



PARTICIPATION GUIDE

ENTER THE MYSTERY

MYSTAGOGICAL REFLECTION
ON THE SYMBOLS OF
CATHOLIC LITURGY

ENTER THE MYSTERY

WAYS TO PARTICIPATE:

1. A VIDEO REFLECTION WILL BE PREMIERED ON THE *SOMOS DE LA VID* WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA EACH SUNDAY, MARCH 28 (INTRO) THROUGH MAY 16.
2. INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE WITH THIS PERSONAL REFLECTION PARTICIPATION GUIDE POSTED ON THE *SOMOS DE LA VID* WEBSITE.
3. COMMUNAL EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTION (IN PERSON & VIRTUAL) AT 7:00 P.M. ON THURSDAYS, APRIL 8 THROUGH MAY 20 AT THE NORBERTINE ABBEY CHURCH.

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INSTAGRAM: @SOMOSDELAVID

ADDRESS: NORBERTINE COMMUNITY OF SANTA MARIA DE LA VID ABBEY

5825 COORS BLVD. SW

ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87121



WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION

MY STORY

Many years ago, I attended leadership training for *Life Teen*, a program for youth formation and ministry. On the evening dedicated to a session about praying with teens, we all gathered in the church. The presenter that evening explained that the only way we could learn to pray with teenagers was to know how to pray ourselves.

So as the lights dimmed and quiet instrumental music was played, we began with a period of *Lectio Divina*, reflection on sacred scripture. The scripture selection that evening was Matthew 5:13-16:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

We were asked to close our eyes and listen, to hear a word or phrase that stayed with us, and to ponder in silence. Then the scripture was proclaimed a second time. This time we were asked to invite God to speak to us – what did God want us to know? Finally, we were asked to turn to the person next to us and share our insight into God's word.

It was at that moment that I turned to my friend, who was also attending the training and sitting next to me. I looked at her with my eyes full of tears and she asked me what was wrong. I simply replied: "I didn't know I had a light!"

It was in that moment of experiencing the Mystery of God through scripture that my heart was transformed. I recognized that my ministry is about allowing the Light of Christ shine through me. That experience, that insight, changed the way I see myself as a child of God, and it changed the way I minister to others.

HOW DO YOU LEARN MYSTERY?

You don't. Mystery is something that is experienced and encountered, without explanation. We enter into mystery, open to what we may encounter there, to be touched and transformed by it, so that we may proclaim it to others. The term *Mystagogy* comes from the Greek word *μυσταγωγία*, meaning "to lead through the mysteries."

Our encounters with Jesus are an entry into Mystery. To be a follower of Jesus is to enter into relationship with him, to be touched and transformed by that relationship, and to share that experience of faith with those we meet. One of the principle ways in which we encounter Jesus Christ is in rituals and symbols of the Catholic liturgy.

Experiencing the Paschal Mystery of Christ involves more than words. We cannot simply talk about faith; we must embody faith. We enact our faith through rituals and gestures that immerse us into an experience of the Paschal Mystery. In our Catholic faith the liturgy of the Church places us in contact with the Mystery of God revealed in Christ. What we are doing when we gather for worship is mysterious: we are participating in the work of God.

This journey into and through Mystery has several characteristics:

1. **It is for all the baptized.** While we may be familiar with mystagogy as something for the newly baptized, it really is something that all the baptized are called to participate in.
2. **It is life-long.** Mystagogy – entering into the Paschal Mystery – is a way of life for followers of Christ. It is an ongoing awareness of the presence of God around us.
3. **It is both personal and communal.** While each individual has their own personal encounter with Christ in the Paschal Mystery, mystagogy finds its center in the well-celebrated liturgical and sacramental life of the faith community.

4. **It is sensual.** Entering into an experience of Christ in the Paschal Mystery requires the use of all our senses; it is an awareness of what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell.

PAYING ATTENTION

There are multiple obstacles pulling our attention in all directions: the noise of the world around us, our need for speed and multi-tasking, the many digital and electronic gadgets that call to us, and the busyness of our lives. During the celebration of the liturgy, there are other challenges to our ability to recognize God's presence in our midst: the monotony of ritual habit, the desire to feel good or get something out of it, a focus on style, manner, and personality of the minister, and a lack of silence.

