

# IS YOUR MYSTAGOGIA MISSING?

SUGGESTIONS TO NURTURE YOUR NEOPHYTES  
AND ENRICH YOUR PARISH COMMUNITY



## INTRODUCTION

In the initiation of new Catholics, a period of mystagogy follows the celebration of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. The term mystagogy means “the mysteries revealed.” In this period, “the neophytes [newly planted] are introduced into a fuller understanding of the mysteries through the gospel message and above all through their experience of the *sacraments* they have received” (RCIA 245, emphasis added). An effective mystagogy in the parish must focus on the *Word* and the *Eucharist*.

Too often, parish initiation teams think that the main focus of this period is urging the neophytes to join a parish club or sign up to volunteer at the soup kitchen. Such participation in parish life and apostolic works should have already been a vital part of the catechumenate period.

This is the time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the eucharist, and doing works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in the newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priest should give them thoughtful and friendly help (RCIA 244).

Similar to their formation during the catechumenate period, their continuing formation must be based upon participation in the liturgy of the Church; ongoing catechesis in harmony with the Liturgical Year; immersion into the Christian way of life, and participation in apostolic works (cf. RCIA #75).

We have developed the attached brochures based upon those four categories – liturgy, catechesis, the Christian way of life, and apostolic works. We hope that they can assist you in the formation of your initiation team, your sponsors, and your parish community.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “Come then, eat your bread with enjoyment” He means spiritual bread. “Come then” his invitation brings salvation and blessedness. “And drink your wine with a merry heart—the wine of the Spirit. “And let oil be poured over your head”—you see him here hinting at the sacramental anointing. “And let your garments always be white, because of the Lord has approved of what you do. For before you drew near to the gift, your works were “vanity of vanities.”

Once you have stripped off the old garments and put on those which are spiritually white, you must be clad in white always. I am not, of course, saying that you must always wear white clothing on your body, but that your spiritual dress must be truly white and shining, so that they may say, in the words of the blessed Isaiah, “Let my soul rejoice in the Lord. He has clothed me with the garment of salvation and with the robe of gladness he has covered me.”

(Cyril of Jerusalem, quoting from the books of Ecclesiastes and Isaiah as he instructed neophytes, c. 386 AD.)

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# THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

## PART I: THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH

Since the neophytes were initiated to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church, their presence in the assembly at Sunday Mass is of utmost importance.

You need do nothing more than to prepare the Church's liturgy well. The orations and readings for the Sundays of the Easter season draw our attention to the glory of the Resurrection, to the initiation sacraments, and to the neophytes in our midst. Rely on the rites—their symbols, assigned readings, and profound orations—to give the neophytes (and the rest of the parish) the proper Easter "attitude." The Second Sunday of Easter provides the perfect example.

### DOMINICA IN ALBIS

In the fourth and fifth century, the newly-baptized wore their white garments for Easter Week. They came to church daily to hear the bishop explain the rites they had experienced at the Easter Vigil and to participate in the Eucharist. The following Sunday, the eighth day of Easter, came to be known as *dominica in albis*, "the Sunday for laying aside the white garment." You may continue this tradition in your parish and invite the neophytes to wear their white garment to church on the Second Sunday of Easter.

While all the Sundays of the Easter season are appropriate for Masses with the neophytes, the Second Sunday of Easter provides particularly appropriate readings and orations.

### YEAR C—SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 12-16

Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24

Revelation 1: 9-11 a, 12-13, 17-19

John 20: 19-31

Great numbers of believers were added

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,  
his love is everlasting.

I was dead, but now I live forever.

"Peace be with you"; doubting Thomas

God of mercy,  
you wash away our sins in water,  
you give us new birth in the Spirit  
and redeem us in the blood of Christ.  
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection  
increase our awareness of these blessings,  
and renew your gift of life within us.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
your Son, who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God forever and ever. Amen.  
(Opening Prayer, Second Sunday of Easter)

Lord,  
through faith and baptism  
we have become a new creation.  
Accept the offerings of your people  
and of those born again in baptism  
and bring us to eternal happiness.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.  
(Prayer over the Gifts)

Almighty God,  
may the Easter sacraments we have received  
live forever in our minds and hearts.  
(Prayer after Communion)

## THE SUNDAYS OF EASTER

Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacraments and of the community, its main setting is the so-called Masses for the Neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season. Besides being occasions for the newly-baptized to gather with the community and share in the mysteries, these celebrations include particularly suitable readings from the Lectionary, especially the readings for Year A. Even when Christian initiation has been celebrated outside the usual times, the texts for these Sunday Masses of the Easter season may be used (RCIA 247).

