

## **rites belonging to the period of purification and enlightenment**

**(RCIA 125-197 - Dark Blue Book for England and Wales)**

During this period the focus of the RCIA process moves towards the spiritual preparation for the sacraments of initiation. The emphasis is more on interior reflection than on catechetical instruction, leading the Elect to 'search their consciences and do penance' as well as 'enlightening (*their*) minds and hearts ... with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Saviour.' RCIA 126

The aim of this period is to eliminate what is weak and sinful; and affirm what is holy. It is a time during which prayer and retreat opportunity are central and the rites of this period, most particularly the Scrutinies, are the liturgical ways in which the Church prepares the Elect for their new life in Christ, a life of joy and a life of sacrifice.

### **THE SCRUTINIES**

The three scrutinies, on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, are the major events for the Elect. Preparation for the scrutinies, and reflection after them, will be the main thrust of catechesis.

The words of the Rite indicate clearly that they are not scrutinies *by* the Church of the Elect, but a scrutiny *by the Elect of themselves*, within and supported by the community, thus interior reflection in preparation of the Elect is essential.

The readings for the Masses at which the Scrutinies are celebrated are to be those of the Sundays of Year A. The other texts for Mass are from the ritual Masses, 'Christian Initiation: The Scrutinies'

The gospels of these Sundays are John's narratives of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. These are stories of coming to faith, to light and to life. They are conversion stories which are echoed in the lives of those coming to baptism, those who seek greater fullness of life. They are echoed too in the lives of the baptised, those gathered here every Sunday, for as the Elect approach their initiation, the baptised prepare to renew their baptism.

As such, these gospels make more precise the nature of the invitation extended at the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent, calling the Elect to the Easter sacraments – in fact, calling them to faith, to light and to life.

One suggestion of Lenten catechesis for the Elect is that it asks three questions, each with an element of strength and weakness.

1. What have you most drunk in of Christ? For what do you continue to thirst ?
2. What have you seen that you never saw before? To what do you remain blind?
3. What is most life-giving in your new intimacy with Christ? What is still dead that needs resurrection?

### **OUTLINE OF THE RITE**

- Readings
- Homily
- Invitation to Silent prayer
- Intercessions for the Elect
- *Exorcism, involving:*
  - Presidential prayer
  - Imposition of hands on individuals in silence
  - Continuation of presidential prayer with extension of hands over all
- Dismissal of the Elect
  - (the Rite gives a prayer of dismissal or, if the Elect are to remain, appropriate words of instruction)

## **PRESENTATIONS (RCIA 134ff)**

The presentations take place after the celebration of the scrutinies (unless they have been anticipated for pastoral reasons during the period of the catechumenate –RCIA 79,103-104). The Church entrusts to the Elect, who have completed their catechumenal formation, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, the ancient texts which express the heart of the Church's faith and prayer. They are presented in order to 'enlighten' the Elect.

The first presentation to the Elect is the **presentation of the Creed**

- **during the week following the first scrutiny.**
- they are to commit the Creed to memory
- they will recite it publicly prior to professing their faith in accordance with that Creed on the day of their baptism. RCIA 135

The second presentation to the Elect is the **presentation of the Lord's Prayer**

- **during the week following the third scrutiny** (*but, if necessary, this presentation may be deferred for inclusion in the preparation rites of Holy Saturday; see no. 172*).
- From antiquity the Lord's Prayer has been the prayer proper to those who in baptism have received the spirit of adoption.
- When the Elect have been baptised and take part in their first celebration of the eucharist, they will join the rest of the faithful in saying the Lord's Prayer. RCIA 136

The Rite does, however, suggest that both presentations should be celebrated in the presence of a community of the faithful, within Mass.

- The Creed is recited by the celebrant and the faithful, while the Elect listen attentively. RCIA 147

As for the presentation of the Lord's Prayer the gospel itself (Matthew's version of the Our Father) the living source of faith for all Christians, which is the vehicle for presenting this prayer.

- At the Liturgy of the Word, after the First and Second Reading, those who are to receive the Lord's Prayer are called forward to listen 'to the gospel reading in which our Lord teaches his followers to pray'. RCIA 167

## **PREPARATION RITES ON HOLY SATURDAY (RCIA 172ff)**

These rites offer a final preparation for the Elect prior to the Rites of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Holy Saturday is to be a day set aside for prayer and reflection before the rituals of initiation and so these preparatory rites serve as focus for the coming events of the Vigil. It is a time for the Elect to continue their spiritual preparation for their baptism.

The Rite states,

The Elect are to be advised that on Holy Saturday they should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast.

When it is possible to bring the Elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments . . . .RCIA 172

Usually the Elect gather with their sponsors, their priest, their catechists, and others who have journeyed with them, to celebrate whichever of the rites is felt suitable. This often happens before a rehearsal of their part in the Easter Vigil.

There is a model for this celebration at RCIA 174ff

### **Recitation of the Creed**

The rite of the recitation of the Creed prepares the Elect for the profession of faith they will make immediately before they are baptised and instructs them in their duty to proclaim the message of the Gospel. RCIA 180

### **The Ephphetha Rite**

Its symbolism impresses on the Elect their need of grace in order that they may hear the word of God and profess it for their salvation. RCIA 184

### **The choosing of a baptismal name**

recognises and reveals the life transforming power of initiation, wherein one leaves behind the old life and takes on the life of Christ. It is a powerful reminder of the seriousness and surrender involved in authentically living out the gospel.

The Rite of Choosing a Baptismal Name may be celebrated on Holy Saturday, unless it was included in the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens.

The Elect may choose a new name, which is either a traditional Christian name or a name of regional usage that is not incompatible with Christian beliefs.

Where it seems better suited to the circumstances and the Elect are not too numerous, the naming may consist simply in an explanation of the given name of each of the elect. RCIA 187

### **The anointing with the Oil of Catechumens**

The anointing with the oil of catechumens that ordinarily forms part of the liturgy of baptism may be anticipated on Holy Saturday to save time in the celebration of the Easter Vigil.

The presiding celebrant is a priest or a deacon.

When this anointing is anticipated, care is to be taken that the elect who are to be baptised understand its significance. It symbolises their need for God's help and strength so that, undeterred by the bonds of the past and overcoming the opposition of the devil, they will forthrightly take the step of professing their faith and will hold fast to it unfalteringly throughout their lives.

The oil used for this rite is to be the oil blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass but for pastoral reasons a priest celebrant may bless oil for the rite immediately before the anointing. RCIA 190-192

*An index to the Rites and Pastoral Notes can be found on the website of the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales at <http://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/RCIA/RCIA-index.pdf>*