

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

THE R.C.I.A. - WHAT'S THAT?

The above abbreviation does not have to do with the government or with the Central Intelligence Agency! Rather the initials, which you might have seen in the bulletin or heard in church stand for "Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults." Last week, I had the great privilege of conferring the sacraments of initiation on three wonderful young women in the parish - Tiffany Nieves, Miki Shen and Stephanie Sherafini.

All of them participated in our parish R. C. I. A. program here at St. Charles which is led by Deacon Steve Tobon and his wife, Thea. Tiffany and Miki as catechumens were baptized at the noon Mass on July 19th. Immediately after, they received the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and made their First Holy Communion. Stephanie, who had already been baptized, was confirmed and made First Holy Communion.

I suppose that for most of us who went to Catholic grammar school, we received our sacraments when youngsters: Baptism shortly after birth, Holy Eucharist in the second grade and then in seventh or eighth grade, the Sacrament of Confirmation. Today many people may not be following that traditional order!

With increasing frequency, I meet Catholics who might have been baptized, but then for some reason (usually relating to family), failed to fully complete their initiation. At times, some do express an interest in making their sacraments, especially if they are getting married. It is then that I direct them to the R. C. I. A. program.

Upon acceptance, these men and women are known as "candidates." Then of course, there are those who have never been baptized at all and seek entrance into the Catholic faith. These are referred to as "catechumens." That term "catechumen" is an ancient Christian word that refers to a person who is not baptized yet but who is undergoing a period of preparation in order to receive it.

The usual process in the R. C. I. A. program starts around September. There are various stages in the process. In the Rite of Acceptance, catechumens stand before the parish community and express their desire to become baptized members of the church; the candidates - for the other sacraments. After this step follows the Rite of Election in which the names of those to be baptized are enrolled. During the Lenten season, there are the Rites of Purification and Enlightenment.

Finally, at the beautiful Easter Vigil Mass, the initiation sacraments are given by the pastor. During the Easter season, up until Pentecost is a time of follow up catechesis. The R. C. I. A. may sound a little daunting, but it really is a wonderful program in which the whole parish community embraces those who are to come into the faith.

Catechumens and candidates attend Mass on Sunday and then are usually dismissed after the homily to reflect upon God's Holy Word that they have just heard. Classes usually are held in the rectory and include doctrinal teaching, prayer and discussion.

This year 2020, as we are all aware, has not been a very normal year! Because of Covid-19 restrictions, we could not have anyone in the church on the Easter Vigil although Mass was live-streamed on Facebook. So our "Easter Vigil" this year occurred on the third Sunday of July!

Whenever it happened, it was a tremendous joy to welcome people into the faith. Hopefully, starting September, we will be back on track with the regular R. C. I. A. program. If anyone reading this article knows of someone who is interested in becoming a baptized Catholic or who would just like to receive their full sacraments, please do not hesitate to let us know here in the rectory. Congratulations to Tiffany, Miki and Stephanie and may the Holy Spirit continue to guide you and bless you in your Christian journey!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome