

## February 21, 2021 Rite of Election

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley  
Readings for the First Sunday of Lent

### **Introduction:** (right after the Opening Hymn)

Good afternoon---Please be seated.

- On this beautiful but frigid February day, I'm glad that you all arrived safely here to our Cathedral from your parish homes around the Diocese.
- Before we actually begin, I'd like to take this moment to welcome all of you for this "Rite of Election/Call to Continuing Conversion". This is not a Mass; this is what we call a Liturgy of the Word---Service.
- This very same Rite is taking place in every Cathedral in every Diocese around the world, as Bishops in each Diocese welcome their people to this very same Rite of Election.
- You have come to our Cathedral Church, which is very often affectionately referred to as "the Mother Church" of the whole Diocese. I assume that for most of you, this may be your first visit to the Cathedral. (Is that true?) You are welcome today, and always.
- There are 34/34 of you who have come from 15/13 parishes from among our 59 parishes in our 27 Collaboratives. As I like to do with each group who come to the Cathedral for the Rite of Election, I affectionately call you the "Class of 2021"!
  - 18/10 of the 34 of you here this afternoon are "Catechumens"; 16/24 of you are "Candidates"---and all of you have been on a journey of Faith because you have heard the Lord calling you to enter into the life of Faith in the Catholic Church.
- Since we have just begun the Season of Lent, we are only 6 weeks away from the Easter Vigil when you will be either be Baptized, or make a

Profession of Faith, and all of you will become full members of the Catholic Church.

- I am grateful that you have responded to God's call to this spiritual life-changing moment for you, and that you have come together here in our Mother Church---our Cathedral Church---to join with me as the Bishop of the Diocese, to formalize your "Call to Conversion".
- I am also happy to welcome your sponsors, your family members, and all those who are accompanying you on this journey of faith as we are all so excited to welcome you into the Church as our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Faith.
- And so please stand.....and let us enter into this Rite of Election in the way that we begin all our times of prayer united with our Loving God: *"In the Name of the Father...."*

**Homily** (*Readings for the First Sunday of Lent: Gn.98-15; 1 Pet 3:18-22; Mk.1:12-15*)

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

- The Rite of Election is one of the most joyful Liturgies we get to celebrate each year. It provides us with the privilege of welcoming *you* who are so close to entering fully into the Sacramental life of the Church.
- I look forward to this Rite of Election every year, and I am always inspired by those of you who are making this momentous decision in your spiritual lives to be baptized into Christ, and the Mystery of our Faith; or if you've already been baptized, that you are deepening your relationship with Him by entering into full Communion with the Church and by being able to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. But why do we call this the "Rite of Election"?
- "Election" comes from the Latin word, "eligire"---"to choose". The most important understanding of "election" is that we have been "chosen" by God, as unworthy as we are. God chooses us, and claims us as His own. That's what we refer to as the Covenant that God makes with His people: "You will be My people, and I will be your God", says the Lord! We heard about God's Covenant a lot in today's First Reading....5 different times, following the Great Flood, God repeated over and over again to NEVER do anything ever again to break His Covenant with us.
- So, in the big picture, God's Plan is for ALL people to realize that. But equally important to God's commitment to be our God, is our commitment to accept God's invitation for us to be His People----for each of us to enter into this Covenant with God----to say to God: "I am yours, Loving God; I choose to be one of Your beloved and a part of 'Your People'. I am blessed to say that You are my God!"---and to demonstrate that by the way we choose to live our lives.
- As the "Class of 2021", you have been pursuing this "call to conversion" during a world-wide pandemic, and because of that, you've clear been coping with more than the unusual amount of challenges. I imagine

most of you have had to go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process via ZOOM, or in other less-than-ideal circumstances. Now, more than ever, the Lord's call to us in this Season of Lent, to "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel*", will lead us to find that sense of Hope and Joy, thanks to that repentance and belief, in these troubled times.

- But whoever chooses to wholeheartedly embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to be a good, faithful and joyful Catholic, as you are preparing to do, must first be purified in mind and heart. That's what this Season of Lent helps all of us to do---to let go of all the things that get in the way of following Jesus especially as we will accompany Him through Holy Week, joining ourselves to Jesus as we re-live His Suffering, Passion and Death, followed by His Glorious Resurrection---which is what fills us with Hope throughout our lives.
- In the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent, which we heard just a few moments ago, St. Mark tells us that "*The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and He remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.*"
- The Church makes sure that every year on the First Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading is about "Jesus' Temptations by Satan", an event that is so significant that it's recorded in 3 of the 4 Gospel accounts. Jesus, the Son of God in the Flesh, was a prime target for Satan, the Prince of Darkness, who did everything he could---for 40 days and nights---to deceive Jesus Himself.
- If Satan did that to Jesus, then there's no doubt that he's got his sights set on all of us----especially when we are deliberately choosing to follow God, and publicly committing ourselves to give witness to the world that we are one of God's beloved People.
- That's why on Ash Wednesday (if you had the opportunity to receive your blessed ashes), you heard one of the two short prayers explaining why we receive the Ashes: to "Remember that we are dust, and unto dust we shall (one day) return"; and to "Repent, and believe in the Gospel". This is a powerful reminder that there is more to life than the seductive promises of "the world, the flesh and the devil." As Jesus so

firmly told Satan: *We do not live by bread alone*. The “bread” of our physical food feeds/nourishes our bodies. But what is ultimately most important is what feeds/nourishes our souls; our spiritual lives can only be fed by the Word of God which comes to us in the Scriptures, through the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist), and by pouring ourselves out in loving service to our sisters and brothers in need, as Jesus did.

