

RCIA and the Formation of Liturgical Piety

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Here is what I think the "formation of liturgical piety" means. You will recognize at once, I believe, these words which in December 1988 will celebrate their 25th birthday, words taken from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the first work of Vatican II. In what seems to me to be the very clearest and most amazing statement of its own zeal for putting the renewal of the liturgy as its first and foundational work, the Council said:

The church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9; see 2:4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. For it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.
(CSL, #14)

What do we mean when we speak of liturgical piety? We must mean what is said so simply here: that liturgy done fully, consciously, actively by a people is this source--primary and indispensable--of the true Christian spirit.

Please see how these as yet barely tapped words set up that notion of our relation to the liturgy. The Council does not say that full, conscious, and active participation by all (all!) the faithful is called for because the church has always said that it is called for, nor do they say it is called for because it was such in the ancient church. They say it is called for "by the very nature of the liturgy." Think of that. Liturgy does not belong to those kinds of human activity which are done to

people, for people, on behalf of people. Liturgy belongs to a kind of human activity which is done *by* people. All the people are to be fully and consciously and actively involved in liturgy because anything else violates the kind of thing liturgy is, is against its nature. If we think that liturgy is something some people do in order to entertain, inspire, educate, or even bind up the wounds of other people, then we are at odds with this. Only when we admit that by its nature is liturgy done by all, and is therefore something that can be done by all, something in which leaders are truly called ministers because they are themselves members of the assembly skilled at some service enabling the assembly to do its liturgy, only when we are convinced of that in our hearts, can we go on to what follows about liturgical piety.

So in this first crucial sentence the Council makes the probably startling announcement that we have to reform the liturgy because--whatever else may be said of it--liturgy's nature is to be done by all. And lest anyone take that and turn it into mush, those three unmushy adjectives are there: full, conscious, active.

One other notion is added before the insight into what liturgical piety is. "Such participation," that is, the full, conscious, and active kind, "such participation by the Christian people . . . is their right and duty by reason of their baptism." So we are not talking here about options, about taste. We are talking rights. A baptized person has a right. We do not ask for a liturgy that is ours to do as some favor, some privilege. It belongs to us, this doing of our liturgy. Liturgy is also a duty, what we are obliged to do, a responsibility, a burden even. Perhaps it helps to name other things that in our society are both rights and duties. We may think of voting that way, or more basically of the whole realm of political power: the right and duty to speak out, the right and duty to find the truth. We are more accustomed to thinking of those areas where rights are one thing and duties another. Where they are the same--as with this matter of doing our liturgy--things can get tense. We should expect this: something, somebody, is being stretched between two poles. Easier to relax, it seems, and we often have.

The Council speaks of "right and duty by reason of their baptism." Again, something remarkable. The same Constitution would set in motion, or rather pick up on and approve and encourage the motion toward, the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. But twenty five years ago, few of us thought of baptism as a deed which established rights and duties. Note that the Constitution simply accepts that this is what transpires with baptism. If we accept this, then here is why we must speak of the RCIA and liturgical formation in the same breath.

So with this said about who does the liturgy, does it by right and as duty, the Constitution names this "full and active participation by all the people" as "the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit." The thoughts behind this declaration for a liturgical piety took their shape from some 1903 words of Pius X who wrote in a document on liturgical music: "Our people assemble for the purpose of acquiring the Christian spirit from its first and indispensable source, namely, active participation in the most sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the church." [Pius was pretty serious about this; his next sentence leaves little doubt of this: "It is vain to hope for such copious blessings from heaven if our worship of the Most High, rather than ascending with an odor of sweetness, again puts into our Lord's hands the scourge with which the unworthy profaners were once driven out of the temple." Sixty years later, the tone was no less urgent.]¹

The doing of the liturgy is to be for us the source of the true Christian spirit, and not one source among many, but the primary source and--in a strong and challenging word--the indispensable source. Where do we put on Christ? In doing our liturgy. Where do we find little-by-little what a Christian life looks like? In doing our liturgy. Note, please, it is not in studying our liturgy,

1. Pius X, *Tra le sollicitudini* (1903).

in observing the liturgy, in being uplifted by the liturgy, but in the *doing* of the liturgy. Where are the deeds, the habits of the heart--to take Bellah's good use of Alexis de Tocqueville's phrase--to be learned by Christians, learned in the sense of made our own? Where do we learn to speak and move and look and act the way a Christian speaks, moves, looks, acts? In doing the liturgy. Are there other sources of the Christian spirit, other ways in which we learn to put on Christ? Certainly. But to say that the doing of liturgy is for us the primary and indispensable source is to place an order, a discipline, on our formation.

