

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The journey of faith involves growing in love of God and his Church.
- The Scripture readings from the Easter Vigil help us reflect on our faith journeys.
- Initiation into the Church is the beginning of full membership and ongoing formation.

Easter Vigil Retreat

You've come a long way on your journey of faith. You've become part of a faith community, grown in knowledge and awareness of God, and made new friends and memories. You've been preparing for the next step—initiation into the Church and reception of the sacraments.

The reflections and activities during this time of reflection and sharing will help you prepare in heart and spirit for the celebration of Christ's resurrection and the next stage of your faith journey.

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds to your presence. Guide our steps along our journey of faith today and always, so that we may come closer to you every day. Amen.

First Reading: Genesis 1:1—2:2

"God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good."

Genesis 1:31

Spend some time walking outside by yourself. Become aware of God's presence in creation all around you. When an object or scene catches your eye, ask God what he's trying to reveal to you. For example, a plant growing through a cracked stone or sidewalk might remind you that faith can grow even in tough times. A seedpod may represent the need for patience in your spiritual growth. A sturdy oak may show how faith can grow in strength. Weeds may represent things that distract our focus on God.

If walking outside isn't possible, imagine walking in a park, looking at everything around you until you see something that reminds you of God. When an object or scene catches your eye, ask God what he's trying to reveal to you.

- What do you learn about God from reflecting on his creation of the natural world?



Second Reading: Genesis 22:1–18

"God put Abraham to the test and said to him: Abraham! 'Here I am!' he replied."

Genesis 22:1

"Here I am!" Can we respond so eagerly to God's call? God has given Abraham so much, but now God is asking Abraham: *Do you trust me? Are you really ready to answer my call?* As you look forward to entering the Church, these are questions you must answer as well.

- Look back on your faith journey during the RCIA process. What have you felt called to sacrifice or offer during this journey? (A habit that wasn't Christian? A way of thinking? A commitment of time for Mass and RCIA sessions?) It should be a sacrifice that had meaning for you.

- What have you gained as a result of making this sacrifice?

Third Reading: Exodus 14:15—15:1

"Then the LORD said to Moses:... 'Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it in two, that the Israelites may pass through the sea on dry land.'"

Exodus 14:15–16

God is still working miracles for each of us. As you've gone through the RCIA process, you've traveled on a journey similar to that of the Israelites. God called you from the slavery of sin to the freedom of loving God and others. You've broken with your past life to discover a new life with God and his Church. All along your journey, God has guided and protected you.

- How are you different from when you started the RCIA process?
- What was the most wonderful thing God did for you on this journey? (A special memory? Someone you met? A prayer experience?)

- What has been the most difficult part of the process for you? How has God guided and protected you through that difficult time?

Fourth Reading: Isaiah 54:5–14

"Though the mountains fall away and the hills be shaken, My love shall never fall away from you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you."

Isaiah 54:10

This is a love letter from God. God is pictured here as a spouse and lover who wants to be reconciled with us, to shower us with love.

A Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position...Close your eyes... Breathe in...Breathe out...Breathe in...Breathe out... Breathe in...Breathe out...Keep paying attention to your breath...If thoughts come, let them go and bring your attention back to your breath.

Now imagine that you're surrounded by God's love just as you're surrounded by the air...With each breath, imagine that you breathe God's love into your whole being...And as you breathe out, you breathe love back to God.

- What human relationship best describes your relationship with God?

- How would your life be different if you believed that God is as close to you as a best friend and cares for you in the same way?

Fifth Reading: Isaiah 55:1–11

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it."

Isaiah 55:11

This reading speaks eloquently about the power of God's word.

Spend some time in quiet reflection on God's word. Ask God to reveal to you something about your journey through this reading. Read this passage slowly and prayerfully. As you read, be aware of your reactions. What phrase or verse causes the strongest reaction in you? Consider negative reactions as well as positive feelings. A feeling of discomfort or tension might indicate something God wants to show you but that you're resisting.

Silently repeat the phrase that causes strong reaction. Don't think about what it means, simply repeat it over and over. Imagine that you're hearing God repeat the phrase to you. Continue to pray this way for a few minutes.

Now sit silently and reflect on this phrase and how it relates to your life. Talk to God about what thoughts and feelings you have. Listen inside yourself for any response that might be God's prompting.