The first step to an encounter with the Mystery of God in the liturgy is to pay attention. We must put aside these obstacles and give our attention to the liturgy as it unfolds, and we experience it. We must also attend to the movement of our hearts before, during and after our experience of the liturgy.

HOW DO WE ENTER THE MYSTERY?

To fully enter the Mystery, then, is to overcome all these obstacles and direct our minds and hearts toward our deepest longings for an encounter with beauty, meaning, simplicity, reverence, relationships, and wholeness.

The symbols we use in worship are ordinary, familiar things – fire, oil, bread, water. They call to mind the bread we eat at our meals, the candles we have in our homes, the oils we use to soften our skin, and water which we drink and in which we bathe. As we encounter these symbols, we invite you to follow a simple four-step process of contemplation:

Awareness

- Open yourself to the sights and sounds and smells of the experience
- Become alert and focused on the symbol and the ritual
- Be aware of the physical choreography of the body, movement, gestures and postures

Reflection

- Allow the symbol and the symbolic language of the ritual speak
- Begin to question and reflect more deeply
- Meditate on the realities beyond the surface of the experience

Reception

- Move from rational reflection to prayer of the heart
- Ponder, as Mary did, what this might mean
- Allow your heart to be tutored by the Holy Spirit
- Give yourself over to the power of the symbol

Transformation

- Become like Moses, standing in God's presence, beholding and reflecting God's glory
- Be aware that the process of transformation has already begun
- Begin to recognize that there are consequences, ways in which you may be challenged to change or grow in faith

WEEK 2 – WATER

Awareness

Find some water. It doesn't need to be holy water. Tap water in a glass or bowl will work. Fill a bathtub or bucket with water, stand in the rain, or turn on a water hose or lawn sprinkler. Walk down to the river or stream or arroyo. Go to the lake.

Touch the water. Is it too hot? Too cold? Just right?

See the water. Is it clear or cloudy? Full of soap bubbles or muddy?

Hear the water. Is it running from a faucet, or downstream? Is it still? What does it sound like?

Smell the water. Does it have an odor, good or foul?

Taste the water. Is it refreshing or salty? Perhaps it shouldn't be tasted at all.

Reflection

Water brings about life and sustains life; it can also bring about death. Water is vital for our survival; we cannot live without it. Most of the earth is made up of water, and so are our human bodies. Water cleanses, it washes away dirt, and it wears away mountains and solid rock. It polishes stones in the riverbed, and it smashes them on the beach, pulverizing them into sand.

Have you ever been in a flood, or a severe drought? Have you ever been so dirty, or thirsty, that all you can think about is getting a bath, or a drink of water? In what ways have you experienced the life or death water can bring?

Reception

Blessing of Water (from the Easter Vigil)

O God, whose Spirit in the first moments of the world's creation hovered over the waters...

O God, who by the outpouring of the flood foreshadowed regeneration...

O God, who caused the children of Abraham to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea...

O God, whose Son, baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan, was anointed with the Holy Spirit...

Do you remember your own baptism, or the baptism of a friend or family member? What do you think of when you touch the water of the font and make the sign of the cross? How does the sacredness of the water speak to you as a child of God?

Transformation

*O water mysterious,
O water miraculous,
you make us a people,
children of God, friends of Jesus:
survivors of death
and lovers of life –
the baptized.*

WEEK 3 – OIL

Awareness

Find some oil. It doesn't need to be blessed or holy oil. Olive oil or cooking oil in a glass or bowl will work. Perhaps it is massage oil used to relieve aching muscles. Or the oil found in lotions and salves, to soften our hands and heal our wounds. Machine oil or engine oil, to provide energy, light, and heat.

Touch the oil. Is it thick or thin? Smooth or clumping?

See the oil. What is its color? Is it clean and clear or cloudy?

Hear the oil. Is it heating and sizzling in a pan? Is it still? What does it sound like?

Smell the oil. Does it have an odor, good or foul?