On all the Sundays of Easter season, the following options are recommended to those who prepare the liturgy:

- Include the neophytes and their sponsors in the opening procession.
- Seat them in pews which are visible to the assembly or in pews scattered throughout the nave. Their presence now is in stark contrast to their dismissal during the catechumenate period.
- Use the sprinkling rite each Sunday of the season. (It is prescribed for the Second Sunday of Easter.) Use the symbol of water lavishly.
- Include the neophytes in the homily and in the general intercessions each Sunday and weekday.
- The following intercessions might serve as examples:  
For all who were initiated at the Easter Vigil, that by the grace of the sacraments they will courageously persevere in the Christian life, we pray.  
For our neophytes and for all who have joined the Church in this Easter Season, that the joy of the resurrection may show forth in their lives, we pray.  
For all who have joined us at the Lord's table in this Easter Season, may they continue to be fed by the love of the Lord and may their lives give witness to the sacrifice of Christ, we pray.
- Have the neophytes present the gifts.
- Let the neophytes evangelize the assembly. Few Catholics are as eager to share their faith as a neophyte. Their conversion is so fresh and their enthusiasm so contagious. Let them give witness at least one weekend, but preferably at all the Masses of the Easter season. One neophyte may be invited to speak at each of the Masses. This talk takes place after the Prayer After Communion and lasts no longer than five minutes. If possible, avoid using the ambo.
- Observe Easter for fifty days. Keep the joy of Easter and the thrill of receiving new members always in front of the parish.

If you haven't already done so in the catechumenal period, provide catechesis on the Mass. Avoid interrupting Mass with various "explanations." On a weeknight, provide instruction on the history and structure of the Mass; this might be followed with a celebration of the Mass. Another technique would be to celebrate Mass and then provide time for mystagogical reflection on it. Recommended resources include Edward Foley's excellent, five part CD series *Eucharist as Mystagogy* (WLP); *The Mystery of Faith* by Lawrence J. Johnson (FDLC); and *Visions of Liturgy and Music for a New Century* by Lucien Deiss (The Liturgical Press).

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## YEAR A

### SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 42-47

1 Peter 1: 3-9

John 20: 19-31

All who believed were together and held all things in common.  
God has given us new birth ... hope through the resurrection  
Peace be with you...whose sins you shall forgive... Thomas

### THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 22-33

1 Peter 1: 17-21

Luke 24: 13-35

Impossible for Jesus to be held by death ... we are all witnesses  
You were saved with the precious blood of Christ... the Lamb  
Road to Emmaus...recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 1, 4a, 36-41

1 Peter 2: 20b-25

John 10: 1-10

God made Jesus both Lord and Christ.. 3000 persons added that day  
He bore our sins... you have returned to the Shepherd and guardian of your souls.  
The sheep hear the shepherds voice... I am the gate for the sheep

### FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 6: 1-7

1 Peter 2: 4-9

John 14: 1-12

Choosing seven men as deacons  
You are living stones... you are a chosen race a royal priesthood  
I am the way and the truth and the life

### SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

[The second reading and gospel may be taken from the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter]

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17

1 Peter 3: 15-18

John 14: 15-21

Peter and John laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit  
Christ was put to death in the flesh... raised in-the Spirit  
The Father will send you an Advocate

### ASCENSION

Acts 1: 1-11

Ephesians 1: 17-23

Matthew 28: 16-20

In my first book, Theophilus... Jesus ascends into heaven  
God seated Jesus at his right hand  
All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Go  
baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### PENTECOST (VIGIL)

Genesis 11: 1-9

Romans 8: 22-27

John 7: 37-39

Tower of Babel [one of several options]  
The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness  
Rivers of living waters will flow

### PENTECOST (DAY)

Acts 2: 1-11

1 Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13

John 20: 19-23

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak  
In one spirit we were all baptized into one body  
As the Father sent me, so I send you... receive the Holy Spirit

YEAR B

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31

They were of one heart and one mind ... no needy person among them

Whoever is begotten by God conquers the world

Peace be with you ... whose sins you shall forgive... Thomas

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

1 John 2: 1-5a

Luke 24: 35-48

The Author of life you put to death, but God raised hi from the dead

Jesus is expiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world

Jesus appears to the disciples... Thus it was written that the

Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4:8-12

1 John 3:1-2

John 10: 11-18

He is the stone you rejected. There is no salvation through anyone else

We shall see God as he really is.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 9:26-31

1 John 3:18-24

Barnabas reported to the Apostles how Saul had seen the Lord ...

This is his commandment, that we may believe and love one another

John 15: 1-8

Whoever remains in me and I in them will bear much fruit

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

[The second reading and gospel may be taken from the 7th Sunday of Easter]

Acts 10: 25-26, 34-35, 44-48

1 John 4: 7-10

John 15: 9-17

The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles also  
God is love.

