

Module 9: Say yes to Christ

Session 1: A different kind of lenten retreat for kids, parents, and godparents

Objective: Discover the meat and potatoes of the period of purification and enlightenment.

We are reaching the pinnacle of the journey. We are getting close to the mountaintop, so it's getting intense. The children sense the intensity: the purple, the quiet, the kneeling, all the rituals. It's Lent. And, for the catechumens, it's the period of purification and enlightenment.

I remember way-back-when, when I first started in catechumenate ministry and before I really understood the period of purification and enlightenment and liturgical catechesis. The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent were the dates when I taught baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. After all, the gospel readings for Year A are very baptismal.

However, the lenten period of period of purification and enlightenment is a time for spiritual reflection, not sacrament classes. Sacrament classes come during catechumenate. Lent is a time to reflect upon and prepare for the upcoming celebration of the paschal mystery that the catechumens, and indeed all of us, will celebrate at the Easter Vigil.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults speaks directly about what the period is to entail.

This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction (no. 139; Canada no. 126).

In this module, we will consider what this "intense spiritual preparation" looks like for children. We will look specifically to the scrutinies and presentations, and finally at the sacraments of initiation.

Spiritual meat and potatoes for kids

Even though the spiritual preparation is intense, it's also age-appropriate. Moreover, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults tells us what the "interior reflection" for this period is like. So, we don't have to guess or make it up or design our own retreat. It's all designed for us.

The celebration of the scrutinies and presentations are what help the elect do the "interior reflection" of Lent. The scrutinies and presentations are the meat and potatoes of Lent. The RCIA says it's the celebration of these rituals that "brings about the purification and enlightenment" of Lent.

Furthermore, the three scrutinies are rites of repentance that heal and strengthen the elect (no. 141; Canada no. 128). The two presentations enlighten the elect by expressing the heart of the Church's faith (no. 147; Canada no. 134). Let's look at an example of how these rites make up a healthy serving of meat and potatoes for the elect.

A plain ol' regular everyday story

Although some kids benefit from the scrutinies because of the extraordinary pressures and issues in their lives, I'm going to use the example of Alex. Alex, age 11, is like the majority of kids in the catechumenate who have plain ol' regular everyday concerns and worries. Nothing big or dramatic.

Nonetheless, I contend that children are aware of and touched by the power of evil in the world. Just think of the images from the 9/11 that these children have grown up with. Or think of the number of kids who come to school hungry and with dirty clothes and shoes that don't fit.

The scrutinies free the elect "from the power of sin and Satan" and "give them strength in Christ" (no. 141; Canada no. 128). Thus, all children can benefit from this strength and freedom. For Alex, when we prepared to celebrate the first scrutiny, he said that he needed strength to "not fight with my little sister." Granted, fighting with your sister is not evil, and probably not even a sin, but it was real to Alex. And it was also a starting point from which we could urge him to look beyond himself.

Preparation for a scrutiny

Asking children to "progress in self-knowledge through serious examination of the lives" is part of what we do in our preparation for the scrutinies (no. 142; Canada no. 129). It's also important to have parents involved in the preparation for the scrutinies so that they know what we are asking their children to consider. Here's what a preparation session may look like for the first scrutiny:

- Reflect upon the gospel for the Third Sunday of Lent, Year A. Use a guided meditation, or dramatic reading, or focus on a portion of the gospel.
 - Highlight water image.
 - Have water, buckets, or even a well.
 - How did living water give the woman strength?
- Name areas of strength and weakness in our lives.
 - Ask parents and children to discuss.
 - Incorporate their thoughts into the "Intercessions for the Elect" (no. 153; Canada no. 140) when you celebrate the rite.
- Close with minor exorcism (nos. 90-94; Canada nos. 90-94).

This preparation session, the rite itself, and the reflection session afterward are the meat and potatoes of the period of purification and enlightenment.

In the next session, we'll continue our discussion of the scrutinies with children. However, let's spend a little more time on the preparation session. Please go to Exercise 1.

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Session 2: Celebrate the scrutinies—then talk about them

Objective: Learn the benefits of the “adult” scrutinies and how to reflect on their celebration.

The preparation for the scrutiny leads into the celebration of the scrutiny and then reflection on the scrutiny. This is repeated for the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. And the presentations are also included during the third and fifth weeks of Lent (nos. 157, 178; Canada nos. 144, 165). That’s a lot to “do” during Lent! That’s your meat and potatoes. This is the “lenten retreat” for the elect and their parents.

