

## Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion

March 1, 2020 2:00 p.m. St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Portage

What a joy it is to see all of you here today for this beautiful Rite. This really is one of my most favorite Liturgies to celebrate each and every year. It's a joyful moment, and like the birth of a child into any family which expands and adds joy to the family, this celebration of the addition of 95 new members to the Catholic Church here in our Diocese, and expands our Family of Faith! That's truly a cause of great joy for me, and a reason for the whole Church to rejoice. And what I look forward to most about this Rite of Election every year, and what truly touches my heart, is being with all of you—the Catechumens and Candidates—who are making this momentous decision in your spiritual lives. As I mentioned at the beginning of our Liturgy, 47 of you will be baptized into Christ, and enter into the Mystery of our Faith; 48 of you, who have already been validly baptized in another Christian denomination, will be deepening your relationship with Jesus by making a Profession of Faith and entering into full Communion with the Church; and all 95 of you being able to participate in the sacramental life of the Church, which is the greatest Gift Jesus has provided for all of us. But why do we call this the "Rite of Election"?

In light of the constant news about "elections" that we have been hearing about for months, witnessing Candidate Debates, and now entering into the Spring Caucuses and Primaries to determine the Democratic Candidate in the Fall Elections, there's a danger when we talk about this Rite to confuse the use of the word "election". But let's make very sure that we don't confuse the Rite of Election with our political process. None of you here are "running" for "office"; you won't be asked to make any "campaign speeches"; there won't be any kind of "debates" being held. And you're being "elected" today doesn't in any way depend on how many "votes" you get from your fellow parishioners, or even from me, as to whether you can "enter into the Church". There are no "losers" here in this process; only "winners".

In the Church's understanding, "*election*" means to be "chosen". It comes from the Latin word, "*eligire*"—"to choose". As unworthy as any of us are, the most important understanding of "election" is that all of us have been "chosen" by God. God chooses us, and claims us as His own. That's what we know as the Great Covenant that God made with His people in ancient Salvation History through Abraham, and Moses, when God solemnly promised: "*You will be My people, and I will be your God!*" And Jesus, through His suffering, death and resurrection, has established the *New Covenant* that guarantees us who choose to follow Jesus that we will share in His Victory over sin and death.

But, the Journey of Faith which the 95 of you, members of the "Class of 2020" have been on, clearly began long before you went to your first RCIA class. That's what makes this gathering so "inspiring" to me, because each of you has a very unique "story" about what it is that has brought you to this point in your life. I'd love to be able to hear each and every one of them, if we had the time to do so. At some point along your journey of Faith, grappling with the questions/calling you were hearing in your heart, each of you made a decision to begin this process which we call the RCIA. But please—don't ever lose sight of the fact that it is God Who "called" you first; it was God Who stirred those questions/that calling in your Heart; it is God Who is touching your heart. Always remember that our Loving God and Father has been waiting for YOU to make the decision to respond to His call—maybe God's been waiting for some of you for a very long time. But, as we know, our God is infinitely patient, and will wait for us to

choose Him, as long as it takes. So, that's one, and really the most important and profound, aspect of "Election"—God chooses you, and you have to choose to respond to God's call.

The other equally important aspect of this beautiful Rite has to do with why you've been asked to come here today; and that's because the Church also needs to "choose" you. We're so pleased that you have made a choice to consider entering into the life of Faith in the Catholic Church; but the Church also has a responsibility to make sure that you are doing so for all the appropriate reasons, that you have an adequate understanding, that there is nothing standing in the way. And that's why every Catechumen or Candidate in the RCIA process, in every Diocese throughout the world, comes to the Cathedral (or as we're doing here this year, the "designated" Cathedral), so that I, as the Bishop of the Diocese—the Shepherd of this Local Church and the Chief Pastor of each of the 59 parishes in all 9 counties of our Diocese—can formally and officially acknowledge your request. In other words, I, your Bishop, have the joy and the privilege of saying: "You have been elected!" You can move forward toward the Easter Vigil which is now less than 6 weeks away, when you will either be Baptized and Confirmed, or make a Profession of Faith, and when all of you will then receive the most special Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

