

Christian Initiation of Adults

Rite of Election

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“God is always faithful to those he calls.”
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 133

Chosen By God

Witnessing God at Work

Our country knows a lot about elections. Each year, we're bombarded with candidates telling us why they would be the best choice for our vote. There's a lot of self-promotion, but not a lot of testimony, at least not in the way the Church thinks of being elected.

In the Bible, we hear many stories of God choosing a person or even an entire people. The Israelites were God's "chosen people." David, the shepherd, was chosen by God to be king of God's people. The angel Gabriel brought Mary the news that she had found favor with God and had been chosen to be the mother of God's Son. And of course, Jesus is called the Messiah, the "chosen one" of God.

It is God who chooses. God takes the initiative and claims a person or a people as his own. Yet God's choice is always witnessed by another. God's choice is witnessed by the Church, God's own people. We know whom God has chosen because we can see God's influence clearly in that person's life. In that person, we see God at work.

Election begins with God and is witnessed by the Church. To be elected means to be chosen by God to be the way God wants to act in the world now. It is one way God continues to be present in our world, and it is how the Church continues to proclaim God's faithful presence to his people today.

When have you felt chosen? What were you chosen to do? Who testified on your behalf that you were the right choice? How did their testimony make you feel?

Chosen for Baptism

When an adult seeks to be baptized, the Church is always looking for signs in that person's life of God at work. Here are some signs we look for: Does the person listen to God's word and respond to it? Have they changed their way of life to match the way of life presented in the Gospel? Do they pray with the Church and do the things the Church does? Do they live a spirit of charity in their family and work life? Have they learned to sacrifice themselves for the good of others? When we see these signs in the person's life, we can affirm that God has chosen them to be baptized.

This discernment, testimony, and election are formally ritualized in the Church's ancient Rite of Election. This rite is the turning point for those who are seeking to be baptized. It is when their months and years of preparation

take the final turn because the Church recognizes that God has chosen them to be baptized at the next Easter Vigil. This rite, which takes place at the beginning of Lent, propels them and the Church into the final preparations for the great Easter celebration. After they celebrate the Rite of Election, the catechumen's baptismal preparation is less like catechesis and more like a retreat. It's a bit like the time before a couple's wedding when their concern is less about getting to know their soon-to-be spouse and more about preparing themselves to make this lifelong commitment.

The Rite of Election has several important symbols and actions that help to communicate the importance of this moment in the life of the Church. Let's look at some of these symbols. If you get to participate in your diocese's Rite of Election, watch for them.

(continued on next page)

Words to know

Book of the Elect: a book that serves as both a record of those elected each year and a symbol of God's chosen people

catechumen: Greek, meaning "one in whom the word echoes"; one who celebrated the Rite of Acceptance

Elect: name given to catechumens chosen by God and affirmed by the Church as ready to celebrate baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist at the next Easter Vigil

election: the formal liturgical act of choosing those who have been called by God to celebrate the initiation sacraments; the election is proclaimed by the Bishop of a diocese

enrollment of names: another name for the Rite of Election; the formal liturgical act of gathering and recording the names of those ready to be initiated at the next Easter Vigil

godparent: a person chosen by a catechumen to be a lifelong companion and mentor in the Christian faith

Rite of Election: a liturgical rite that takes place at the beginning of Lent which formally names those who will be baptized at the next Easter Vigil

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- Have you ever prepared for a significant moment in your life? What were the days and weeks beforehand like? How was that time different from your everyday life?
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Testimony of the Church

Before the Rite of Election, a parish decides who among their catechumens have shown the signs of readiness for baptism. These catechumens are then asked to choose one or two godparents who will be their lifelong companions in the Christian faith. These godparents go to the Cathedral with their catechumens for the Rite of Election. There, the godparents testify and swear before the Bishop that they have seen God at work in the lives of their companions and therefore they are ready to be initiated into the Church. The Church assembly affirms the godparents' testimony, and the Bishop, on behalf of the Church, accepts the godparents' witness.

Enrolling One's Name

The Bishop then asks the catechumens if they are ready to accept God's election of them as verified by the Church. If they are, they are then to give the Church their names.

Your name is very important. God has called each person by name, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says "the name is the icon of the person" (2158). Your name is sacred. When you give your name, you are giving your life. Those deemed ready to celebrate baptism are asked to give their life to God by giving their name to the Church for enrollment in the list of God's chosen ones. These names are inscribed into a book called the Book of the Elect. Sometimes, the godparents will also put their name in the Book of Elect next to their companion's name as a kind of "surety" or endorsement. These names and books are presented at the Rite of Election.

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- What does your name mean to you? Do you know how you got your name? Have you ever put your name on something important?
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Act of Election

Having received the catechumens' names, the Bishop makes a powerful proclamation: "I now declare you to be members of the elect, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil." This Act of Election officially gives the catechumens a new name. From then until their baptism at Easter, they will be known as the Elect. They are the ones of whom we speak before Communion: "Happy are those who are called to his supper." The Elect are those called by God to be his own, to be washed in the waters of baptism, anointed by the Spirit in confirmation, and nourished by Christ in the Eucharist.

Handing Over to the Godparents

This is a very subtle but important part of the Rite. The Bishop asks the godparents to place their hands on the shoulders of their Elect. This gesture shows that the Elect are now in their care. The Bishop tells the godparents that they are to support them by their love and example, especially during these final days before Easter. As their first act of care for them, the Church prays for the Elect in intercessions and a final prayer.

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- Who are your godparents? How have they supported you in your faith? Are you a godparent for someone? How can you help the Elect strengthen their own faith?
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All the baptized are God's chosen people. In each of our lives, Christ continues his mission of bringing peace and light into the world. We do this in very simple ways—by living as Christ in our families and in all our daily interactions. The Elect are chosen not simply for baptism but for mission, Christ's mission. The Elect are signs that God is still indeed with us, blessing our world and recreating it with his Spirit.

After the election, [the entire community] should surround the elect with prayer, so that the entire Church will accompany and lead them to encounter Christ. (RCIA 121).

Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names

Gathering Rites

Gathering song
Sign of the Cross and Greeting
Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

(usually taken from the First Sunday of Lent)
First Reading
Psalm
Second Reading
Gospel Reading
Homily

Presentation of the Catechumens

Affirmation by the Godparents (testimony)
Affirmation by the Assembly (testimony)
Invitation and Enrollment of Names
Act of Admission or Election
Intercessions for the Elect
Prayer over the Elect
Dismissal of the Elect

Liturgy of the Eucharist (optional)