Finally, let yourself grow silent again and simply sit in the presence of God and God's word.

- What change can you make in your life based on what you've learned from this word of God? Resolve to make this step.



Sixth Reading: Baruch 3:9–15, 32–4:4

"Blessed are we, O Israel; for what pleases God is known to us!"

Baruch 4:4

This reading talks about wisdom. But, as this and other readings make clear, the "wisdom" the world follows isn't always the true wisdom of God. As St. Paul tells us, the wisdom of God often seems foolish to those who look for worldly approval and success. In your journey through the RCIA process, you've learned a lot about the difference between God's perspective and the world's.

Make a list of "wisdom" messages from the world. Then for each piece of the world's "wisdom," write what God's wisdom is, using quotations from Jesus if possible. For example, world wisdom: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." God's wisdom:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal."

Matthew 6:19–20

- What is your definition of wisdom?
- How is it different from what you thought was wise before you joined this group?



Seventh Reading: Ezekiel 36:16–28

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26

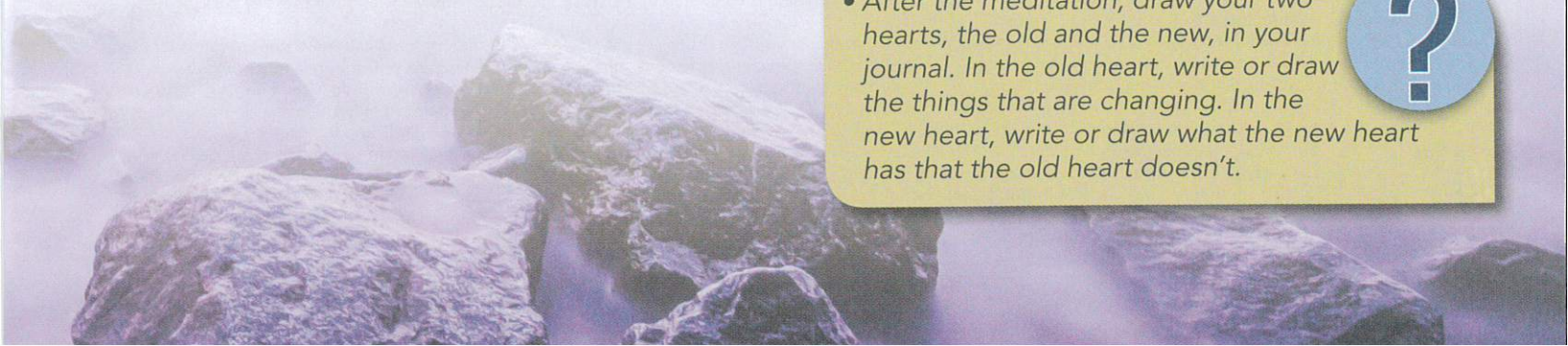
A Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position...Close your eyes...Now breathe in...Breathe out...Breathe in...Breathe out...Breathe in...Breathe out...With each breath, imagine that your mind is sinking deeper...deeper to the center of yourself...your heart.

You're still breathing and thinking from your center, your heart...Now ask God to show you your heart...What is it like?...What needs to be changed in your heart?

Now, imagine that God is creating a new heart within you. What is God's heart like?...How do you feel with this new heart within you?

- After the meditation, draw your two hearts, the old and the new, in your journal. In the old heart, write or draw the things that are changing. In the new heart, write or draw what the new heart has that the old heart doesn't.



Epistle: Romans 6:3–11

"We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

Romans 6:4

- In baptism, we die with Christ. It's natural to be afraid of loss. What fears do you have about changes this step will make in your life?
- In baptism, we're raised with Christ. What hopes do you have about your future in the Church?



Gospel:

Year A, Matthew 28:1–10;

Year B, Mark 16:1–7;

Year C, Luke 24:1–12

"You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here."

Mark 16:6

- Reflect on the miracle of Christ's resurrection, Christ's promise to you, and Christ's presence in your life.



Closing Prayer

Lord, you are the resurrection and the life. We have journeyed from darkness to light, from being alone to belonging, from doubt to faith. Guide us on the next step of our journey to make a commitment—a covenant with the living God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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