This Journey of Faith is not easy. I'm sure every one of you, whether you're a Catechumen or a Candidate, could tell me stories about the challenges you may have encountered along the way. Perhaps there was some family resistance or even unacceptance; perhaps there were those who might have tried to stop you. I hope that there have been many more who have encouraged you along the way. As we all know, our Society, sadly, is steadily and increasingly moving away from basic respect for God and God's ways, and even adherence to God's basic commandments. People of Faith can be looked down upon in general; Christians can be categorized with certain "labels" from those who consider themselves to be advanced, sophisticated, highly educated or politically correct; and Catholics have always been a little suspect. And sadly, in the last couple years, as we have been enduring the heartbreak of news of scandals about some of our priests, bishops, and even a Cardinal—that is very painful for all of us.

On top of all of that, we know that Satan, the Father of Deceit, is constantly doing all that he can to keep us from being good Catholics, active Christians, people of Faith. The Devil has been the "arch-enemy" of human beings from the very beginning, as we heard in today's First Reading from the Book of Genesis, when the Devil, in the form of a serpent, in his "original temptation", deceived Eve and tricked her into disobeying the one and only command God had given to our first parents, resulting in Original Sin, a condition that has infected the heart of every human being ever born.

And, no one is excluded from the Devil's evil intents, including Jesus Himself, as we heard in the Gospel passage a few minutes ago. We're all familiar with this famous Gospel. The Church, in her wisdom, makes sure that we hear some version of Jesus' Temptations account which are recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) every year on this, the First Sunday of Lent, and this year, we heard St. Matthew's account. It helps us to be reminded what, and who, we are up against—a true "force for Evil" to be reckoned with! As we know, there were 3 Temptations, which all were based on the proposition: "*If You are the Son of God.....*" Satan knew better than anyone Who Jesus was; he knew that he was tempting God Himself, and was delusional and arrogant enough to think that he could actually defeat Him. And so the first temptation was: to turn stones into bread; Jesus was famished, so the temptation targeted Jesus' physical needs for food/sensual pleasure and satisfaction. The second temptation was for Jesus to test His Loving Father, and throw Himself off the tallest structure to see if God would protect him. And the third temptation was to propose that Jesus

could ask for anything His heart desired; all He had to do was to worship the Devil, the falsest of all “gods”.

Temptations are normal, and all of us get them; and we can be certain that, just as with Jesus, our temptations will be targeted at our vulnerabilities and our weaknesses. But the most important part of our Gospel Reading, besides knowing that we are in good company when even Jesus was tempted, is learning from Jesus how to conquer the temptations that come to us, and thereby how to defeat Satan time after time. We need to pray for Jesus’ Grace, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and make sure that we just say “No!” to whatever it is that tries to lead us astray. We need to be faithful to God, Who always remains faithful to us.

We have no cause for fear, or to feel in any way that the cards are stacked against us. In fact, it’s just the opposite. For us who are united with Christ—for those of you who are on the way to be united with Christ—for all of us as the Body of Christ—as we heard St. Paul tell us so beautifully in today’s Second Reading, we share in the Victory over Sin and Death which we will celebrate on Easter, and that Victory includes the victory over all evil, including the Prince of Evil.

That is what makes you “special” about being counted among the Elect—that’s what make you “winners”. That is why the Catechumens will sign the Book of the Elect when you come forward; to officially register yourselves as People of Faith. And when you Candidates come forward, you will once more renew your commitment to the Baptism you’ve already received.

My dear Friends, you who are making such a huge, and life-changing “choice” today are a great inspiration to all of us, and I think you on behalf of all of us. I also want to thank all those here who are accompanying you on this Journey of Faith—your Godparents/Sponsors, Catechists, Family members, your priests and deacons, and the remainder of the Body of Christ. The whole Church rejoices today because God, our Loving Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has chosen you---has “elected” you—for His very own. May you live your Faith with Joy, with enthusiasm, and with confidence. And may God, Who has begun this good work in you, bring it to fulfillment.

God bless you, now and always!