

# **Lent 1-B**

## **Rite of Election**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

18 February 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons; dear catechumens and candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church; and dear godparents, sponsors, catechists and friends in Christ:

### ***Introduction***

Last Wednesday, when we were marked with the ashes, we began Lent, the season of mercy and the beginning of the final forty days the catechumens have to prepare for the Sacraments of Initiation and the candidates for full communion with the Church at the Easter Vigil.

These are exciting, solemn and blessed days for you!

Today's ceremony is called the Rite of Election for the catechumens. To elect someone is to choose that individual. A person who is elected is chosen. You have been chosen to take this step of becoming a Catholic Christian. Certainly you have decided to present yourself to the Lord, saying that you want to belong to his Church. But remember that it is God who has first chosen you.

Being a Catholic is always a gift of grace. And, thanks be to God, you have responded, no doubt with the help of others who have inspired and guided you in taking this step. Do express to them your prayerful gratitude not only on your own behalf but mine as well.

God calls you each by name. He knows you intimately, even better

than you know yourself. And knowing you, he loves you – personally.

That is why catechumens write their name in the Book of the Elect, the Book of the Chosen. In response to a personal invitation, they are responding in a personal way, putting down their name as a sign of commitment. After this signing, they are no longer catechumens, but are properly called the elect, God’s chosen ones.

The time you are spending in preparation for the Easter Vigil is far more than a course of studies in which you learned about Jesus and the teachings of the Catholic Church. It is journey, one undertaken with others, in which you are coming to know God himself, to become close to him by turning away from sin. This is a journey that doesn’t end with entry into the Church the Easter Vigil. It is just the beginning of a great adventure which lasts a life-time; that is, until our journey ends in the joy of heaven.

## ***Gospel***

### ***Time of Spiritual Combat***

Now I would like to say a few words about today’s Gospel, for it sheds light on how to face the trials and temptations that come our way.

St. Mark writes: “The Spirit drove him [Jesus] out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him” (Mk 1:12-13).

Jesus is tested at the precise moment in which he embarks on the mission he has received to be the Saviour of the world. The temptations were the consequence of Jesus' decision to carry out that mission entrusted to him by his Father.<sup>1</sup> In those forty days of solitude in the desert, Jesus confronted Satan in close combat “not unlike a contestant in an athletic contest,”<sup>2</sup> and he emerged victorious.<sup>3</sup>

For all of us Lent is a time of spiritual combat against the forces of evil and sin in our own lives. At the beginning of this season, the Church reminds us of both of the reality of this combat – that we are and will be tested – and of the victory won by Jesus. In this way we can gain perspective on the struggles against sin we face in our own lives.

The battle between good and evil continues in the hearts of each one of us. Such trials came even for Jesus. But Satan suffered defeat at his hands, so that Jesus could share his triumph with us. That's why when we pray sincerely in the Lord's Prayer, “lead us not into temptation,” that we can be sure that God will hear us, just as he heard Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (21 February 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Leroy A. Huinzenga, *Loosing the Lion* (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2017), 91.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis, Angelus (22 February 2015).

## ***Believe in the Good News***

Immediately after the temptations in the desert, Jesus begins to preach: “Repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15).

But what is this “good news”? Is it to accept as true what is contained in the four Gospels? That’s only part of it.

What is most important to understand is that the “good news” refers to Jesus himself. He is the Good News who has come when the time was fulfilled.<sup>4</sup>

If someone were to ask you what is the core or the heart of the Gospel, what would you say? To love your neighbour as yourself? To do unto others as you would have them do unto you? To keep the commandments? While these follow from believing in the good news, the core of the message, the heart of Jesus is this: “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.”<sup>5</sup> In these days, meditate over and over again this truth: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Meditation during the First Congregation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Synod of Bishops (8 October 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 164.

I urge you therefore to keep before your eyes the central message of the Gospel. And, dear catechists, I wish to repeat to you what Pope Francis has said: that you must never deform the fullness of the Gospel in your catechesis,<sup>7</sup> making compromises with a worldly way of thinking. Instead, you must “constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness.”<sup>8</sup> The Gospel must come alive in others because it itself is alive: the very Person of Jesus the Lord.

“To believe in the Gospel” is not, therefore, simply to accept what is written in the four Gospels, but to entrust oneself to Jesus, to enter into a personal relationship with him who is alive. Now. In our own lives. Jesus is the Good News for each one of us personally, individually – and no one is excluded, for Christ died for us while we were still sinners (cf. Rom 5:5).

Jesus’ proclamation is accompanied by the demand that we measure up to such a great gift: we have to “repent” – to take off our old clothes before being clothed in Christ, or to make ourselves new wineskins capable of holding the new wine of the Gospel. The Lord calls us to convert all our actions and thoughts to goodness, every day.

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 41.

The season of Lent, and this year above all for you, dear catechumens and candidates, is a favourable moment for renewing and reinforcing your relationship with God, through more ardent daily prayer, acts of penance and works of fraternal charity.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Dear friends: do not be alarmed by the temptations and trials you may face, for in Christ the victory has already been won. But be alert to them. Recognize them and confront them. These days of Lent, of final preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation or entry into full communion with the Catholic Church, are the time to embrace the absolute primacy of God in your life and draw closer to Jesus.

On our journey to Easter, let us invoke with special trust the protection and help of the Blessed Virgin Mary: may she, who was the first to believe in Christ, accompany us in our days of intense prayer and penance, so that we might come to celebrate, purified and renewed in spirit, the great Paschal mystery of her Son.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (26 February 2012).