

Rite of Christian Initiation for
Adults
The RCIA Process

Holy Saturday, Fire, Water And
New Life
--by Richard Bedard

Every good thing that exists is gift ...and is grace from our loving God who is Love and Grace itself. The very One who loved us into existence also wants us to share in His divine life through the sacraments and into eternal joy and happiness when we return to Him. The very fact that we want to seek Christ and know about Him is itself a grace from Him.

At the Easter Vigil Mass on Holy Saturday night we celebrate the three Sacraments of Initiation -- Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. Those who are not baptized receive all three sacraments. Those who are already baptized and converting from another Faith or who have never completed their sacraments receive Confirmation and Eucharist. The remainder of us who are already fully initiated renew our own baptismal promises and call to live out our Faith each day. We too will be nourished with a share in the divine life when we receive Our Lord Jesus himself in the Holy Eucharist. This Mass has a rich texture of symbolism. This is in the same way as we are taught when we become Catholic that sacraments are "outward signs and symbols of what we inwardly believe and used by Christ to confer grace." Let us explore this a little further.

It is sunset and the Mass begins with the church plunged into darkness. With this darkness we are reminded of death. That Jesus is dead in the tomb, that if we have followed the disciplines of Lent we too are now "dead to sin" and



anxiously await the resurrection of Christ. The Holy Spirit in scripture is often referred to as water and fire. We begin outside and we light the fire of new life which Father blesses and with it lights the Easter Candle. As the priest carries the candle in procession through the church to the altar, he stops periodically and chants "Light of Christ." We are thus profoundly reminded that Christ indeed is the Light of the World and out of deep gratitude everyone responds with "Thanks be to God!" This flame is then passed around and everyone lights a candle and holds it as the priest sings out the Easter Proclamation. We then extinguish our candles and the church is again in darkness. Several Readings are then read which are taken from the Old Testament which recount the story of Creation, and the Hebrew people's journey through salvation history. One last Reading is taken from the New Testament. During this darkness, and these Readings we are taken back to Ancient Rome and the catacombs where the Early Christians themselves met in secrecy two thousand years ago and where they too sat in mostly darkness and listened to some of the same stories and recounted the events of the life of Our Savior. It was then too that they welcomed and "initiated" the catechumens in their midst who had been studying to become Christians for two years or more.

The lights now come on! The Gospel is read, the homily is given. We are told and receive the most excellent news!



Christ is Risen! Alleluia!



Following this, the Easter Candle is dipped in the baptismal water and the waters of baptism are blessed. The catechumen-elect are then asked to give their baptismal promises and the rest of the assembly is asked to renew their own baptismal promises at the same time. The catechumen is then baptized with the water of baptism. He now rises from the water to a new life as a new creation in Christ. An indelible mark has been placed on his soul. Another soul has just been infused with spiritual life!



The Mass continues. Confirmation is now celebrated. Our newly baptized along with our candidates are now each Sealed with the Holy Spirit with chrism. Another

mark is placed on their soul. Another soul has just been strengthened against sin and temptation and filled with the Holy Spirit is now ready to evangelize others with the Good News of Christ!



Next the Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated and everyone now receives another share in the divine life. As we receive Communion, Christ is now truly breathing, talking, walking and living in us and through us! Christ gives Himself as food for the journey for our souls. The Eucharist itself is a foretaste of Heaven! And every Sunday Mass is a celebration of Easter! What a Gift!

Everyone is then dismissed and commissioned to go forth and reflect the mirror image of the love of Christ that dwells within us to everyone we meet and to proclaim the Good News and give an account of the Joy we have in countless and varied ways. And in the words of St. Francis, "if necessary, to use words!"

*Rejoice Always for He is Risen
Alleluia!*