

**Homily for the Rite of Election  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**The First Sunday of Lent  
February 22, 2026**

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Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated religious, catechists, godparents and sponsors, dear catechumens, family and friends, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

There is a significant election taking place here at the Cathedral today, not a political election, but an election of faith. The word “election” comes from the Latin word, *eligo*, which means, “I choose,” the past participle of which is *electus*, which means, “one having been chosen.”

The Latin etymology is important to help us understand what is taking place here theologically. Each of you catechumens may be thinking, “I have come here today because I am choosing to become Catholic.” Well, that is true to the extent that you are engaging your free will to accept the invitation to join the Catholic Church, but the invitation itself was first initiated by God choosing you to follow Him. In that sense, God is the one

doing the electing or choosing. You are accepting what God has chosen for you, not what you have chosen for God!

We are here today because, in one way or another, each of us has experienced a stirring in our hearts that has led us to “know the mystery of the divine purpose,” at least in part (Ephesians 1:9). We have come to know that the Lord desires to “bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth,” you and I included (Ephesians 1:10).

While God is the One whose action of choosing you is the primary focus today, it is important to understand clearly what your actions mean here. Accepting God’s call for you to enter the Catholic Church is not a cause for self-righteousness or for seeking admiration or praise for what you are doing. It is not we who are doing God any big favor by choosing to become Catholic, but God who has done us the biggest favor possible or imaginable by calling us into His loving embrace.

Nor is our accepting baptism in the Catholic Church merely a label or an accomplishment that we can check off our bucket list, but a true conversion that means we will live a Christian way of life for the rest of our lives. In short, to be a Christian means to recognize our sinfulness, to

repent our sinful way of life, and to place ourselves completely dependent on the grace of God to save us and raise us up to live in His love.

Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr, summed it up succinctly in these words:

In the beginning God created Adam, not because he needed man, but because he wanted to have someone on whom to bestow his blessings. . . . The same is true of service to God: it adds nothing to God, nor does God need the service of man. Rather, he gives life and immortality and eternal glory to those who follow and serve him. He confers a benefit on his servants in return for their service and on his followers in return for their loyalty, but he receives no benefit from them. He is rich, perfect and in need of nothing. The reason why God requires service from man is this: because he is good and merciful he desires to confer benefits on those who persevere in his service. In proportion to God's need of nothing is man's need for communion with God.<sup>1</sup>

Today we have gathered to celebrate an ancient ritual of Holy Mother Church in which those seeking the Sacrament of Baptism "give in their names." I turn first to you, my dear catechumens, to you who seek baptism. To understand the meaning of this ancient rite, it is helpful to quote from the written account of a woman in the fourth-century who left

her home in what is known today as southern France or northern Spain – on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Writing home to her community, she describes this ancient rite as it was then celebrated in Jerusalem. She says:

Then the candidates are brought in one by one, the men with their “fathers,” the women with their “mothers.” Then the bishop one by one asks their neighbors: “Is he a good-living man? Does he respect his parents? Is he a drunkard or untrustworthy?” He asks them like this about every vice, at least the more serious ones. If the bishop finds that the candidate is free from all these faults about which he has questioned the witnesses, he writes down the candidate’s name with his own hand.<sup>2</sup>

Today, you will give your names to me in petition to receive the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Your “fathers” and “mothers,” that is, your godparents, have already sent me written testimony, which I have read, about the conduct of your lives, and in a few moments they – and those responsible for your formation – will testify publicly before the Church to your readiness to be incorporated into the life of Christ Jesus. I would like to read some excerpts of these written testimonies now.

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” (Ephesians 1:4). 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 whole Church rejoices at your presence here today, dear catechumens. Through you, we see in a clear fashion that 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 coming forty days of Lent, our readings from the Old Testament and the Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke during the first three and a half weeks of Lent will speak of beginning anew; of fasting prayer and almsgiving; of conversion, of mutual forgiveness, of hardness of heart; of love of enemies; and the call to holiness. The readings of the second half of Lent, beginning on the Monday of the fourth week of Lent, are taken from the Gospel of Saint John and lead us to the mystery of Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, of whom Saint John says that all who believe in Him will have eternal life. Christ is the healer and life-giver, the One who gives life through His confrontation with death and gathers into one the scattered children of God. This dynamic from the ethical to the Christological is quite intentional, because as we come to see the high ethical ideals and moral demands of discipleship, we come to realize our total dependence on God's grace and our profound need of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

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.

I urge you to continue to stand with your catechumens, who will soon be numbered among the Elect. 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> St. Irenaeus, from the *Treatise Against Heresies*, Lb. 4, 13-14, 1: SC 100, 534-540; reprinted in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings for Saturday after Ash Wednesday.

<sup>2</sup> Egeria, *Peregrinatio*, 45. In Edward Yarnold, S.J., *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mark Searle, "The Spirit of Lent," in *Assembly*, volume 8:3 (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Center for Liturgy).