

Faith journeys of the elect strengthen our own

By **Bishop
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I spent the weekend of the First Sunday of Lent celebrating the Rite of Election in four ceremonies. This is a significant moment in the life of the Catholic Church in Sacramento and throughout the world.

The bishop of each diocese receives those who are seeking full initiation into the life of Christ and his body, the church, through the celebration of the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist.

The Rite of Election is very simple. After reflecting on God's word in the sacred Scriptures, each parish presents the names of their catechumens. Both their instructors as well as their sponsors — godparents — vouch for their readiness both spiritually and intellectually to enter into the Paschal mysteries celebrated on the night of the Easter Vigil.

On that most sacred of nights, they will be immersed into the waters of baptism, dying with Christ so they may rise with him to new life. They will receive the Holy Spirit through the anointing with holy chrism and then approach the eucharistic table for the first time to be nourished by the body and blood of their Lord and Savior, Jesus.

During the Rite of Election, each of their names is read from a specially prepared Book of the Elect. Each parish then presents this book to me and I sign it verifying that these are the names of those to be baptized. It is a simple ceremony yet profound in its meaning both for those whose names are written into the book as well as the whole Catholic community in Sacramento.

Along with all the catechumens who are seeking baptism, there were also a good number of Catholics seeking to complete their sacramental initiation. These men and women have been previously baptized but had never been properly catechized and did not receive confirmation or first Communion. In this ceremony their names were also read and they were invited to journey to the Easter Vigil when they will be fully initiated into the life of Christ and his church.

While the ritual may seem very minimal and the recitation of names monotonous, there is a perceived sense of drama for anyone who has attended this rite. For me, this year's celebration of the Rite of Election was a source of great consolation and hope for our future as a church. Because of the number of men and women seeking to share our life with Christ, there were four Rite of Election ceremonies scheduled, three in the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament and one in Sacred Heart Church in Red Bluff.

I was not certain how many people to expect on the first night. I remember entering the cathedral on Saturday evening through the basement in the rear of the cathedral. I could hear the rustling of people upstairs in the body of the church. After coming up from the basement vested for the ceremony, I entered the nave of Sacramento's mother church to see it filled with people.

The air was buzzing with excitement and anticipation. There were young people as well as many seasoned by time. There were people from a variety of cultural communities that give such vibrancy to our church and the whole Sacramento community. There were married couples and those preparing to marry. The young bore that self-conscious nervous look that would easily turn to a shy smile as I looked at them. They giggled as their friends or sponsors tried to help them relax.

There were many whose faces bore the weight of the histories and experiences that, through God's wise, patient and loving providence, have brought them to this evening. In their eyes was a glimmer of peace and joy as they began to savor the promise that the initiation sacraments held for them.

While God's redeeming grace was working its mystery in all of them, I was very mindful how their presence here in the cathedral and in numerous parish communities from which they came brought to all of us as well a taste of God's saving mercy.

We are a sinful and fumbling community of Christian disciples but the Rite of Election reminds us all of how great God's goodness is. The strength and vitality of Christ's undying love continues to renew and revive the church.

There is much talk these days about stimulus packages. Politician and pundits are struggling to stimulate our economy and revitalize American society. I dare to say there was no more assuring a stimulus package for our church and our world than the lives of those who came to the cathedral and Sacred Heart Church in Red Bluff seeking to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus together with us.

As we journey together to that most holy of nights, the Easter Vigil, let us all remember to pray for the elect as well as those seeking full initiation into the saving mysteries of the Lord's death and resurrection. Their faith journeys strengthen our own.

Our commitment to continue the journey of conversion and repentance during this Lenten season is a mutually beneficial gesture of Christian solidarity. Together with them we should long to embrace those stimulating, saving words: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper."

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