What are the “Scrutinies”?

These very special rites are celebrated on the middle three Sundays of Lent, at liturgies where the Elect are present. The Elect are those in our midst who are preparing for Baptism. Part of their journey to the font is that they have been received among us, the Rite of Acceptance, and they have been enrolled in the Book of the Elect in the Rite of Election.

Even if these rites are not celebrated at the liturgy we attend, or not celebrated in our parish or congregation at all, it can be wonderful to reflect upon the journey these Elect are making during Lent, as an inspiration and source of renewal for us in our journey.

These are ancient rites and they may, at first, seem strange to us. But they are profoundly rooted in our human experience. We need to examine (scrutinize) how we are, the areas of our lives where we are tempted, or seriously sin - in what we do and what we fail to do. We really need healing and the strength that can come from the support of our sisters and brothers.

Invitation to Silent Prayer

One of the most powerful moments of the Scrutinies is how they begin. After the homily, the Elect are invited to come forward with their sponsors and to kneel down. Then, the whole assembly is invited to pray.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment

138 The period of purification and enlightenment, which the rite of election begins, customarily coincides with Lent. In the liturgy and liturgical catechesis of Lent the reminder of baptism already received or the preparation for its reception, as well as the theme of repentance, renew the entire community along with those being prepared to celebrate the paschal mystery, in which each of the elect will share through the sacraments of initiation. For both the elect and the local community, therefore, the Lenten season is a time for spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery.

139 This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance. This period is intended as well to enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deeper knowledge of Christ the Savior.

The Scrutinies

141 The scrutinies, which are solemnly celebrated on Sundays and are reinforced by an exorcism, are rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, and then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.
for them in silence. It is a very solemn moment. This community has cared for these elect for some months now on their journey. We have sent them to reflect more and more deeply on the Word of God, and expressed to them our longing for the day on which they would join us at the table of the Lord. Now we pray for them in this sacred silence, deeply asking God to protect them and heal them in the weeks ahead.

**Intercessions for the Elect**

We then pray out loud together for the Elect.

**Prayer of Exorcism**

Then, we pray that they might be freed from the power of the Evil One and protected on their journey.

**The Laying On of Hands**

In a silent ritual deliberately reminiscent of the rite used for ordination in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest or deacon lays his hands for a brief moment on the head of each of the Elect. It is a solemn act of calling down the Spirit of Jesus to be with them and protect them.

**Dismissal of the Elect**

The Elect are then sent forth to reflect upon the Word and this powerful gesture of love on the part of this community, that cares for them so deeply, with the love of Christ.

142 Because they are asking for the three sacraments of initiation, the elect must have the intention of achieving an intimate knowledge of Christ and his Church, and they are expected particularly to progress in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives and true repentance.

143 In order to inspire in the elect a desire for purification and redemption by Christ, three scrutinies are celebrated. By this means, first of all, the elect are instructed gradually about the mystery of sin, from which the whole world and every person longs to be delivered and thus saved from its present and future consequences. Second, their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is the living water (gospel of the Samaritan woman in the first scrutiny), the light of the world (gospel of the man born blind in the second scrutiny), the resurrection and the life (gospel of Lazarus in the third scrutiny). From the first to the final scrutiny the elect should progress in their perception of sin and their desire for salvation.

144 In the rite of exorcism, the elect, who have already learned from the Church as their mother the mystery of deliverance from sin by Christ, are free from the effects of sin and from the influence of the devil. They receive new strength in the midst of their spiritual journey and they open their hearts to receive the gifts of the Savior.

145 The priest or deacon who is the presiding celebrant should carry out the celebration in such a way that the faithful in the assembly will also derive benefit from the liturgy of the scrutinies and join in the intercessions for the elect.

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