We know how this goes against the grain. We are not people who like to be told there is only one way. We don't like to think about any source as being indispensable because we might then have to--on a sort of painful and very fundamental level--admit that "Have a nice day" is not the same as "The Lord be with you." We might have to admit that the pluralism we accept as a way to bring justice to the society as a whole has little to do with the community of the baptized. Let's take a name for the problem again from Robert Bellah and recognize that "Shielism" flourishes even after baptism. A woman named Shiela Larson spoke with the authors of *Habits of the Heart*: "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Shielism. Just my own little voice."² Perhaps Paul was talking about an early form of Shielism when he denounced the way followers of Christ were creating and living with options: I belong to Paul. I belong to Apollos. Perhaps fearing that our only other choice would look like fanaticism, we blend right in with the times. Of course, we seem to say, there are many ways within the church. Of course there are many valid ways to pray. Of course there are great differences of opinion among us when it comes to nearly all questions of ethics and morality. Of course we have those who follow this spirituality and those who follow

2. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, ed. Robert N. Bellah, et. al., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 221.

that brilliant writer and personality. Do you want a warm fuzzy church? You've got it. Do you want a Catholic Worker church? Fine. Do you think we should shape our community and action by the personality test that lets us know if we're INTJ's or some variation thereof, then have at it. Do you find Cursillo-like experiences to be the real heart of the church? Do it. Someone will invariably come up with a newly composed creed or a sweet lyric to which we can all lend a voice and an Amen.

Please understand: We are not talking here about the church embracing all sorts of folks. Certainly it does that. But we are talking about how to deal with a question, again posed by Robert Bellah, that makes us ponder what we really think about those statements in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. Bellah asks: "Does the community have any authority over my life?" A scary question. It frightens us because the word "authority" may summon visions of Shakers or Mormons, communities where the right way and the wrong way are spelled out in ways that seem to do something we cannot accept to the freedom of the individual. It frightens us more, this question about the authority of the community, because we are just more comfortable admitting that for us, yes, the centrality and the beauty and the power of the liturgy are obvious, are what we want to shape our spirits and our lives --but we're not about to inflict such an approach on others. We are satisfied to be one school of spirituality among many in the church. Of course, the situation is far more complicated. In various ways the liturgy itself has been made the servant of the diverse spiritualities: its words made to fit the day's mood, its songs tailored to the theology in vogue. We find ourselves hesitant to challenge this: Aren't we the ones who said the liturgy belongs to the people? Well, aren't these the people? If "Danny Boy" is what moves them at a funeral, then who am I to say they shouldn't have it? We must not be afraid to recognize in so much of what goes on the distortion of the liturgy. It is not at all the case that every manipulation flowing from this or that spirituality has brought about renewal of liturgy. Rather, so much is only to do something to people, for people. It may be therapeutic in a dozen ways. That doesn't make it the Church's liturgy.

I want to know how the community can do its liturgy so that their deeds shape them in that true Christian spirit. I want to know how this can happen for us within a society where we seem to be so uneasy with any letting go of my own final word when it comes to anything that matters. If the community, doing its liturgy, is authoritative, how are we to understand this?

The approach to adult initiation that has begun, very gradually, to take hold in the Roman Catholic Church in the past fifteen years seems to provide insight. These rites ask for a long period of time (a year is usually seen as the minimum), in which a person who comes first to inquire about the church may eventually enter the catechumenate and be led by a sponsor, catechists, and other ministers toward the Easter sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. Beyond that, in the fifty days until Pentecost, the neophyte is to experience the unfolding of the mysteries, the quiet reflection on and continuing celebration of the death one has died and the life one now lives.

