

PRAY

Loving God, you are seeking us every minute we are seeking you. You love us as you love Jesus. Keep us always in your love. Amen.

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SPiRIT

Choosing Baptism



An interview with Joan Mitchell, CSJ

To get to Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Victor Mendoza drives down the Interstate in Minneapolis past the Twins' Target Field and past the Basilica of St. Mary. Victor got his license the day school started this year. His high school has a special Hire4work program that introduces students to jobs in the community. Four days a week Victor studies in school; one day a week Victor works for the Minnesota Twins (and if the team is in town, watches the game from the diversity marketing office window where he works).

After school and evenings Victor might be boxing or playing soccer, his two favorite sports. He likes the boxing workouts, the intensity and the fellowship of boxers sitting around and talking about the “randomest things.” “Boxers are humble because they know their strength,” Victor observes. His girlfriend boxes and has gone to national competitions.

Victor loves soccer. His dad played professionally in Mexico. Victor is 5'8", a perfect height for soccer. He

hopes to make a video to interest St. Louis University or Notre Dame in giving him an athletic scholarship.

Tuesday evenings Victor is at the Basilica, where he is preparing for baptism with other young adults. At 17, he is the youngest person participating in the RCIA program. RCIA stands for Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

“My first reason for getting baptized is my father,” says Victor. “He is Catholic, he is older, 68. It’s a

way to remember him. My dad is the one who usually helps me. I live with both my parents, but my dad drives me to soccer. He’s always been there for me and taken care of me.

“My dad grew up in Mexico going to church with his family. But my mom isn’t Catholic so there was conflict when I was born. I finally made the decision to step up to the plate and get baptized myself,” Victor explains. He has a sister studying at Georgetown, two step brothers, and two step sisters in Mexico.

Getting baptized is something Victor has wanted to do for a long time. “It’s a big thing for someone my age to be willing to put in the time and effort,” he says. “Anyone can do it. It takes faith and the right reasons.



“It started for me during eighth grade when my grandparents passed. I had a lot of questions. Why do things happen? Then Masses in high school brought me into a bigger picture. I have more faith now than I did.

“We have prayer every day in every class. I don’t say what I pray for out loud. I keep the prayers in my head and then I say amen and they all go up with everybody else’s.”

On the school’s Hire4work program Victor worked for a month at the Basilica. When he told his religion teacher he wanted to get baptized, his teacher researched what parishes had RCIA programs. Basilica was one. “It is beautiful over there,” says Victor. “I told my teacher Basilica is where I want to go.”

Victor chose a friend at Cristo Rey, another junior, as his sponsor. Victor became a catechumen, a person preparing for baptism. Together they go to the weekly RCIA sessions.

Each Tuesday the catechumens listen to the gospel and reflect on what it means with their sponsors one on one. Then they have a speaker and again break up to talk about reflection questions with their sponsors. “We pray the Our Father as a way to end,” says Victor. “It’s powerful stuff. I enjoy it a lot. People are nice. A couple of days my sponsor was not there, so I partnered with someone else, and they helped me out just as well as my sponsor did. They are welcoming people.

“It’s great to learn about the past and what people have sacrificed to have the world the way it is today. It’s great to learn from other people and to be part of the RCIA group.”

Jesus’ faithfulness to his Father impresses Victor. “Overall what Jesus does throughout his entire life, not sinning and trying to be the best person that his Father wants him to be for the benefit of all—that’s what gets me the most, to say not even one mean thing but to follow what someone wants you to do the entire time,” says Victor. “A lot of people are rebellious and don’t want to listen, but Jesus listens and does what is right the way God wants him to be.”

Baptism means being accepted into the world wide Catholic Church community. “To me it is opening a new door and being accepted into a bigger community than those around me and being more accepted in the eyes of God and Jesus.”



At the Easter Vigil last year Victor received the sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation, and eucharist. His family, the president of his school, teachers, and friends celebrated with Victor. People filled the huge church, the choir sang, bells rang, the priest lit the new fire outside, and brought the Easter candle inside the darkened church. People lit their own small candles from the Easter candle, spreading the light of the risen Christ.

Victor knew the Easter Vigil is a long service. “I thought that it might be boring, but was I wrong! It was the most elegant and most fulfilling night that I’ve ever had. I was amazed at how beautiful the church was.”

Victor remembers feeling nervous and shaking when the pastor called the catechumens to come to the altar and lay face down on the floor. “I told my sponsor I wasn’t nervous,” says Victor. “When we lay on the floor to get the blessings of all the saints, I felt protected though it was a long time lying there.”

Each catechumen climbed into the baptismal pool of water. When Victor’s turn came, Father Bauer poured water on his head, saying, “Victor, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Then Father anointed Victor on the forehead with oil, saying, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” the sacrament of confirmation.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

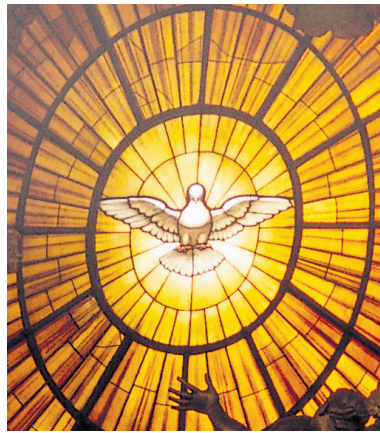
Baptism of the Lord

The Spirit anoints Jesus.

