

The Catechumenate

Jim's Notes for April 2, 2008

St. Justin Martyr (AD 100-165):

As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them.

Then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (John 3:5). (First Apology 61)

Tertullian (AD 155 – 230):

By the end of the second century we find the catechumenate in force:

Tertullian reproaches the heretics with disregarding it; among them, he says "**one does not know which is the catechumen and which the faithful, all alike come [to the mysteries], all hear the same discourses and say the same prayers**" (quis catechumenus, quis fidelis incertum est; pariter adeunt, pariter audiunt, pariter orant), "**Catechumens are initiated before they are instructed**" (ante sunt perfecti catechumeni quam edocti.--"De Praeser."xli, P.L., II, 56)

In the Catholic Church of the second to fourth centuries the catechumens were divided into:

a. Inquirers or Listeners (*audientes, akromeni*):

If a pagan wished to become a Christian he was given some elementary instruction in the fundamental doctrines and practices of the Church. He had to show by his conduct that he was in earnest about the step he was about to take. So far, he was only in the stage of inquiry, and was not counted as a Christian at all. He was allowed to be present at the first part of the Mass, but he was dismissed immediately after the sermon.

b. Catechumens: As soon as his instructors were satisfied that he was likely to persevere, the inquirer was promoted to the **rank of catechumen**. He was now entitled to be called a Christian, though he was not looked upon as one of the "faithful". "Ask a man, 'Are you a Christian?' If he says 'Yes', ask him again, 'Are you a catechumen or one of the faithful?'" (St. Aug., "In Joan.", xliv, 2, P.L., XXXV, 1714). If a catechumen was martyred before his baptism, hope for his salvation was assured by his baptism in his own blood.

The duration of this stage was not fixed. In general it lasted long enough to test the dispositions of the catechumen. The council of Elvira alludes to the custom of making it last two years and

the civil law fixed it at this (Justinian, Novel. cxliv). But the causes which ultimately led to the abolition of the catechumenate (see above) tended also to shorten it. Thus the Council of Agde (506) allowed even Jews (with regard to whom special caution was required) to receive baptism after eight months preparation.

After the Catechumen's baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist, he went through a period of further instruction called Mystagogia:

Mystagogia (Education in the Mysteries [Sacraments]):

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 315 – 386):

The Mystagogics (or Mystagogical Catecheses)

- Mystagogic 1: On sobriety and vigilance after baptism.
- Mystagogic 2: Reflection on the inner mysteries of baptism, and the significance and symbolism of the movements of the rite.
- Mystagogic 3: On chrism and chrismation.
- Mystagogic 4: On the mystery of the transformation of bread and wine into the Lord's true body and blood in the Eucharist.
- Mystagogic 5: On the movements of the Divine Liturgy and their meaning; with a spiritual commentary on the Our Father (the Lord's Prayer).

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA):

During the Second Vatican Council there was a call for the reinstatement of the Catechumenate. In 1972 Pope Paul VI promulgated the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.^[1]

In 1986 the United States of America (USA) Bishops approved US additions to the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults and National Statutes and a national plan of implementation. In September 1988, the RCIA became mandatory in the USA.

Catechumens: Are those seeking to be Catholic who are not baptized Christians.

Candidates: Are validly baptized non-Catholic Christians. They may benefit from RCIA. But the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults was not instituted for them. RCIA is not mandatory for Candidates. The National Statutes for the Catechumenate require that Candidates *not* all be treated like catechumens.

National Statutes for the Catechumenate 31 reads, in part, re: Candidates: "**should not** be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the catechumenate."

National Statutes for the Catechumenate 32: "The reception of candidates ... **should ordinarily** take place at the Sunday Eucharist of the parish community..."

477. The baptized Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The candidate should learn to deepen an inner adherence to the Church, where he or she will find the fullness of his or her baptism. During the period of preparation the candidate may share in worship in conformity with the provisions of the Ecumenical Directory. Anything that would equate candidates for reception with those who are catechumens is to be absolutely avoided."

"478. During the period of their doctrinal and spiritual preparation individual candidates for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church may benefit from the celebration of liturgical rites marking their progress in formation. Thus, for pastoral reasons and in light of the catechesis in the faith which these baptized Christians have received previously, one or several of the rites included in Part II, 4 -- "Preparation of Uncatechized Adults for Confirmation and Eucharist" -- may be celebrated as they are presented or in similar words. In all cases, however, discernment should be made regarding the length of catechetical formation required for each individual candidate for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church."
(The Rites Volume One, Liturgical Press, 1990, ISBN: 0-8146-6015-0, page 276).