This sort of initiation has long been absent from Roman Catholicism. We cannot expect that new rites, however well founded on the Church's earlier practice, will be at home without a rather lengthy adjustment process. That has begun. But there are things we can see now, learn now, from the rites themselves and the practice of the RCIA in our parishes. I would like to look at several moments within the journey as it is defined in the RCIA, asking of these how a normative liturgical piety is being handed on. Can we expect these rites to be kept in such a way that they are shaping Christians, clarifying life in the community, setting limits and imperatives? Can we expect that the community which makes these rites its own will--to put it directly--come to look like these rites? The truest thing I know about ritual is the wonderful saying: "It is not so much that the Jews have kept the Sabbath but that the Sabbath has kept the Jews." That is, in fact, what ritual's work is.

The Sign of the Cross

For Roman Catholic and some other Christian churches, the gesture called the sign of the cross is very familiar,

very common. It is made in a variety of ways and at various times in various traditions. Its origins are obscure, but it is quite ancient and has associations with God's name--God's brand, as it were, stamped on the Christian.

In the RCIA, the sign of the cross is first made when candidates are accepted into the Order of Catechumens. This acceptance must follow a period of inquiry. It is the first public assembly for the one inquiring and it happens only after the church sees signs of faith, of initial conversion, of intention to change one's life and enter into a relationship with God in Christ. The RCIA indicates that all of this will be recognized in ways like these:

the first stirrings of repentance, a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer, a sense of the church, and some experience of the company and spirit of the Christians through contact with a priest or with other members of the community.
(#42)

The community, or at least those most involved, including sponsors, are to discern this. The reception into the Order of Catechumens, therefore, means that the candidates have completed one period, perhaps lengthy; have indicated their intention to become catechumens; and have been accepted by the church.

The church understands that this is a serious moment. Those who become catechumens are "part of the household of Christ, since the church nourishes them with the word of God and sustains them by means of liturgical celebrations." (#47) The RCIA presumes that this rite will take place in the midst of an assembly of the local church. It is not a private matter but something concerning the whole community. The rite itself begins with an unusual informality: the sign of the cross is not made and there is no liturgical greeting. Instead the one presiding greets the candidates in a friendly manner and speaks to them about the church. Then the presider calls each candidate by name and questions them about their intentions, asking particularly whether each candidate is ready to strive to live according to the gospel. Then, when the sponsors have been asked to state their readiness to help

the candidates in this, the presider prays for the candidates.

The candidates are then called forward "to receive the sign of your new way of life as catechumens." Each one is signed with the cross which is traced on the forehead by the presider or by the sponsor. These words accompany the signing:

John, Mary: receive the cross on your forehead. It is Christ himself who now strengthens you with this sign of his love. Learn to know him and follow him.

The rite provides also that the candidates may be signed not only on the forehead but on all the senses: ears, eyes, lips, heart, shoulders, hands and feet. "Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ." "Receive the sign of the cross on your hands, that Christ may be known in the work which you do." Each signing is accompanied by appropriate words and may be followed by an acclamation sung by the assembly. This rite of signing concludes with a prayer; one text for this is

Lord, we have signed these catechumens with the sign of Christ's cross. Protect them by its power, so that, faithful to the grace which has begun in them, they may keep your commandments and come to the glory of rebirth in baptism.

From this moment on the rite refers to those who have been signed not as candidates but as catechumens. They are invited to share with the assembly at the table of God's word; after this the assembly prays for them and then they are dismissed. The rite also provides that the catechumens may be given a cross, although it is hard to believe that, if the signing itself is done with reverence and with attention, there would be any point to such a presentation.

Richard Fragomeni has written about this rite:

The rite affirms the significance of the promise of the inquirer by placing immediately after it the promise of the sponsors and the entire assembly to

support the new catechumens. It seems that the rite is essentially about promise making and promise keeping. It is a celebration of hospitable support and acceptance into a community of vowed Christians. . . . When Christians undertake to follow the Living One, the path leads to the cross. To keep the memory of Christ alive--at times, a dangerous enterprise--the whole community is absorbed in the mystery of Christ's death. Catechumens receive the sign of the cross on their entire bodies, being marked with the magnitude of Christ's love and the immensity of Christ's pain, as a reminder of where the journey of initiation into Christ is leading. . . . Their "blessed assurance" is a road that leads to Calvary and immersion in the Blood of the Lamb.³