In the last session, we talked about the preparation session for the scrutiny. In this session, let’s look at the celebration itself and then the reflection session afterward. The scrutiny for children, given in part II, chapter 1 of the RCIA, is a little bit complicated.

Check out this title

In the children’s chapter, the scrutiny is entitled, “Second Step: Penitential Rites (Scrutinies)” (no. 291; Canada no. 267). The title is very complicated, not to mention problematic, and so is the rite itself. To start with, a scrutiny is not a “second step.” A scrutiny is a kind of penitential rite, not a “step” that ushers catechumens into another period like the Rites of Acceptance or Election.

Second, as the title indicates, this rite for children combines a scrutiny for the unbaptized with a penitential rite for the baptized and also concludes with a liturgy of penance for the baptized (no. 295; Canada no. 271). Read paragraphs 291 to 303 (Canada nos. 267- 279), and you’ll see what I mean. It’s complicated and problematic.

Thus, I am not going to take time to identify and explain all the difficulties with this penitential rite (scrutiny) for children. I have simply pointed out that it is here in the ritual text and thus can be used. However, I suggest we take the advice of paragraph 291 (Canada no. 267) and follow “the guidelines given for the adult rite.” That means we will celebrate all three scrutinies, rather than just this one for children.

Celebrating the scrutiny with children

Let’s say you have spiritually prepared the children for the scrutiny. You helped the children identify what is weak or sinful in their hearts. Likewise, you helped them identify what is “upright, strong and good” (no. 141; Canada no. 128).

By way of rehearsal, you or the liturgist walked through the rite with the parents and godparents, so everyone is prepared for the celebration. A couple points to consider for this celebration:

- 1) **Practice silence** — Read paragraph 152 (Canada no. 139) where it says the elect, with the faithful, “pray for some time in silence.” Prepare the children in advance for silence. I don’t mean just practice the week before. I mean throughout the catechumenate and Lent practice what to do and how to pray silently. Don’t assume kids know what to do. Prayer, especially silent prayer, needs to be taught.
- 2) **Laying on of hands** — During the exorcism prayer, the celebrant lays hands on the elect. Prepare the children for this moment. You may have already prepared them for a laying on of hands by using the blessing of the catechumens during their catechumenate. If you have not, you will need to prepare them now. Always be sensitive and cautious before touching children, even laying hands on their heads.
- 3) **Work with the presider and homilist** — Involve the presider in the preparation for the rite. If he can’t be part of the preparation session, talk with him in advance and be sure he is aware of the thoughts, needs, and concerns of the children. Help him to work those notions into the homily.

After the celebration

After the celebration of each scrutiny, there is a regular dismissal from the Liturgy of the Word. During the following dismissal session and in the extended session with the family, unpack the meaning of the ritual. Return to Module 5, Session 3, for the outline of how to do mystagogical reflection after one of the rites.

Here are a couple of points to keep in mind when doing the mystagogical reflection on a scrutiny:

- **Simplicity** — The scrutiny is a simple rite. The main element is the exorcism prayer, so there are not a lot of signs and symbols and gestures to discuss. Don’t worry if there is not a lot to say about the rite itself. Draw upon the powerful images of the Year A readings. You might ask questions like;
 - How did you feel as Father (your mom, your dad, your godparent, or your friend) laid hands on you in prayer?
 - How did you feel as the whole community prayed for you? Why are we praying for you?
 - Ask parents what struck them in the rite.
 - Ask about the gospel images: water, thirsting, light, darkness, sight, the tomb, the rock, the bindings.
- **Repetition** — The structure of the rite is same in all three scrutinies. Build on that repetition. By the third time you ask some of the questions, the kids will have the hang of it. Besides, they are already getting the “hang of it” from the Rites of Acceptance and Election.

In addition to the scrutinies, you also have the celebration and liturgical catechesis that surrounds the presentations. We will discuss the presentations as well as the preparation rites for Holy Saturday and the Triduum in the next session. Please go to Exercise 2 to wrap up the discussion on scrutinies with children.

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Session 3: The greatest, holiest festival of the year

Objective: Learn how the celebration of the presentations and the preparations during Holy Week makes us ready for the most sacred rituals in the church.

Before we move on to Holy Week and the highlight of the journey, let's give some attention to the presentations. The Presentation of the Creed and the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer are part of the liturgical catechesis of Lent, but they can also be "anticipated" and moved to the period of the catechumenate.