Reflection

Oil has the power to soothe when it is rubbed into a sore muscle or chafed skin. It has the power to seal in water when rubbed over a baby fresh out of a bath. It produces warmth when it is burned in stoves and it radiates light when it is burned in lamps. Holy oils anoint babies and adults in Baptism, candidate for Confirmation, and those who are ill. Holy oil anoints new bishops and priests and is poured on a new altar and on church buildings for their consecration. In scriptures oil was used to anoint the high priest of the Temple, and to anoint kings, and to anoint the dead.

Has your car ever run out of oil? Has your skin been so dry and chapped that it begins to crack and bleed? Have you felt the softness of a baby's skin? In what ways do you use oil or lotions to keep things running smoothly, soft and supple, to keep things from sticking together?

Reception

Reception of Holy Oils (from the Mass of the Lord's Supper)

May the sick who are anointed with this oil experience the compassion of Christ and his saving love in body, mind, and soul.

*Through the anointing with this oil may our catechumens who are preparing to receive the saving waters of baptism
be strengthened by Christ to resist the power of Satan and reject evil in all its forms.*

*Through the anointing with this perfumed Chrism may children and adults, who are baptized and confirmed,
and presbyters, who are ordained, experience the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Do you remember the smell the Chrism of Confirmation, or the feel of rubbing the oil of the sick into your hands? What is your experience of being anointed, or of seeing another person be anointed?

Transformation

Oil applied ahead of time seals the skin against its enemies – sun and water, wind and cold;

oil gives the fighter a fighting chance to slide and squirm elusively

Oil applied remedially repairs the wounds of war and work, chapped, cracked, broken skin salved and soothed,

unguent for bruise and burn, for wound and rash, for scrape and scar...

poured, smeared, daubed, rubbed in: liniment of the spirit, healing balm.

Strength for the athlete, fragrance for the bride; glow of health, vitality, and youth, odor and reflection of sacred beauty.

Heady scent upon the sainted head, fresh fragrance of the Lord's loved ones, by the odor of whose unguents we are allured.

WEEK 4 – SACRED IMAGES (THE CROSS)

Awareness

Find a cross or crucifix. It might be one that hangs on your wall at home or at your office, or it might be one that you wear around your neck, or at the end of a Rosary.

Touch the cross. Hold the cross. Is it rough or smooth? What is it made of?

See the cross. Does it have a corpus (the body of Jesus) or is it a plain cross? Does it hang in your home? Around your neck?

Smell the cross. Does it have an “old” scent or a “new” smell?

Make the Sign of the Cross. Focus on the gesture as you speak the words, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Reflection

Most of us are aware that the cross in Jesus’ time was an instrument of torture; it was a means of execution. Jesus died nailed to a cross. But the heart of the Gospel is that the cross – death – does not have the last word. In liturgy we use the cross in various ways: we follow the cross in processions and mark our bodies with it. We venerate the cross with incense, and reverence it with a kiss or a bow on Good Friday. We bless people and things by making the Sign of the Cross over them. For us the cross is a sign of life, salvation, hope, blessing, and triumph.

Do you have a cross or crucifix in your home, car, or office? Do you wear a cross as a piece of jewelry? Why or why not? Reflect on the crosses in your life.

Reception

Preface V of Easter, no. 49 (from the Roman Missal)

*It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, at all times to acclaim you, O Lord,
but in this time above all to laud you yet more gloriously, when Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.*

*By the offering of his Body, he brought the sacrifices of old to fulfillment in the reality of the Cross
and, by commending himself to you for our salvation, showed himself the Priest, the Altar, and the Lamb of Sacrifice.*

Christ made the cross the instrument of our salvation. In what ways do you join your suffering, your personal crosses, to the cross of Christ? Do you allow Christ to carry your cross with you? How willing are you to carry Christ's cross?

Transformation

*At the beginning and end of Mass;
at the beginning and end of our lives;
at the beginning and end of all we do
stands the sign of the cross, saying:
this place, this span of time, this life, this child,
these people, this body – living or dead –
belongs to the Lord and will not be taken
from him who bears in his body the indelible marks of that same cross.*

WEEK 5 – LITURGICAL COLORS

Awareness

Gather some cloth or clothing in these colors: green, red, white, and violet (purple). A small scrap of material will work, or some t-shirts, scarves or neckties from the closet.