Here, as with all ritual, we must take care about asking "What does this rite mean?" The better question is always, "What does the rite say that we mean?" The very first moment of life in the church, life in this Order of Catechumens, is made by the cross traced on the body. The rite says what we mean. That is indeed what a liturgical piety is. A hand tracing two lines on someone's forehead, heart, hands, feet, with a few words: here, catechumen, feel for the first time what your life now means. See, assembly of the baptized, what you know very well life in this church means. It is this cross traced now on your senses by presider and sponsor. You are claimed for Christ. As Balthasar Fischer has written, you "will belong to Christ the way lovers belong to each other." You are branded with the simplest mark of the great mystery of our salvation. Learn it. Learn now to wear this. Each morning and each night trace it on yourself. Each time we gather for prayer, begin with this signing. At the announcement of the gospel reading, sign head and lips and heart with this cross. When you are seriously ill, the church will trace this cross on your senses again. When

3. Richard Fragomeni, *Catechumenate* (January 1987): 7.

you have died, your body will yet be signed with the sign of the cross.

This rite stands as passage into the church and as the way catechumens and faithful begin their days, begin their assemblies, bless their children, comfort their sick, bury their dead. Rituals, as scholars have told us, are rehearsals. They are the learning of our lines and moves, the trying on of our vesture. What is this cross that admits an inquirer into the catechumenate but a tiny rite that will little by little reveal what is the shape of Christian life. This is what your life is to look like. Do this day by day and let it rehearse you to live day by day until you get your part right, until your life is itself this wonderful and saving sign. That is not some gloom and doom approach, not so long as it can be informed by that spirit which sings on Good Friday, "We worship you, Lord, we venerate your cross, we praise your resurrection. Through the cross you brought joy to the world." Or informed by Paul: "We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection." Or informed by the sixth century poet Fortunatus:

Blest tree, whose chosen branches bore
The wealth that did the world restore,
The price of humankind to pay
And spoil the spoiler of his prey.

O cross, our one reliance, hail!

Or informed by the songs of the Byzantine church:

Rejoice, O life-bearing Cross, the door of paradise,
the foundation of the faithful.

Or informed by the contemporary French poet:

Holy tree which reaches up from earth to heaven
That all the world may exult in Jacob's God.

Or informed by the sixth century poet Romanos who has the devil say:

Let us lament as we see the tree which we planted
Changed into a holy trunk.
Robbers, murderers, tax gatherers, harlots,
Rest beneath it, and make nests
In its branches in order that they might gather
The fruit of sweetness from supposedly sterile wood.
For they cling to the cross as the tree of life.

They cling to the cross! That is something of how the church has and can unfold the signing, ponder it, deepen it, encourage it as daily gesture, let it tell us day by day what we mean, what my baptized life means, what that life should day by day resemble.

The Word

The Rite of Reception into the Catechumenate is again our first source. After the signing of the cross, the rubric instructs:

The celebrant speaks to them briefly, helping them to understand the dignity of God's word, which is proclaimed and heard in the church. The lectionary or the Bible is carried in procession and placed with honor on the lectern, where it may be incensed.

Scriptures are then read and a homily given. After the homily, a book of the scriptures may be given to each catechumen. After this the catechumens are dismissed. One option for the dismissal words is:

My dear friends, this community now sends you forth to reflect more deeply upon the word of God which you have shared with us today. Be assured of our loving support and prayers for you. We look forward to the day when you will share fully in the Lord's table.

This instruction to reflect deeply upon the word of God shared in the Church is indeed key to how the RCIA understands the whole period of the catechumenate which may last several years. Again and again those responsible for the catechumenate are reminded that primary to this period of time is immersion in God's word. The catechumens are to be present when the church assembles on Sunday; they