NARRATOR: When John began preaching, people were filled with expectation, wondering in their hearts whether John might be the messiah.

JOHN THE BAPTIST: I am baptizing with water, but there is one to come who is mightier than I. I am not fit to loosen his sandal strap. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

NARRATOR: Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven.



VOICE: You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.

Luke 3.15-16, 21-22

The newly baptized surrounded the pastor at the altar for the eucharist, where Victor received the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time. Victor explains, "I thought that communion was receiving a part of Christ. But when I took it, I felt different, like it wasn't just Christ but myself as well being taken into me. I thought that nothing could feel better."

"Afterwards my father was very emotional. I never knew how much my decision meant to him. Everyone who was there for me was ecstatic, giving me hugs

and wanting to take pictures of me. The president of my school couldn't stop smiling the entire night."

Victor plans to go to college, study international business, and open up his own daycare centers for middle class and lower income families in parts of the world that need them. "I think little kids are fun people," says Victor. "I used to work at a preschool nearby and I like being around the kids. I've wanted to open a daycare since freshman year."

QUESTIONS **1** What does Victor like about the process of becoming a Catholic? **2** How does his school help him? **3** What groups does Victor appreciate belonging to? **4** What change does Victor experience in receiving the sacraments? **5** Who is the Holy Spirit to Jesus? Who is God to Jesus? **6** Who is in Jesus' community?

OUR CATHOLIC FAITH:

REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE

Where do I fit in the Body of Christ?

The Church is a people just as the citizen of the United States are a people. Jesus Christ is our leader. Loving God and our neighbors as ourselves is our law. We have common rituals in the sacraments and a common destiny in heaven. The Church is also like the human body with many parts that work together and in which all parts are important. Christ is the head.

Both Israel's history and Jesus' ministry show God calls us into community. The bishops at the Second Vatican Council observe that God "has willed to make women and men holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge and serve God in holiness" (*Lumen Gentium*, #9).

The first-century Christians in the Greek seaport city of Corinth struggle to become a stronger community. In fact, these Christians get two letters from the apostle Paul about how to deal with their conflicts. The Church still reads these letters to help communities thrive today. During January and February the second readings each Sunday come from the letters that the missionary Paul wrote to the Christian community in Corinth.

When Paul became a Christian, he set out to spread the good news to people in cities all around the Mediterranean Sea. He continued the work of gathering people into Jesus' new community.

Paul brings the good news to people in Corinth about AD 50. Many problems surface in this community, problems we still face in our communities today. Paul twice wrote long letters to these Christians that we still read to help us.

The community in Corinth has cliques. Some people claim they are better Christians than others because Paul baptized them. Some claim because Apollos and Cephas baptized them they are the most

authentic Christians. Paul writes there is one Jesus, one Spirit, one message.

Cliques are not the Corinthians' only problem. Both women and men lead the community in prayer. The Spirit has poured out gifts for praying and prophesying in both men and women. This equality of gifts shakes up the usual social order. Paul himself thinks like others in his time that men are the image and reflection of God and that women share in that image through being the image and reflection of men.

Paul suggests the women veil their heads when they pray and prophesy. This would express their inferior social status at the same time they celebrate their spiritual equality.

Paul wants the women to follow the social custom and veil their heads when they lead the community in praying and reflecting. He doesn't object to them leading the community in prayer, only to their lack of head covering. Men can pray and prophesy bareheaded. Scholars are not sure why veils were important to Paul. Some suggest that veils might set Christian women apart from worshipers in other religious rituals.

The conflict over veils shows the Christian community struggling with the social order of the time. As Christians, men and women are equals but in Roman society women have lower status. Over the centuries the Christian experience of unity and mutuality in prayer and worship has helped transform societies into communities of equals. For example, many Christians over the centuries freed their slaves and finally slavery has been condemned.

In this problem we see the Spirit at work creating new forms of community. Over the centuries the Christian experience of oneness and mutuality in community has helped condemn slavery and transform societies into communities of equals. This is work that continues today.

The Corinthians have a third problem still common today. The rich don't always share with the poor. The Corinthians share a meal after they have their Eucharist. In Eucharist, they share one loaf and one cup, one Body and Blood of Christ.

But afterward when they eat their



Young people celebrate their baptisms at a youth day. Baptism calls them out to be disciples. T-shirts say, "Challenge accepted."

meal, the rich, who brings all kinds of food, keep it for themselves and don't share with the poorer members of the community. Paul wants these Christians to discover the potluck—all sharing all the food.

To teach the Corinthians, Paul compares community to how the parts of the human body work together.

Just as the body is one and has many members, but all the members, though they are many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Greek, slaves or free. All of us have been given to drink of one Spirit.

You, then, are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it.

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12.7, 12-14, 27

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Following Paul's analogy, who in your parish or school faith community is like a head? Who are all the people who think, speak, and lead others in your parish or school community?
- 2 Who are the hands in your school or parish? Who heals others in any way? Who reaches out? Who gives care in special ways?
- 3 Who are the eyes in your school or parish? Who shows you a vision of where your faith can go? Who imagines solutions to problems?
- 4 Who are the feet in your school or parish? Who travels with good news? Who makes things happen? On whose faith do you stand?
- 5 When have you been a head or hand or eye or foot in your faith community?

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