as catechumens, those who are being instructed. The assembly sings an acclamation, and the new catechumens are welcomed into the assembly, invited to listen with the community to the Word of God.

After the Homily the catechumens may be presented with a Bible or a cross. A series of intercessions for the catechumens offered, a final prayer is prayed over them, and then they are kindly dismissed to "reflect more deeply

upon the word of God" (RCIA, 67B). The Liturgy of the Eucharist then proceeds as usual. From this point on the catechumens are considered part of the household of faith (see RCIA, 47). They participate in the Sunday Liturgy of the Word (after which they are dismissed to reflect on it), and special rites for marriage and funerals have been designed for them should the necessity arise.



The Rite of Acceptance also points to what is to come in the next period—the Catechumenate—when the teachings of our faith will be handed on to them as they are celebrated during the liturgical year. At the core of those teachings is the Cross of Jesus—the Paschal Mystery—that they have just received. It will be revealed to them more and more as they participate in the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays. The assembly will continue to pray for them every week in the intercessions, and the catechumens will have opportunities to participate in activities of the parish, especially service, that will also teach the meaning of the cross they have received in the Rite of Acceptance.

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