

Newt Gingrich and 150,000 other Americans become Roman Catholic this week

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Last week the United States Council of Catholic Bishops announced that over 150,000 Americans will enter into the Church during this Holy Week. Most of them will be baptized (if they never have been baptized before), confirmed, and have First Holy Communion during the Easter Vigil which is on Saturday night.

One of the most famous new converts is Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House of Representatives. He was interviewed on Chris Wallace's Fox News Sunday show this morning, and they briefly discussed the subject.

Gingrich states that his conversion is a very personal experience and has taken 10 years to accomplish. After being a Baptist for most of his life, this is a huge step for him. He states that he has found great peace in his journey to Catholicism.

But Holy Week isn't just about a well known public figure becoming Catholic, it's about all the other thousands that will do the same this week.

On Saturday night, April 7, parishes throughout the country (and world for that matter) will hold the Sacred Easter Vigil. This very ancient mass is the traditional time to receive catechumens (non-baptized people) and candidates (baptized but not confirmed) into the Church.

It is a magnificent, powerful and holy event.

Most candidates and catechumens have spent at least a year in preparation for this night. Many attend RCIA, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, which provides extensive preparation for entry into the Church. The time of preparation is a period of months or even years when questions are answered, introspective examining is encouraged, and learning about the Catholic Church and its traditions is accomplished.

Many of the parish members become familiar with the candidates and catechumens as they progress through the process that leads them to this special night, the Easter Vigil. They enter into a Church being greeted by welcoming people.

I participate in several Catholic forums and have been communicating with some who are waiting anxiously for Saturday night. Each person, including Newt Gingrich, has a tale to tell of his or her journey that has brought them to this place in their lives. It brings great joy to hear (or read) of their experiences. Putting politics aside, each will be greeted warmly as a brother or sister in Christ. We truly are a family.

We are all unique, and God touches us all in unique ways. He seems to know what each one of us needs and at the right time. For those who are part of the 150,000 new Catholics, I welcome you and pray for your journey not to be over now, but to be just the threshold of a wonderful, mysterious walk in the Roman Catholic Church with Jesus.

As Holy week unfolds, I will be examining the main masses and their significance in regards to the passion of Christ.



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