The presentations are pretty straightforward rites that can easily be celebrated as part of a weekday Mass, as the RCIA suggests (nos. 157 and 178; Canada nos. 144 and 165). Sometimes we have done this at the school Mass or as part of weekday Mass with the religious education children. Or we have celebrated the presentations at a regular 5:00 p.m. weekday Mass. We've also celebrated the presentations at the end of a catechumenate catechetical session. Do what works for your families and your parish.

Onto Holy Week

I am very big on not over-burdening RCIA families. Family life is complicated, and if we ask them to do too much, we risk a turn-off. But when it comes to Holy Week, the Triduum, and Holy Saturday, they need to be there.

Yes, it is a lot to ask the families to come Palm Sunday, then Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. But it is *the* most important time of our entire year. So don't apologize for it, and start talking about it *months* in advance, so the families know they have to be there.

And consider this anecdote, which is not uncommon. Sixth-grader Zoe went from after-school volleyball practice to basketball practice to a middle-school soccer game all in the same night. Then she did her homework. Granted, she doesn't do this every night. But lots of kids do the same type of thing. So, I feel it's acceptable to *expect* parents to bring their children to church three nights in row for the sacred Triduum (Holy Thursday night, Good Friday night, Holy Saturday night).

FUN FACT

Let the Children Carry the Oil

During the Mass on Holy Thursday, the three sacred oils are usually carried in the procession of the gifts or during their own procession. We always let one of our young elect carry the oil of catechumens.

The three holy days

The reason it's so important for the elect and their families to be present is that the Triduum is the church's great three-day celebration of the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. This sacred feast starts with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday night and continues with the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Friday. The climax of the three days is the Easter Vigil and the sacraments of initiation on Saturday night. The three days conclude with evening prayer on Easter Sunday.

In order for the children and their families to experience the fullness of this sacred festival, they need to be there for the entire celebration. If the children miss one of the three days, they miss one third of this great commemoration of Christ's saving pasch (passover). If you use this kind of "holy festival" language, rather than, "you are required to come all three nights," you will be better received.

Don't forget these little rites

On Holy Saturday, the elect gather for the preparation rites with their parents and godparents. The outline for these rites is given in paragraphs 185-205 (Canada nos. 172-197). I encourage you to gather with the families on Holy Saturday morning, celebrate these rites, and end with a simple soup and bread lunch. Remember, it's a day of prayer and fasting (no. 185; Canada no. 172), so you want to keep it simple.

In particular, I have to give a "shout out" to the ephphetha rite (nos. 197-199; Canada no. 184-186). Kids love it! Teach them to say the word, "Ephphetha." Read the gospel (Mk 7: 31-37), and you'll see why they love it. Do some liturgical catechesis around this rite sometime prior to Holy Saturday in order to help children prepare for this little rite of "opening the ears and mouth" (no. 197; Canada no. 184).

Summarizing your lenten retreat

Here is the schedule for your lenten retreat:

- **Ash Wednesday** — Dismissal session (if you have Mass). Focus on readings and include reflection on the ashes.
- **First Sunday of Lent** — Rite of Sending and Rite of Election (Rite of Sending may be done previously.)
 - Reflection on the Rite of Election (and Rite of Sending)
- **Second Sunday of Lent** — Dismissal session on readings for this Second Sunday of Lent.
 - Preparation for scrutinies (can be done at anytime).
- **Third Sunday of Lent** — First Scrutiny. Liturgical catechesis includes reflection on scrutiny and dismissal session on readings for Third Sunday of Lent.
 - Presentation of the Creed. (Some preparation in weeks prior)
- **Fourth Sunday of Lent** — Second Scrutiny. Liturgical catechesis includes reflection on scrutiny and dismissal session on readings for Fourth Sunday of Lent.
- **Fifth Sunday of Lent** — Third Scrutiny. Liturgical catechesis includes reflection on scrutiny and dismissal session on readings for Fifth Sunday of Lent.
 - Presentation of the Lord's Prayer. (Some preparation in weeks prior)
- **Palm Sunday** — Liturgical catechesis includes reflection on the Passion and dismissal session on readings for Palm Sunday. Point ahead to Triduum.
- **Holy Thursday**
- **Good Friday**



- **Holy Saturday** — Easter Vigil
 - Preparation rites — Holy Saturday morning or afternoon

As you can see, the liturgies and liturgical catechesis of Lent form the basis for the spiritual recollection of Lent. It's a lot! Let's reflect a little more in Exercise 3.

