

PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT WITH CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

1. The final period of formation before the sacraments of initiation is called purification and enlightenment. This period usually coincides with the Lenten preparation for Easter. The Lenten season has a double character: the elect are prepared for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation and the faithful prepare themselves by penance for the renewal of their baptismal promises.¹ Thus, both the catechumens and the faithful prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery.
2. The period of purification and enlightenment is a much shorter period of preparation, limited to the forty days of Lent. The Lenten forty days and the rituals celebrated during them are all that remain before the sacraments of initiation yet this short period of purification and enlightenment is marked as a time of “intense preparation.”²
3. Purification and enlightenment designed for a “more intense spiritual preparation, consists more of interior reflection than in catechetical instruction.”³ The state of the elect at this time is described as *competentes* (co-petitioners) asking to receive the sacraments of initiation and the Holy Spirit. It is a time for spiritual development, which is cultivating dispositions and deepening desires for baptism. For children of catechumenal age, the focus of this final period is an invitation into the mystery of our faith rather than a mastery of knowledge of that faith. Purification and enlightenment invites children into contemplation, a sense of holy and mystery.⁴ Attentiveness to the imagery and symbols of the Lenten Scriptures is key to their spiritual preparation during this period.
4. The period of preparation for the Easter sacraments is called purification because it is a time “intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own conscience and do penance.”⁵ Searching the hearts, uncovering obstacles and all that is unhelpful for a “true faith,

¹ *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar*, no. 27. For further development see *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 6: “From that time onward the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery... .” In addition *Ceremonial of Bishops*, no. 249.

² *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 105.

³ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 126.

⁴ In their own way and in proportion to their age children are genuinely capable of reflection. They need some guidance, however, so they will learn how to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or praise God and pray in their hearts. See *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 23 and *Directory for Masses with Children*, no. 37.

⁵ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 126.

which expresses itself in love,”⁶ deepen the elects’ desire for the waters of new birth. For children of catechumenal age, lived experience brings moments ever more frequently when they will have to rely on their conscience(s) and assume responsibility for their decisions. Good and evil, grace and sin, life and death will more and more confront one another within them as options that they must accept or reject.⁷ The process of purification can lead children to not only be more attentive to their conscience(s) but can help them become more aware of the movement of God’s Spirit in daily life. Catechetical age children have the capability to be led to first attempts at examination of conscience beginning by first looking intently at the events of their daily life and reviewing this in conversation with God.

5. This final period of preparation is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior. From the day of their election, the elect are also described as *illuminandi*, those who will be enlightened, because baptism itself has been called *illuminatio* or enlightenment.⁸ The sacraments are sources of grace in individuals and communities. Enlightenment is not an accumulation of information but rather is a grace-opening of minds and hearts.⁹ It is by this working of grace that one is formed into a new creation. Children of catechumenal age are more than learners of the faith. They are in the process of being clothed with the garment of believers, those who will be enlightened to profess faith by following Christ with great generosity.
6. The period of purification and enlightenment takes place in the context of the entire Church on the Lenten journey. The faithful surround and accompany the elect up the “holy mountain of Easter.”¹⁰ The Lenten journey is not only in the midst of the Church community but also *with* the Church community to the waters of baptism. With children of catechumenal age the role of the community in this period is especially important in facilitating the conversion process. The spirituality of children is dependent on the strength of parents, godparents and the community. The Lenten call to conversion¹¹ is communal and the community sustains its development. The importance with which Lent is

⁶ From exorcism prayer of the “First Scrutiny.” See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 141 B.

⁷ See *Catechesi tradendae*, no. 39.

⁸ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 111, 126.

⁹ See Mark 10:46 ff. and Luke 24:13 ff.

¹⁰ *Ceremonial of Bishops*, no. 249.

¹¹ See Joel 2:12-18.

celebrated in the local Church is foundational to the catechumenal experience.

Rites Belonging to the Period of Purification and Enlightenment

7. “The celebration of certain rites, particularly the scrutinies and presentations, brings about this process of purification and enlightenment and extends it over the entire Lenten season.”¹² The rites attached to the period need to be celebrated well because purification and enlightenment hinges on immersion in these rites. Children especially are to be drawn into authentic participation in these rites by pre-ritual preparation; attention to symbol, gesture, posture, song, silence, and word; and post-ritual reflection.

THE SCRUTINIES WITH CHILDREN OF CATECHETICAL AGE

8. When only catechetical age children comprise the group of elect, the rite provides a penitential rite (RCIA, nos. 267-279) a “kind of scrutiny” or “the guidelines given for the adult rite (RCIA, nos. 128-133) may be followed and adapted.”¹³ When both adults and children comprise the group of elect, the scrutinies as found in RCIA, nos. 137-164 should be followed.¹⁴ A unified celebration of the scrutines reinforces the understanding that there is one process of initiation for both young and old.
9. The celebration of the scrutines is more than a ritual requirement for initiation. “Scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good.”¹⁵ In the case of children, the task of the scrutinies is to uncover what is weak and sinful in being a child, while enabling children to see how the Church provides healing, strength and support in a world with violence, hostility and exploitation. The scrutinies are not about burdening the young elect with guilt. Rather, they are a moment of joy in recognizing it is Christ who protects them and gives them their strength.