are dismissed before the intercessions and the eucharist, but they are to hear the scriptures and the homily. Catechists and others are to continue to instruct them in the scriptures, and special liturgies of the word are to be part of the catechumenate. The instruction makes clear that this is not any Bible study program but is a disciplined reading and pondering and study of the scriptures which is founded on the lectionary itself. It is therefore based, during Ordinary Time, on the *lectio continua*, on the continuous reading of the gospels and of the other New Testament writings. The present Sunday lectionary, though it presents much that is significant from the Hebrew Scriptures, has yet to recognize a valid approach to those scriptures. More and more, catechumenates are accepting this challenge and are discovering how the lectionary can shape all the pre-baptismal catechesis. It seems that this is itself what we must mean by a liturgical piety. We belong to churches where it is not at the whim of the preacher to open the book to any spot and read. The book is marked. We journey with it, going page by page. During the seasons, we have ancient traditions that guide us to specific texts. We have not made this book servant but our companion and our teacher. The book itself, carried and held and opened with dignity, honored with light and incense, is a constant and loving and visible witness in our midst. This and the way in which preachers and catechists lead the assembly and the catechumens regularly into dialogue with the scriptures, is again formation in a distinctly liturgical piety. It is a piety, or a spirit as the Constitution calls it, which approaches the scriptures in a certain way--a way which the liturgy itself teaches through careful and well-prepared proclamation, through times of silent reflection, through the use of psalmody and acclamation to reflect on and rejoice in the scriptures, and through the preaching which is a model for how study and imagination engage the scriptures. A catechumen is to learn the scriptures and to learn the way. This will bring with it the learning of the liturgical year, the Ordinary Time and the seasons as these are defined chiefly through their lectionaries.

The Roman documents refer to the liturgy of the word as the foundation of the liturgy (for example, *Introduction to the Lectionary*, #3). This description is important for it speaks of a relationship which the rites themselves are

to manifest. When Christian churches assemble, they listen to God's word read out in their midst. On this rests all else that they do. What the whole manner of our liturgy must make clear is that this is something the church does: the church reads and the church listens. It is not simply a collection of individuals responding to the announcement of a speaker or a workshop. It is the church assembled reading and listening, powerful, reflecting in psalmody and homily. That is our way of being with the scriptures. It is our way of making a foundation, something upon which we may then intercede and do eucharist. Through the months of the catechumenate, those newly come should sense how real this is for the church.

The Easter vigil itself, at which the catechumens are at last led to the baptismal waters, is also an important part in defining, with relation to the scriptures, what a liturgical piety looks like. For here we see what happens at the very heart of the year. The prayer and fasting and almsgiving of Lent's forty days give way on Thursday evening to the Paschal Triduum. From Thursday night until the vigil the principal rituals of catechumens and faithful alike are fasting and vigiling. This fasting, unlike that of Lent, is a fasting of anticipation, a fasting of excitement, a sort of pre-marital fast. It is not only a fasting from food, but in the sense of keeping watch, it is also a fasting from work and from the seeking of distractions. Marked by occasional gatherings for public liturgy, the Easter fast brings the assembly together at the vigil "with uplifted and clear mind" as the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* expresses it. What happens then? After kindling fire and lighting the Easter candle and praising God, the hungry assembly is fed in a once-a-year manner at the table of the word. We spend a long time reading, listening, reflecting, singing psalms, praying. And what do we hear? On the one hand, we hear some of the scriptures we are likely to know best. Everyone knows Genesis 1. And yet we read it, aloud, with some care and no haste. It is not new information. It is foundation. It is what we hunger for, or at least it is what we want to hunger for. And that is very difficult, but that is exactly liturgical piety. To be hungry to hear the dear old words with that uplifted and clear mind where they will be new because they are old. What would it be like to be hungry, really hungry, for that moment

when the lector opens the book to its very first page and reads out: "In the beginning" That kind of hunger would be found in a life whose piety, whose spirit, is shaped by the liturgy. Faithful and catechumens would come to know this night as one filled with the foundational stories and the rare poems. The rites of baptism and eucharist which follow would then have a true foundation; the forty days of Lent and the fifty days of Easter would have a center, as would the year itself.

Exorcisms, Scrutinies, and Renunciations

The RCIA says of the exorcisms which may take place at various moments during the catechumenate:

They draw the attention of the catechumens to the real nature of Christian life, the struggle between flesh and spirit, the importance of self-denial for reaching the blessedness of God's kingdom, and the unending need for God's help. (#90)

The rubrics direct the catechumens to bow or kneel and the presider to pray with arms outstretched over the catechumens. The texts provided include petitions like these:

Protect them from the spirit of evil and guard them against error and sin.

In the name of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we ask you to remove from these your servants the love of money and lawless passions, enmity and quarreling, and every manner of evil.

Help these your servants, who hear the word of the gospel, and protect them from the spirit of greed, of lust, and of pride. May they find the blessings of your kingdom in poverty and in hunger, in mercy and in purity of heart. May they work for peace and joyfully endure persecution. Hold in check the power of the evil one, and show them your mercy; heal in them the wounds of sin and fill their hearts with your peace.

