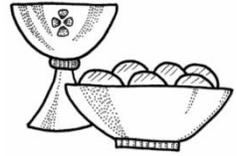


Liturgical Catechesis and Prayer: Forming Children, Teens and Adults for Mass and Catholic Life

The Church Calls Us to Form People Liturgically



Pope John Paul II said "Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action." (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 30) As a catechist you may be called upon to prepare young people for sacraments, and often to explain the meaning of symbols and words used in their celebration. But that's not the only time catechists should refer to the liturgy. Faith formation sessions should always include attention to liturgical symbols and rites, sources of the liturgy, the liturgical year, and include rituals, gestures and celebrations that mirror what we do at Mass. This is how we will help students develop and treasure their identity as Catholics.

Regular exposure to good liturgical catechesis and to liturgical prayer helps people participate well in the Mass. We owe this to them, because "full, conscious and active participation" is their right by baptism. The General Directory for Catechesis explains the scope of liturgical catechesis and how it supports participation:

... catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ "for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds...", (*General Catechetical Directory*, 25b) as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life." (*GDC*, 25)

The RCIA, or catechumenate, by which persons over the age of seven are prepared for baptism, contains a great deal of wisdom for working with the already-baptized:

...comprehensiveness and integrity of formation; its gradual character expressed in definite stages; its connection with meaningful rites, symbols, biblical and liturgical signs; its constant references to the Christian community. Post-baptismal catechesis...does well, however, to draw inspiration from "this preparatory school for the Christian life", and to allow itself to be enriched by those principal elements which characterize the catechumenate. (*GDC* 91)

"Liturgical catechesis" says the *National Directory for Catechesis*, "aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ...by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the signs to the thing signified, from the 'sacraments' to the 'mysteries.' It promotes a more informed knowledge and a more vital experience of the Liturgy." (*NDC*, 111) This is why it is so important to incorporate the signs, symbols and actions of the Church into our faith formation sessions with children, teens and adults.

Lectionary-Based Liturgical Prayer in Catholic Formation

Getting Started: The Prayer Space and Its Elements

Every catechetical or meeting space with children, teens and adults should have a prayer space or focus. This helps participants realize that they have not come to just another class or meeting like the ones they encounter in the rest of their day. You want to convey that this is a gathering where the people of God encounter not only the human but also the divine. This prayer space can be simple but must communicate a sacred beauty and dignity.

- Cover an empty desk or table with a cloth in the color of the current liturgical season. White can always complement any seasonal color of the Church.
- Display an open ritual lectionary or a Bible on the table and possibly add a candle, crucifix and a bowl of water, as appropriate.
- Add various forms of art (seasonal and otherwise), sacramentals (rosary, ashes, palms, oil or other sacred objects used in church...)
- Personalize it by adding special items brought in by the children or family, an object connecting to a national or global event, or something from nature.

- Gather around this prayer space, ideally to open the session. Stand and/or sit as appropriate. (The dedication of this time and space for prayer conveys an important delineation from the rest of the session. This manner of prayer helps to form learners in the *Catholic* tradition of liturgical – public ritualized - prayer.)

Components of *Lectionary-Based Liturgical Prayer*

The following are elements (from which to choose) in creating a Catholic prayer experience using Word, ritual and symbol that forms people for a liturgical sensibility:

- Proclamation of the Gospel (or another reading) from the upcoming Sunday Lectionary as the *center-piece* around which the prayer is built, drawing in variable components that relate
- Ritual Actions related to proclamation (i.e., standing, procession, three-fold Sign of Cross prayer before Gospel...)
- Reflection on Scripture proclaimed, designed to evoke interaction, active learning and integration
- Ritual action related to symbols/sacraments (blessing with water, anointing with oil...)
- Music (both sung and meditative)
- Silence (woven throughout and even for an extended period as age-appropriate; important element)
- Examination of conscience
- Recited prayer (Our Father, Glory Be, Hail Mary...) and possibly Creed
- Intercessory prayer (petitions)
- Spontaneous prayer (invited by the catechist/prayer leader)
- Breaking and sharing of bread
- Sign of Peace
- Other liturgically formative actions and helpful elements for any particular group

Liturgical Catechesis Resources

Comprehensive Liturgical Catechesis Website: <http://theliturgicalcatechist.weebly.com>

Curated resources and videos on many liturgical catechesis topics.

Paprocki, Joe, *Beyond the Catechist's Toolbox: Catechesis That Not Only Informs but Also Transforms* (Loyola Press, 2013) How to make your session “more like Mass and less like class”

Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions: Catechesis on the Liturgy website:

http://www.fdlc.org/Liturgy_Catechesis.htm

Variety of easy-to-use materials, including information about sacraments, children's liturgy, etc.

Pastoral Liturgy Magazine Resource Website: <http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/> Click “resources” to access articles on many topics of interest.

Ministry and Liturgy Magazine (includes content from former *Liturgical Catechesis Magazine*)

<http://www.rpinet.com/ml/> Site has table of contents for each issue.

Resource Publications – booklist of Liturgical Catechesis materials

<http://www.rpinet.com/slcat.html> Many good options, workbooks, practical materials for all age groups.

Our best chance to touch the hearts and lives of our children (and all learners) with a transforming experience of God's saving power is to pray well together and form them for prayerful lives...not just teach them about prayer. Our best chance to keep young people Catholic is to ground their prayer formation in the richness and texture and beauty of the Church's public prayer tradition, have them grow proficient in it and come to love liturgy as the air they breathe and the spiritual food for which they hunger.

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