

**Homily for the Rite of Election  
Sunday, February 18, 2024**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here today as we gather for this Rite of Election and the Enrollment of Names. This rite, which coincides with the opening of Lent, marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation, during which the elect will be encouraged to follow Christ with greater generosity.<sup>1</sup>

This step is called election because the acceptance made by the Church is founded on the election by God, in whose name the Church acts. The step is also called the enrollment of names because, as a pledge of fidelity, the candidates inscribe their names in the book that lists those who have been chosen for initiation.<sup>2</sup> Before the Rite of Election is celebrated, the catechumens are expected to have undergone a conversion in mind and action, and to have developed a sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity.<sup>3</sup>

As Diocesan Bishop, I have the great privilege of welcoming you to this magnificent Cathedral, the mother Church of our diocese, as well as presiding over this part of your journey that will not only bring you to the Easter Sacraments, but also, through God's grace, to a full and active participation in the life of the Church. Your coming to the Cathedral for this Rite of Election and the Enrollment of Names also expresses in a profoundly symbolic way that you are not just joining a local congregation or parish, but will be initiated into the universal Church, in spiritual communion with over 1.3 billion Catholics throughout the world.

This milestone event in your spiritual journey is a visible sign that men and women, young and old, from all walks of life, are continuing to respond to the Lord's invitation as He says to you, "*Come, follow me.*"<sup>4</sup> Jesus invites you to come, see where He lives and share with Him in the life of the Spirit.

In this ancient ritual of Holy Mother Church that we celebrate today, those seeking the Sacraments of Christian Initiation will be invited to come forward as I sign the Book of the Elect, indicating that you have been chosen by God to be welcomed into His family as adopted sons and daughters of God. As you do so, remember that you have been moved in a profound way by the power of the Spirit and that you are making this journey, not just on

your own, but because our Lord has stirred your heart and has led you to desire to *know the mystery of the divine purpose*.<sup>5</sup>

Each of you has had a different experience of what brought you to this moment. Perhaps the Spirit worked through a witness: a family member, a spouse, friends, coworkers, or neighbors, someone who invited you, encouraged you, and who now prays with and for you as you make this journey.

In preparation of this Rite of Election, your sponsors, Godparents, pastors, family members and friends have written letters of testimony to me attesting to how God is working in your life and has called you to be a Roman Catholic Christian. I would like to read some of their letters now, because they are powerful testimonies of faith by people who know you well. *(Read selected letters.)*

We are reminded by these testimonial letters that the example of witnessing to our faith in our everyday lives is what brings people to Jesus and in turn strengthens our own faith in the Lord. Today, as we continue with this most profound celebration of faith, may the Lord move us to bear witness to Him by living as His disciples, so that we might inherit the place that has been prepared for us in the Heavenly Kingdom.

So now, I turn to you, my dear catechumens, to you who seek to become members of the Catholic Church. Today, you will give your names to me in petition to receive the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. In addition to the written testimony about the conduct of your lives that your godparents have sent me, in a few moments they – and those responsible for your formation – will testify publicly before the Church as to your readiness to be incorporated into the life of Christ Jesus.

By signing my name to yours, I will ratify that God has indeed chosen you *in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before God in love.*<sup>6</sup> Once I have signed my name, you will no longer be called catechumens but the Elect, those who have been elected to the Easter Sacraments after a final period of enlightenment and purification consisting particularly in the three great scrutinies and their accompanying exorcisms.

