

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Conversion is a lifelong process.
- God's grace and continued perseverance are needed for spiritual growth.
- Participation is an important part of our community faith.



- What role do you see your faith playing in your life?
- How will your life be different because of it?



## Mountaintops and Valleys

*"The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, and is always in the mood for singing."*

*St. John of the Cross*

## Conversion: A Lifelong Process

Welcome! You're now a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church.

The Easter Vigil isn't the end of your formation as a Catholic. It actually marks the beginning of your commitment to learning more about and living out the Catholic Christian message. Your journey continues.

The next stage of the RCIA process is called **mystagogy**, a Greek word meaning "mystery." The early Church used the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost to explain the mystery of the sacraments celebrated at Easter. Today this post-Easter period serves a similar purpose. It's a time for **neophytes** (the newly baptized) to gain a deeper understanding of God's word, the sacraments, and what their new commitment means for their lives.

As you explore mystagogy, your focus will shift from learning about the faith to living the faith. You'll recommit to the Church every day you choose to live like Jesus.

You may be feeling what St. John of the Cross described. You may also be experiencing other feelings:

*"I felt such a spiritual high during the Easter Vigil. But now everything else seems so...ordinary."*

*"I feel like I've graduated. I guess I don't have to keep coming to these meetings."*

*"I feel kind of confused. I spent so much energy preparing for initiation into the Church. Now what do I do?"*

*"I really love my new faith, but I still have questions. Maybe I should have waited."*

Even the apostles weren't swimming in joy all the time. Peter experienced Jesus' transfiguration in person (Matthew 17:1-9) and wanted to stay on that mountaintop—but he had to come down. The joy of that mountaintop experience must have faded into the background as the apostles witnessed Jesus' suffering and death.

Whether you're still on that spiritual high or the newness is fading as you get back to life as usual, hold on to your desire to continue learning about the mysteries of faith. This is part of your ongoing conversion.

## Ongoing Conversion

At its root, conversion means "to change or turn around." **Conversion** is the ever-present call of the Christian to grow in faith and to live out that faith. It means deepening our relationship with God and our fellow Christians.

The first step in the conversion process is to turn to Jesus Christ, accept him as Lord and Savior, and choose to live the life of faith in the community of God's people. This first step is called **initial conversion**. It may be a moving experience, a dramatic moment, or something that moves you deep in your soul. Or it may be subtle, a change that happens gradually.


- *Reflect on your own initial conversion. What was the turning point that made you want to know more? When did you know you were on the right path?*

Conversion is a process that requires nurturing and the right atmosphere to continue growing. Even Jesus' apostles continued to change and grow in faith after their initial conversion.

James and John were looking for a warrior king like those of the Old Testament who would rally the people, gather an army, and drive out the Romans. But Jesus came as the "suffering servant" (see Isaiah 53) and called his apostles "not to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). This wasn't at all what they expected, but as they followed Jesus they discovered that his mission of salvation was greater than any mission of conquest they had imagined.

*Indeed, Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but he never coerced them. "For he bore witness to the truth but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His kingdom...grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself."*

CCC 160

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- *Have you ever experienced something that was better than you expected?*
  - *How have your expectations of the Church changed as you've grown in faith?*
  - *Has anything you've experienced in the Church been better than you expected?*


## How Will Ongoing Conversion Affect My Life?

In the eighteenth century, Alphonsus Liguori, an ambitious young lawyer, was handling a complicated case between two Italian dukes. When he lost the case through deception, his whole world collapsed. He stormed out of the courtroom saying, "World, I know you now."

A few weeks later, after an argument with his domineering father, he walked into a church and heard a voice saying, "Alphonsus, give yourself to me." He went up the street to the church of Our Lady of Ransom and placed his sword, the symbol of his nobility, on one of the side altars—symbolizing his decision to turn his life over to God.

But this wasn't the end of his conversion. Three years later, the young man was ordained a priest, the next step in his journey of faith. Then, while vacationing with four other priests on the Amalfi Coast, a sudden storm forced them to shore and they took refuge in a hermitage called St. Mary's of the Mountain. Alphonsus was overwhelmed with the poverty of the townspeople and dedicated himself to serving the poor of the country district. The death of his friend and teacher, Bishop Falcoia, led Alphonsus to take on the role of leader.

The process of conversion continued throughout St. Alphonsus Liguori's life. It's the same for us. God calls us to use our gifts and talents to bring love and truth to our world, and we'll be offered many opportunities for grace and continued conversion.

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- *How is God calling you to conversion in your everyday life?*
  - *What can you add to your life to continue growing closer to God?*

## Conversion Happens Every Day

*“Then [Jesus] told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.”*

Luke 18:1

Conversion is a process that takes place every day. Your initial conversion has already taken place. Now it's up to you to make sure the process doesn't stop. Luckily, the Church has given you the tools you need to keep going.

You've learned a lot about prayer during your RCIA sessions. Now it's up to you to use what you've learned. You may not be able to make time for Mass every day (although it's worth trying!). But that doesn't mean you don't have time for any prayer at all. You can offer up a quick prayer for patience when you feel frustrated or thanksgiving when something good happens. You can sacrifice something simple, like listening to music in the car to fit in a decade of the rosary or just some quiet time talking to God in your own words.

*“Pray constantly’ (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is always possible to pray. It is even a vital necessity. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable.”*

CCC 2757

You can also foster conversion by getting involved in the work of your faith community. We serve the people of God when we become active in parish choirs or music ensembles or when we become lectors or greeters.

*“As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. It makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men. It engages the faithful in the new life of the community and involves the ‘conscious, active, and fruitful participation’ of everyone.”*

CCC 1071

You also have unique gifts that enable you to serve your community. If you excel at sports, you might become a coach for a community team. If you have a passion for sharing what you know, you can volunteer your time as a tutor. If you feel called to be the hands of Christ, you could volunteer in a soup kitchen. There are limitless possibilities to share your new faith and the love of Christ in your community.

*“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*

James 2:14–17

- What would happen to your faith if you stopped all faith-related activities after receiving the sacraments of initiation?
- What would happen if everyone went out and lived faith as vibrantly and publicly as Jesus did?



## I Thought I'd Have It All Figured Out

Still have questions about your new faith? Welcome to the club! It's nearly impossible for any thinking, active Catholic to go through life without any questions about his or her faith. It's part of the conversion process. Jesus didn't kick out his apostles when they had questions or doubts. He taught them.

Having faith means not knowing with certainty but still believing. Having a relationship with God and the Church means having somewhere to turn with our questions. We might not always get the answers we expect or want, we might not get the answers society tells us are correct, but we're not alone.

*“Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”*

John 20:29

With a partner or as a group, create a list of things you can do when you have questions about your faith. Be as specific as possible and save this list where you can go back to it.

What about the ongoing conversion process sounds exciting to you? Why? What sounds scary or intimidating? Why?



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