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Session 4: You have reached the pinnacle — the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil

Objective: Explore the integral connection among the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

After all of this emphasis on the *spiritual* preparation, inevitably these are some of the questions the kids seem to ask:

- Is the water cold?
- Will Father really put me under all the way?
- Should I wear my bathing suit?
- Can I still get a first Communion dress?

Oh well. In the end, when they stand outside in the dark night, their innocent faces lit by the glow of the blazing new fire and their eyes wide with wonder — you realize that they really do get it, or they soon will.

And even if they don't fully "get it," it's all God's work anyway. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be filled with the grace of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. Even if we didn't do everything exactly as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults said. Or even if Alex did miss the second scrutiny for a soccer tournament, God's grace is poured out in full measure in the sacraments of initiation.

Yes, always all three

There is no doubt about it. If a child is of catechetical age, then they are to celebrate baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist in the same celebration, preferably at the Easter Vigil. The church is strong and clear in canon law and in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that those who are baptized are to be confirmed immediately, "unless a grave reason prevents it" (Code of Canon Law, canon 866).

Furthermore, fitting in with "all the other kids" is not considered a grave reason for delaying confirmation. As the RCIA says so beautifully,

In accord with the ancient practice followed in the Roman liturgy, adults [including children of catechetical age, canon 852:1] are not to be baptized without receiving confirmation immediately afterward, unless some serious reason stands in the way. The conjunction of the two celebrations signifies the unity of the paschal mystery, the close link between the mission of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the two sacraments through which the

Son and the Holy Spirit come with the Father to those who are baptized (RCIA, no. 215; Canada no. 208).

Then, after confirmation “the newly baptized reach the culminating point in their initiation” by coming to the table to fully share in the Eucharist (no. 217; Canada no. 210).

After the children have been on this long, spiritual journey of conversion in which they have developed a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and a desire to join the community of disciples, I cannot imagine holding back one of our sacred sacraments of initiation.

One year this did happen

One year however, the pastor did feel we should not confirm because he wanted the kids confirmed in high school when all the other parish kids were confirmed. (By the way, I know this happens in a lot of your parishes.) That year, there were seven children who had completed their catechumenate and were being initiated at the Easter Vigil. They had been baptized, put on the white garments, and returned to their seats.

Keep in mind that according to the pastor, they were *not* to be confirmed. When Father called forward “the candidates for confirmation,” all seven kids spontaneously rose from their pews and came forward. I held my breath, thinking he might confirm them after all! Alas, no, he shoed them back to their seats.

But that was the last time that confirmation was delayed in that parish. It makes so much sense that these young disciples receive the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the culmination of their journey of faith and conversion, rather than have them wait until later.

The following references make the church’s position on the unity of the sacraments of initiation undeniably clear:

From the Code of Canon Law

Canons 842, 852, 866, 883-885

From the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Paragraphs 14, 206, 215, 304, 305, 308, 323 (Canada nos. 14, 198, 208, 280, 281, 284, 299)

National Statutes 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 35

From the Rite of Confirmation

Paragraph 7b

Confirmation for previously baptized children

Throughout this course we have maintained a focus on unbaptized children. However, we must mention confirmation for baptized children, partly because the RCIA brings up the topic in paragraph 308 (Canada no. 284). Let’s address various situations.

Children baptized in another Christian tradition

Those who are brought into the full communion of the Catholic Church celebrate confirmation within the Rite of Reception.

From the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Paragraphs 409, 481 (Canada nos. 385, 394)

National Statute 35

From the Rite of Confirmation

Paragraph 7b

Children baptized in the Roman Catholic tradition

Typically, children baptized as Roman Catholics would not participate in the RCIA, even if they “missed” a sacrament. They would receive the necessary sacramental catechesis, receive the sacrament, and participate in regular religious education.

However, if a child is of catechetical age and “did not receive further catechetical formation,” (no. 400; Canada no. 376), they may benefit from participating in the RCIA. The important point is that you must do some serious discernment when deciding if the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the correct option for a baptized Catholic child. Furthermore, in most dioceses you need special permission from the bishop for a pastor to confirm a child who is baptized Catholic.

The issue of baptized Catholic children seeking the sacraments at a later age is a serious pastoral issue. Please go to our online forum and let us know how you do sacramental preparation with baptized Catholic children who seek the sacraments at an age that is outside of your parish norm. Also, please go to Exercise 4 as a wrap-up to this module.