Touch the fabric. How does it feel? Is it soft and flowing, or stiff and sturdy?

See the fabric colors. Are they bright or subdued? Do they vary in shade or are they of one tint? Is the color patterned or plain?

If you are colorblind, what do you see? How do you distinguish one color from another?

Reflection

Colors fill our lives. We select colors to decorate our homes, coordinate our sheets and towels, and plan our wardrobe. Colors can also express to others how we feel, or what we are celebrating. Colors also indicate what season we are living in: green summer, multi-colored autumn, dreary winter, floral springtime. The church clothes itself in color to express our liturgical mood: violet or purple for penitence and preparation; white for resurrection joy and purity; green for hope, growth, and life; red for the blood of martyrs and the fire of the Spirit.

Do you have a favorite or least favorite color? What is it? Why do you like or dislike that color? In what ways does that color “speak” to you?

Reception

Psalm 23:1-3

The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.

In green pastures he makes me lie down;

to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul.

He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.

Revelation 7:13-14

Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?"

I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows."

He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress;

they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

When you see the colors of the liturgical seasons in church, what do they make you think of? Do you see them? Are they joyful or serene, bright or dingy? In what ways do the colors of the church direct your mood?

Transformation

The Church is fruitful, made holy by the blood of Christ: a bride made radiant with his glory.

The Church is holy, your chosen vineyard: its branches envelop the world, its tendrils reach up to heaven.

The Church is favored, the dwelling place of God on earth: a temple built of living stones.

The Church is exalted, a city set on a mountain: a beacon to the world, bright with the glory of the Lamb.

WEEK 6 – INCENSE

Awareness

You might purchase a package of incense sticks or cones at a local shop, or perhaps your parish is using incense at Mass. You might even get a small quantity at a local church goods store that you can burn at home. Use an incense burner or a fire-safe bowl or plate in which to burn the incense.

Touch the incense. How does it feel as you prepare to light it?

Hear the incense. Does it make any sound as you light it, or as it burns?

See the incense. What shape is it? Is it a stick or cone, or small grains to place on charcoal? Watch the smoke as it begins to rise.

Smell the incense. What is its fragrance? Is it floral or woody? Does it make you cough?

Reflection

For some incense is a constant aroma around the home, used to add fragrance to our surroundings or sometimes to cover other odors. For many the only interaction with incense is in the liturgy. Incense is the “aroma of church”. Consider the many things that are honored with incense during the liturgies we celebrate: the altar, the cross, the Paschal candle, the Book of the Gospels, the gifts of bread and wine, the Eucharist itself, the priest, the assembly of people gathered in prayer. These are all symbols of Christ.

Do you use incense in your home or office? Why or why not? What fragrances do like? Does the smoke of the incense make you cough or uncomfortable? What memories are evoked by the smell?

Reception

Psalm 141:1-3

*LORD, I call to you; hasten to me; listen to my plea when I call.
Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering.
Set a guard, LORD, before my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips.*

Revelation 8:3-4

*Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar;
he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints
on the golden altar that is before the throne.
And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints,
rose before God from the hand of the angel.*

Incense in the liturgy is used to reverence holy things and holy people. The gathered assembly is incensed during Mass. You are incensed as a holy person, a child of God. Do you think of yourself as holy? Why or why not?

Transformation

*Graceful tendrils of smoke swirling, dancing, reaching upward, spending themselves as they rise,
dissipating until nothing remains but their sweet odor filling the space.
It is the nature of incense to be burned away into smoke, to be transformed into lingering fragrance.
May our prayers rise like incense before you, O Lord.
May our spent lives linger in your presence like the fragrance of incense.*

WEEK 7 – BREAD AND WINE

Awareness

Place a loaf of bread (or a large piece) on a plate and pour a small amount of wine into a glass. A homemade loaf of bread enhances the experience, but any kind of bread and wine will work.

Touch the bread. Is it fresh or stale? Soft or hard?

