

What is the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults?

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In Ireland, the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is central to many households. This image, which includes the symbols of a heart, fire engulfing the heart, and a crown of thorns encircling the heart, can be interpreted from the scriptural passage of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). In that story, the disciples' hearts begin to burn as Jesus explains the events surrounding his death. The image of the Sacred Heart, of course, also evokes the burning bush, a symbol of God's power beyond the world. The burning heart speaks of pain (fire, thorns), but also of a life reinvigorated by God, who cannot be imprisoned by our desires.

The process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is the transformation of not just hearts but also of the entire body (spirit as well as limbs to work for the good of others from a love burning in our hearts). The process nurtures persons who seek to be gifted with faith in Christ Jesus.

There are two distinct ways of growing in God's gift of faith: through Baptism as an infant or, for those who are of catechetical age (typically seven years old), the Christian initiation process, which includes liturgical rites, catechesis, and works of charity. Four major periods are part of the Rite. After an initial period of inquiring about Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular, the person who wishes to continue the journey of faith, takes part in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. The catechumens take part in liturgical rites as they journey to faith. Central to this is a total formation process—not simply educating the mind, but the heart, the spirit, and the entire person. In this way, the person might better embody God's love so that this love might be lived out in daily life.

The third period is Purification and Enlightenment. When catechumens are ready for the sacraments of initiation, the parish sends them to the diocesan cathedral, where the catechumens become the *elect*. There, the Church acknowledges that God has chosen, or elected, the catechumens for initiation at the Easter Vigil. This rite usually is celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. During the weeks of Lent, the elect will enter into a time of intense spiritual preparation and interior reflection. The period will be marked with the liturgical rites that will help the elect discern where they need healing and strengthening from God's love.



The Christian initiation process immerses in liturgical prayer those who seek faith so that they might burn with God's love.

At the Easter Vigil, the elect will be baptized and confirmed and will receive the Eucharist.

Once they have received the initiation sacraments, they will enter into the period of postbaptismal catechesis called *mystagogy*. During this time, they will reflect on the mysteries of the sacraments that they received at the Easter Vigil.

The Christian initiation process is one of immersing those seeking faith in liturgical prayer so that they might burn brightly with God's love.