The Lord himself has called you to this moment and at the great Vigil of Easter will graft you onto His vine. For your part, you must strive each day of your lives to keep His commandments so as to remain in His love. By remaining in His love, the joy that begins to well up in you today will be brought to completion on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are several components to the Rite of Baptism that you will receive at the Easter Vigil. First, those to be baptized make a profession of their belief in the Catholic Faith. Second, they are called upon to renounce Satan, the prince of sin, and all his works and empty show. Third, they are baptized in Christ, and thus released from the bondage of the devil and entered into the divinity of sons and daughters of God. Fourth, a white garment is placed on each of them, and they are exhorted to keep it pure and undefiled until death. Fifth, a lighted candle is presented to signify the good works that they are to perform as long as they live, fulfilling the command that Our Lord speaks in the Gospel: "your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."<sup>7</sup>

By being baptized, you will enter into the common priesthood of all the faithful. This may sound confusing if you are thinking only of the ordained ministerial priesthood. Everyone shares in the priesthood of Jesus

Christ by virtue of baptism. The common priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood are related to each other, but they are essentially different.

What does it mean for the laity to share in the priesthood of all the baptized? Basically, a priest is one who gives sacrifice. An ordained ministerial priest offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but all the baptized are called to offer their very lives as a sacrifice. This notion of giving sacrifice to God - by offering to Him all that we are, all that we have, and everything that we do - is at the heart of the commitment that we made as a community of faith at our Fourth Diocesan Synod in 2017, when we declared that the Christian faithful grow in love of God and neighbor by “dying to their selfish desires through acts of mortification and self-sacrifice. The whole Christian life aims at reaching this goal of everlasting happiness in eternal life by turning from sin and growing in virtue through God’s grace.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, as faithful and generous stewards of God’s abundant gifts, those who are “committed to discipleship and stewardship as a way of life pledge to share their talents, give of their time and contribute proportionately from their financial resources for the good of the Church and those in need.”<sup>9</sup>

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Essentially, it means that nothing or no one is more important to us than Our Lord. Please think about that carefully. It means that we are not mere admirers of Jesus, but truly His followers. Those who truly love Jesus and follow Him are those who take up the cross<sup>10</sup> and put God's teachings and commandments into practice,<sup>11</sup> even when it is difficult to do so, such as Our Lord's command to love our enemies.<sup>12</sup> As we read in the Gospel according to St. John, "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, the whole Church rejoices at your presence here today, dear catechumens. Through you, we see in a clear fashion the activity of the Holy Spirit present in the world, stirring the hearts of men, women, and children to turn to the One who has not only given them life but who also gave His life for them.

In these forty days of Lent, the faithful will accompany you in the works of increased prayer, fasting, and alms-giving, which complete our faith.<sup>14</sup> Your desire for a deeper conformity of your life to the teachings of the Lord spurs each of us to the same desire. May we all enter deeply into

the Passion of our Lord so as to celebrate with abundant joy the great glory of His Resurrection and of your full reception into the Church.

Finally, dear catechists, godparents and sponsors, I turn to you. You have shared your faith with those who will be, as it were, your spiritual children. I thank you for your credible witness to the truth. You have come to understand that *it is possible to realize something new within ourselves and around us, simply because God is faithful, continues to be full of goodness and mercy, and is always ready to forgive.*<sup>15</sup>

So, I urge you to continue to stand with your catechumens, who will soon be numbered among the Elect. You must give them a good example of what it means to live as a follower of Christ. In the days, months, and years to come, they will look to you for sources of both strength and comfort as they strive to stand daily with and for the Lord.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 119.

<sup>3</sup> *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 120.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:19.

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 1:9.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:4.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:16. The summary of the five components of the Rite of Baptism is based on St. Robert Bellarmine, *The Art of Dying Well* (First published in Latin in Rome in 1620 under the title, *De Arte Bene Moriendi*; English translations by the Society of Jesus [London: I. Dalton, 1720, and London: Richardson and Son, 1847]; reprinted with extensive editorial revisions and improvements in the translation in Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1998 and 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, Fourth Diocesan Synod (2017), Declaration n. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, Fourth Diocesan Synod (2017), Declaration n. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Matthew 16:24.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 1 John 5:3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Matthew 5:43-48.

<sup>13</sup> John 15:10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. James 2:22.

<sup>15</sup> Pope Francis, Homily for Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2014.