See the bread and wine. What is its color? Is the wine white, rose, or red? Is the bread white or wheat?

Smell the bread and wine. What fragrances come to mind?

Hear the bread and wine. What sound does the bread make as you tear off a piece? Listen to the wine as it is poured into a glass.

Taste the bread and wine. What kind of flavor does each have? Is the wine dry or sweet?

Reflection

Throughout the scriptures, bread was a staple of life. It was baked daily and was so important to the people that in the Bible, *bread* is often used to refer to food in general. Wine was also a staple part of the Mediterranean diet and a symbol of festivity and well-being. Both bread and wine were understood as a gift from the Lord and a sign of his blessing. While bread and wine are common, simple foodstuffs, for those of us who gather around the Lord's table, they are a sharing in the banquet of the Lamb. A banquet, a feast, a heavenly celebration through the common simple stuff of bread and wine.

Are you a baker? What is your favorite kind of bread to eat? What is your favorite wine? Are there certain kinds of bread and wine reserved for special celebrations? Do you gather around the table? Eat in the car? Home-cooked or carry-out? Reflect on your family meals.

Reception

Preparation Prayers, no. 23, 25 (from the Roman Missal)

*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you:
fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.*

*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you:
fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink.*

God takes the simple elements of bread and wine and transforms them into the Body and Blood of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. When we share in Holy Communion, we are transformed into the Mystical Body of Christ, poured out for the life of the world. Reflect on your reception of Holy Communion. How are you transformed?

Transformation

It is of the nature of food that it should be eaten. It is of the nature of food that it should be consumed.

Food exists only that it may be devoured. Drink exists only to be poured out.

Food is food, not for its own sake, but to give life to the hungry.

Drink is drink, not for its own sake, but to give joy to the drinker.

Food and drink are creatures which achieve fulfillment in being put at the disposal of others:

they exist to serve the needs of others; their destiny is met in their destruction.

This bread is my body, which is for you; this cup is my blood, poured out for you.

He is for us. It is the story of his life.

WEEK 8 – FIRE

Awareness

Find a wax candle in your home or office that you can safely light. It might be a pillar candle, or a taper, or a scented candle in a jar.

Before you light the candle, touch it. Feel the wax and the wick.

See the candle. What is its color? What kind of candle is it? Is it a taper, or in a glass?

Smell the candle. Does it have any kind of fragrance?

Hear the candle as you light it. Does the wick make a sound as the fire catches?

Watch the candle as it burns. How does the wick burn? Does the wax begin to melt and drip?

Reflection

We put candles on cakes and celebrate a person's birthday with them. We decorate our homes with them or put them on the tables around which we gather for meals. They set mood and atmosphere in our homes and other spaces. In ages past they were a necessity for light in the darkness, and even today we need them when the electricity goes out. In our churches, candles adorn the walls and the sanctuaries. Every Easter we bless fire and light a new Paschal candle that stands as an image of the Risen Christ throughout Easter Time, and at every baptism and funeral. Candles bring light into every kind of darkness and shine with brightness. Like Christ, they give of themselves completely, as they slowly burn down until the wax is used up.

Fire destroys. Fire also gives light, heat and energy. In what ways have you experienced the life, or death, that fire can bring?

Reception

The Easter Proclamation (excerpt from the Roman Missal)

*On this, your night of grace, O holy Father, accept this candle, a solemn offering,
the work of bees and of your servants' hands, an evening sacrifice of praise, this gift from your most holy Church.*

*But now we know the praises of this pillar, which glowing fire ignites for God's honor,
a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by sharing of its light,
for it is fed by melting wax, drawn out by mother bees to build a torch so precious.*

At your baptism you received a lighted candle and were told to keep the flame of faith alive in your heart. What is the light that burns within your spirit? Do you feel the flame of faith still burning? Reflect on the ways in which your inner fire leads others to the light of Christ.

Transformation

Candlelight pushing back the edges of dim shadow.

Fire consuming wax: immolation.

Dying, rising in paschal rhythm.

Christ,

light and life, resurrection radiance

aflame in conquered darkness.

RESOURCES

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