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Mystagogy, not a word you hear every day, comes to us from the Greek meaning "interpretation of mystery." In the early church, the newly baptized (neophytes) first had to *experience* the ceremony of the water bath, followed by anointing and coming to the table for the first time, before ever being allowed to talk about it. Why? Because people believed the ritual event was so profound that no amount of teaching or explanation could compare. We first hear God's call, so beautifully expressed in Dan Schutte's song, "Here I am Lord." The language to express our faith comes later.

Who will bear my light to them, whom shall I send?

What leads a person to begin even considering the possibility of becoming a full member of the baptized Catholic community? I suspect that the tales of each are as individual as the people themselves. Everyone has a story — a sacred story that needs to be honored. Often the process begins days, weeks, even years prior to their ever setting foot in the first inquiry meeting. Who is charged with the privilege of guiding them throughout the process? What is expected of these guides? Catechists, godparents, pastors ... actually, the entire community is responsible for passing on the light of faith to these newcomers. We are called to be mystagogues — that is, those who embody and make available to others a set of values, a different way of living. We are to be human bridges who help others to reflect on what is important to the human heart.

Those involved in any way with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) must themselves have a deep and rich relationship with God through personal prayer. This process is not just a matter of offering classes that teach doctrine and devotion, but a process that focuses on that deep place in the soul where God dwells. Breaking open word and symbol, having the courage and willingness to share how God has worked in your own life is a vital part of guiding those who are experiencing God's grace coming alive in their own hearts. It is a journey of conversion.

I will speak my word to them, whom shall I send?

God speaks to us in many ways on many levels. Only if we are paying attention will we be open to recognizing God's voice. Do we take the time to ponder what possible meaning or grace is being offered in a particular moment through the people, events, thoughts and inspirations that occur daily? The Sunday scriptures are crucial to all of us, especially catechumens and candidates. Scriptural reflection opens us to receive what God offers, opens us to humility and brings about change at the deepest levels of our being. We are busy people who are easily distracted by so many demands made on our time and energy. We are surrounded constantly by noise from gadgets and people. It is easy for the voice of the Spirit to be lost in this endless din. Yet, we come to liturgy weekly, assemble as a worshipping community, bring with us all the joys and pains, deaths and resurrections of our week in order to find a place for them in God's plan. In the words of "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" (#14), the liturgy calls us to "full, active, conscious participation," but we are also to keep in mind that the liturgy is primarily God's work, God's invitation, God's initiative, God's grace. We, for our part, are to be alert to what is happening in liturgy, to be as present as we can to the Mystery. Attentiveness to language, music, word, silence, movement and symbol enables us to be receptive to how God is speaking and acting in our lives here and now. Sharing our spiritual encounters with one another strengthens the community of faith as we journey together.

I will give my life to them, whom shall I send?

At worship a diverse group of individuals assembles as one, united by a common hunger around the Lord's table of Word and Eucharist. We experience reciprocal reverence. As the Eucharist is celebrated, we ourselves are broken and poured out, nourished and fed — God's life lavished upon us. But this gift is not meant for us alone. At the end of every Mass, we are sent to "love and serve the Lord." We are charged with the task of love and service, of keeping heaven's memory alive. Our own hearts satisfied, and we now carry Christ's light, word and life to a broken world.

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Questions for reflection:

- What was a significant moment for you in this liturgy? Why?

- What was your experience of God, Christ, the Spirit, the community?
- Have you heard God "calling in the night"? What kind of commitment did you make as a result?
- How can the RCIA process be a model for all sacramental preparation?

Recommended Reading:

- *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Introduction).
- *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament*, by Kathleen Hughes, Liturgy Training Publications, 1999.

Editor's note: This reflection was originally published in the May 2010 issue of [*Celebration*](#). Sign up to receive [daily Lenten reflections](#).

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