These brief rites of exorcism may be accompanied by a rite of anointing with the oil of the catechumens, or this anointing may be itself a rite celebrated at appropriate moments during the catechumenate. The RCIA describes this rite:

The anointing with oil symbolizes their need for God's help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unflinching throughout their lives. (#99)

This is the anointing of the one who wrestles, the one who does battle with an enemy. It had become but a brief part of the pre-baptismal rites; the RCIA first extended it to be one of the rites which could be celebrated on Holy Saturday, during the day. The current revision allows much more extensive use of this rite.

The scrutinies come on the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent when the A cycle gospels are read: the woman at the well, the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus. The RCIA introduction says of the scrutinies:

[They] are rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ By this means, first of all, the elect are instructed gradually about the mystery of sin, from which the whole world and every person longs to be delivered and thus saved from its present and future consequences. Second, their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is the living water, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life. From the first to the final scrutiny the elect should progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation. (#141, #143)

In the scrutiny rite itself, the catechumens come before the assembly after the homily. They kneel or bow their heads as prayers of intercession are spoken or sung. These intercessions are not the general intercessions but are prayers specifically for the elect. Some of the petitions include: that they may humbly confess themselves to be sinners, that they may sincerely reject everything in their lives that is displeasing and contrary to Christ, that they may be freed from the spirit of mistrust, that they may put all fear behind them and press forward with confidence, that liberated by repentance from the shackles of sin they may become like Christ by baptism. The litany is followed by a prayer of exorcism with a laying on of hands; the text flows from the gospel reading of the Sunday.

The final moments before baptism are given now as in the ancient church to the renunciation of evil and the profession of faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The RCIA adds nothing to the rather brief questions and answers familiar from the Roman Rite of Baptism. This is certainly acceptable if, because of the exorcisms and anointings with oil of the catechumens and scrutinies, these brief statements may now sum up what has been a constant and powerful movement throughout the catechumenate. Even so, one would wish for some greater strength here (as one would in almost all of these texts: we get very soft in our language when we have to speak of evil). Nor is there any ritual gesture present, nothing to compare with the Byzantine liturgy where the catechumens face the west for the renunciation and are told, in a ritual gesture that would make us rightly uncomfortable, to spit at Satan.

Alexander Schmemmann said this of the renunciation rites, which could apply to this whole complex of ritual that is to pervade our catechumenate:

To renounce Satan thus is not to reject a mythological being in whose existence one does not even believe. It is to reject an entire worldview made up of pride and self-affirmation, of that pride which has truly taken human life from God and made it into darkness, death and hell. And one can be sure that Satan will not forget this renunciation,

this rejection, this challenge. "Breathe and spit upon him!" A war is declared! A fight begins whose real issue is either eternal life or eternal damnation. For this is what Christianity is about. This is what our choice ultimately means!⁴

It seems that our churches are being very slow to accept this whole dimension of the catechumenate. Neither presiders nor catechists nor the catechumens themselves are, as a matter of course, prepared for what exorcisms, anointing, scrutinies, or renunciations are all about. Yet exactly here is the reason for a catechumenate. Here is what makes this initiation different from joining a social or benevolent organization. Here is where the whole work of pondering gospel life is done, or begun at least. The ample presence of such rites would indicate, in our context today, that here is for all of us something which is to give essential shape to our church, to our selves. A liturgical piety is not one cut off from the struggle with evil; a liturgical piety is not one that knows nothing of naming the evil of this day. It does name it. It names it in these rites and it names it week by week in Sunday intercessions, day by day in psalms and canticles and traditional texts learned by heart and made one's own.

Conclusion

We have looked at three elements from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, three examples of how we might understand our ritual--the rituals which slowly through their repetition over weeks, seasons, and years become truly our own, this church's, this assembly's --might understand our ritual as formative of our piety, as constituting our very spirit as Christians. What we should see is that the ritual expressions--the sign of the cross, the reading of scripture, the confrontation with evil--are not limited to the public liturgy but naturally

4. Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (n.p.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, c. 1974) 30.

are found also in the everyday rites of individuals and of households. They need to live in both settings, slowly giving shape to a life.