¹² *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 126.

¹³ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 267.

¹⁴ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 20, 125, 128. The Church sees the celebration of the scrutinies as most important for the completion of conversion and preparation for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Three scrutinies should be celebrated. If all three are not celebrated, only the bishop can dispense from one of them for serious reasons or, in extraordinary circumstances, even two.

¹⁵ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 128.

10. Parents, godparents and the adult community may be uncomfortable with the scrutinies. The terminology used during the scrutinies often breeds misunderstanding and indecisiveness as to whether or not there is a need to celebrate the major scrutinies with children. Catechesis focused on the reality that the choice for baptism and Christian life is a struggle brings forth the understanding that grace is necessary and grace is received. The scrutinies challenge elect and the baptized alike to confront the reality of sin and the need for God. In addition, children are not strangers to the violence and evil in the world. They need to name what is good and strong, as well identify that which is not good and grow in the realization that God is stronger than any evil and brighter than any darkness. This catechesis may take place in an adapted form of the penitential rites¹⁶ on a Lenten weekday. Such a gathering would be helpful in preparing both the baptized and the elect for the three major scrutinies, which take place on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent.
11. The celebration of the three major scrutinies would better strengthen the children's faith life because the scrutinies are instructional in nature. First and foremost, they take place in the context of the Sunday assembly, "the primary and indispensable source from" which children are to derive "the true Christian spirit."¹⁷ Through the celebration of three scrutinies the elect are "instructed gradually about the mystery of sin."¹⁸ In addition, the scrutinies introduce the children to the rich, poetic scriptural imagery of living water, light, resurrection and life, which, in turn, prepares the children for the ritual action of the Easter Vigil. Finally, the ritual elements of the scrutinies -repetition, movement, posture, touch, storytelling, homily, silence, song all in the midst of the community with the support of parents and godparents- are conducive to praying with children.
12. It is necessary to support the catechesis operant in the celebration of the scrutinies with pre-ritual preparation that should begin with a lectionary-based catechesis. The literary genre of the gospels assigned to the scrutinies is story. Children have willing ears for stories. These gospels lend themselves to storytelling, dialogue and drama and have the

¹⁶ The penitential rites could be adapted by replacing the exorcism and anointing with the oil of catechumens with a minor exorcism. See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 90 – 94. Baptized parents and the godparents could be invited to the sacrament of penance at this time.

¹⁷ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 14.

¹⁸ *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 130.

capability of engaging religious imagination. Inspired by the word of God and in preparation for the extensive intercessory prayer during the scrutinies, the elect take time to name the particular aspect of their life for which they desire freedom, so that the community can pray for them. Children could be led to formulate their own intentions to commend to the Church's prayer¹⁹. The elect, young and old, need to understand their dependence on the prayers of the Church at this time²⁰. Such preparation for the scrutinies should be repeated with each scrutiny.

13. Post-ritual catechesis dependent on the celebration of the each scrutiny is also needed. (See below for a model of post-ritual catechesis.) Content for post-ritual catechesis may be the acceptance of good and the rejection of evil as is expressed in the "Renunciation of Sin"²¹ found in the rite of baptism. Catechesis should not only lead to the celebration of the scrutinies but should flow from the liturgy as well.

Model for Dismissal Catechesis for Catechumens

With the help of some of the faithful, all the catechumens remain together to share their joy and spiritual experiences. This is catechesis dependent on the rite.

Invitation to Reflection

Invite catechumens to reflect on the event they have experienced.

Encourage them to remember words, actions, feelings and scripture that might have stirred in their hearts.

Silence

Adults as well as children are genuinely capable of reflection. They need some guidance, however, so they will learn how to recollect themselves, meditate briefly, or praise God and pray in their hearts.²²

Reflective Dialogue of Experience

Invite dialogue about the liturgical experience.

¹⁹ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 140. Two formularies of "Intercessions for the Elect" are provided in the rite both of which can be adapted to fit various circumstances.

²⁰ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 143. After the celebration of the scrutinies the elect are dismissed and the liturgy of the eucharist follows. In the eucharistic prayer there is to be a remembrance of the elect and their godparents. See ritual Mass "Christian Initiation: the Scrutinies."

²¹ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 217.

²² See *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 23; *Directory for Masses with Children*, no. 37.

Catechesis

Content for catechesis may be the acceptance of good and the rejection of evil as is expressed in the “Renunciation of Sin”²³ found in the rite of baptism.

Concluding Prayer

Prayer text should be attentive to the needs of elect E.g. prayer that the elect turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.

Simple Blessing

²³ See *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, no. 217.