No greater love... than to lay down one's life for one's friends

ASCENSION

Acts 1: 1-11

Ephesians 1: 17-23

Mark 16: 15-20

Jesus ascends into heaven

God seats Jesus at his right hand [or the reading from Year A]

The Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God.

PENTECOST (VIGIL)

Genesis 11: 1-9

Romans 8: 22-27

John 7: 37-39

Tower of Babel (one of several options)

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness

Rivers of living waters will flow

PENTECOST (DAY)

Acts 2: 1-11

1 Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13

John 20: 19-23

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak

In one spirit we were all baptized into one body

As the Father sent me, so I send you... receive the Holy Spirit

## YEAR C

### SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 12-16

Revelation 1: 9-11 a, 12-13, 17-19

John 20: 19-31

Signs by apostles; great numbers were added to them

I was dead, but now I am alive for ever

Peace be with you...whose sins you shall forgive... Thomas

### THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 27b-32,40b-41

Revelation 5: 11-14

John 21: 1-19

Apostles before the Sanhedrin

Countless angels cried out "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..."

Jesus on the seashore, bread and fish..."Feed my sheep."

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 13: 14,43-52

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John 10: 27-30

Paul and Barnabas preach to the Gentiles

John saw great multitude; Lamb will lead them to life-giving waters

I give my sheep eternal life

### FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 14: 21-27

Revelation 21: 1-5a

John 13: 31-33a, 34-35

They called the Church together, reported what God had done for them.

a new heaven and a new earth; the former earth had passed away

I give you a new commandment: love one another

### SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

[The second reading and gospel may be taken from the 7th Sunday of Easter]

Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29

Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23

John 14: 23-29

Decision of the Holy Spirit and ours too,... (Council of Jerusalem)

The Holy City... its lamp was the Lamb.

The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you

### ASCENSION

Acts 1: 1-11

Ephesians 1: 17-23

Luke 24: 46-53

Jesus ascends into heaven

God seats Jesus at his right hand

All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me.. Go baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### PENTECOST (VIGIL)

Genesis 11: 1-9

Romans 8: 22-27

John 7: 37-39

Tower of Babel (one of several options)

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John 20: 19-23

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak

In one spirit we were all baptized into one body

As the Father sent me, so I send you... receive the Holy Spirit

# THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

## PART II: ONGOING CATECHESIS

After the completion of their Christian Initiation in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist, the neophytes should begin the period of mystagogy by participating in the principal Sunday Eucharist throughout the Easter season, which ends on the Pentecost Sunday. They should do this as a body in company with their godparents and those who have assisted in their Christian formation (National Statutes, no. 22).

Under the moderation of the diocesan bishop, the mystagogy should embrace a deepened understanding of the mysteries of baptism, confirmation, and the eucharist as the continuing celebration of faith and conversion (23).

After the immediate mystagogy or post-baptismal catechesis during the Easter season, the program for the neophytes should extend until the anniversary of Christian initiation, with at least monthly assemblies of the neophytes for their deeper Christian formation and incorporation into the full life of the Christian community (24).

Some parishes have found it extremely helpful to form a special team for the period of mystagogy. Though acquainted with the neophytes while they were progressing through the pre-baptismal periods and rites, this team becomes especially active during this period. The team might include trained catechists, discussion facilitators, and perhaps a hospitality coordinator. The team should be conversant with mystagogical techniques. Ideally, the true mystagogue will build upon the experience, reconstructing the ritual and relating it to familiar life experiences. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem described the washing of hands at the preparation of the altar and gifts in this manner:

You saw the deacon offering water for washing to the priest and to the elders encircling God's altar. Of course he did not do this because their bodies were dirty. Not at all; we did not enter the church with grimy bodies in the first place. No, the washing is a symbol of the need for you to be clean of all sins and transgressions. Since our hands symbolize action, by washing them, we are clearly denoting the purity and blamelessness of our deeds.... (Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogical Catecheses, Sermon 5)

You may wish to use some of the following techniques:

- Within one week of the Easter Vigil, gather the neophytes and their sponsors for an evening of reflection. Help the neophytes to reflect on their experience at Easter Vigil. Often it helps to recreate the readings, the music, and even the aromas of that night.
- Three simple questions might generate discussion –  
1) What did you experience? 2) What does it mean? 3) What are you going to do about it?
- Gather the neophytes weekly until Pentecost. The main gathering is at the principle Sunday Mass. This can be supplemented with catechetical sessions after Mass or sometime during the week. The Lectionary continues to serve as the basis for these catechetical sessions. Encourage the neophytes to meditate on the readings during the week. Offer them reflection questions that they may use for their personal prayer.
- After Pentecost, arrange to meet monthly to reflect on the Scripture and to dialogue about their new experiences.

Always relate the readings and orations to the neophytes' recent experience of the reception of the initiation sacraments. Note how the readings speak of Christ's victory over death, of new life in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles will provide abundant examples of what it

means to bear witness to the truth of the risen Christ. Of course, the chief catechist of the parish is the pastor and his preaching at the Sunday liturgy is of utmost importance.

# THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

## PART III: THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

The goal of initiation is living the Christian life. This includes, but is not limited to, faithful participation in the sacraments and in the Sunday assembly. It also assumes a deep faith in God, a willingness to grow in knowledge of their faith, and living a moral life that manifests a genuine care for others, especially those less fortunate.

### DISCERNMENT

Personal discernment allows each person the opportunity to reflect on the steps they were/are taking and on how God is calling them. Serious discernment is a necessary part of serious commitment. Father Dennis Chriszt notes, “one parish at which a number of neophytes did not attend mystagogy sessions and were no longer seen at the Sunday liturgy was also the one at which there were few opportunities for discernment during the initiation process. This may indicate a correlation between discernment and committed membership” (*Creating an Effective Mystagogy* p. 68).

Opportunities for discernment should continue for at least a year after initiation. Perhaps a spiritual director might be appointed to meet monthly with the each neophyte. At this point, the neophyte is not discerning whether or not to join the Church or receive a sacrament, but how they might best use their gifts to build up the kingdom of God.

### SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Continue to meet in small Christian communities monthly, at least until the first anniversary of the neophytes baptism. The neophytes, the newly received, sponsors, catechists, and other members of the faithful may form the nucleus of these groups. The “agenda” for these gatherings should include any or all of the tenets noted herein—prayer, catechesis, apostolic works, and parish activities. Establish early on in the inquiry period that we will always continue to grow as Christians and that we need community to do that effectively.

The godparent assumes a vital role during this period. He/she continues to journey with the neophytes, guiding them in the sacramental life of the church and making sure they are made to feel welcome and involved in the parish community.

### WITH THE PARISH AND THE GREATER CHURCH

To close the period of post-baptismal catechesis, some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter Season near Pentecost Sunday (RCIA 249). It may include a brief prayer of thanksgiving for God’s grace during the initiation process. On the anniversary of their baptism, the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment. You may find suitable readings and prayers in the Book of Blessings, Chapter 70. This prayer service might include a renewal of the baptismal vows.

Together, the neophytes, their godparents, and the team might make a pilgrimage to the diocesan cathedral and the diocesan museum.

The parish assembly, too, can use the Easter Season to renew themselves. Publicly post the photos of all the neophytes, perhaps in the gathering space at church, in the bulletin, or in the parish center. Remind the parish, yet again, of the results of their evangelizing efforts. Remember that we are all mystagogues, too. Take time to reflect on our own initiation and how the paschal mystery is lived out in our lives.

# THE PERIOD OF MYSTAGOGIA

## PART IV: APOSTOLIC WORKS

Continue works of charity. This should be a simple extension of the practice they established during the catechumenate period (RCIA 75.4).

Choose age-appropriate charitable projects. At the least, plan a monthly activity. This might include a shift at a local soup kitchen, participating in Amnesty International Letter Writing Campaigns, working on a Habitat for Humanity Project, bringing food to a family of a person who is facing a serious illness, helping at a funeral luncheon, packing and delivering food baskets, or raking leaves for an elderly person. With the proper clearance and training, some neophytes may visit those in prison.

Prayer should always begin and conclude the experience. Always allow the neophytes time to reflect on what they did and to relate it to the Gospel message. For example, you might read Matthew 25:31-46.

Practical and prayerful resources are often available from the Campaign for Human Development, [www.nccbuscc.org/cchd](http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd), Catholic Charities, [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org), Catholic Relief Services, <http://www.catholicrelief.org> or contact your local diocesan offices of the above organizations, if available.

Just as their participation in the sacraments enlightens the neophytes' understanding of the Scriptures, so too, it increases their contact with the rest of the faithful and has an impact on the experience of the community. As a result, interaction between the neophytes and the faithful is made easier and more beneficial. The period of post-baptismal catechesis is of great significance for both the neophytes and the rest of the faithful. Through it, the neophytes, with the help of their godparents, should experience a full and joyful welcome into the community and enter into closer ties with the other faithful. The faithful, in turn, should derive from it a renewal of inspiration and of outlook (RCIA 246).

You went, you washed, you came to the altar,  
you began to see what you had not seen before.

—St Ambrose—  
Bishop of Milan, fifth century

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