- The first reading from the Book of Genesis (Gn 9:8–15) references God’s promise to Noah following the great flood that “devastated the earth” and nearly destroyed the entire human race. This Covenant that God has made with us after the Flood, symbolized by the Rainbow, is a promise that He assures us He will never break. When God makes a promise, He keeps it.
- Of course, each of us has an obligation to keep our promises to God. These include our Baptismal Promises, as well as the promises we make to our spouses and children, to our work, and to our society as good neighbors and faithful citizens. God is always faithful, but unfortunately, we are not. What a difference it would make to our Church and our world if every one of us was as faithful to our promises as God is faithful to us!
- Selfishness and sin cause us to break our promises, and that’s one reason why this time of spiritual renewal is so important.
- The Season of Lent recalls Jesus’ time in the desert, and it provides us with an opportunity to share in this experience through a renewed commitment to the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These three traditional Lenten practices help us to open our hearts to God so that He can “*create a clean heart in us*”, and so that we can develop a relationship of trust, both with God and with our neighbor.
- In today’s Second Reading (1 Pt 3:18–22), St. Peter explains that Noah’s flood “*prefigured baptism*.” Like the sacrament of our rebirth in Christ, the cleansing we experience during Lent “*is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience*”.

- Lent is a time of spiritual renewal, a time to acknowledge our selfishness and sin, and a chance to overcome the temptations that distract us from joyfully living the Gospel values, and a time to become more committed to who we are as God's sons and daughters---sisters and brothers in Christ--- through Baptism.
- Lent is the season for feeding our souls, and to heal the wounds caused by sin. God's promise to Noah—that he will never again permit the complete destruction of His creation—is a sign of the hope, and joy, that can only come through the grace of Christ---and why the “Rain-Bow” in the sky following the Flood represents for us the Hope we need to move forward in our lives despite whatever challenges we face.
- It's no secret that following Jesus and living a Christian life is difficult. In many ways, I think it's more challenging today than at any time in the 50 years I've served as a priest/Bishop. People of Faith are clearly in conflict with the prevailing culture of the day. Making a commitment to Christ today requires the courage to “stand up” and be witnesses to our fundamental beliefs and values---a type of “martyrdom”---because we can certainly expect to pay certain consequences for doing so.
- In fact, in the very next issue of our diocesan quarterly magazine known as “Southwest Michigan Catholic”, the cover story features a recent “Alumna” of the RCIA program---one who entered into the Church in the “Class of 2010”. In that feature article, Arlea wrote about what it means to become a Catholic, and what it has taken for her to practice her faith in the current social climate: “I tell my kids...I'm raising you to understand your faith, but you will have to embrace it someday for yourself. I can show you the way to Heaven, but only you can get yourself there....Living your Faith in this world is not going to be easy. There's a true religious stigma happening, and you need to be able to live your faith with confidence. That's why we really need to Church--- to help us to stand strong with our families and be brave.”
- Yes, we definitely need the Church----and that's ALL of us---to stand strong in these challenging times, and the best way to make sure that happens is by each of us remaining faithful to our promises, and not compromising our Catholic beliefs at any time, or for any reason.

- I am so very happy for each of you, and as you have made this journey here to our Cathedral this afternoon, I trust that you too are happy in the decision that you have made to become Catholic. All of us here applaud your decision, and along with your Godparents/Sponsors and Catechists, the whole Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo supports you with our prayers.
- But don't ever lose sight of the fact that God has taken the initiative; it is God Who has "called" you---it is God Who is touching your heart--- it is our Loving God and Father Who has been waiting----for some of you, perhaps He has been waiting a long time----for YOU to make the decision to accept to His call.
- So, that's really the most important and profound aspect of "Election". The other important aspect has to do with what we're doing here today. In this beautiful, newly restored Cathedral of St. Augustine, our Diocese's patronal saint and the patron of all who are undergoing a dramatic conversion in Faith, the Church also "chooses" you. The Church also has a responsibility to make sure that you are prepared to make this decision, and that you are doing so for all the appropriate reasons.
- And that's why every Catechumen or Candidate in the RCIA process, in every Diocese throughout the world, comes to the local Cathedral, as you have come here to ours, so that I as the Bishop of the Diocese—the Shepherd of this Local Church and the Chief Pastor of each of the 59 parishes in all 9 counties of our Diocese—can formally and officially acknowledge your request.
- In other words, I, your Bishop, get the joy and the privilege of saying: "You have been elected!" You can move forward toward the Easter Vigil which is now less than 6 weeks away, when you will be Baptized or make a Profession of Faith, and when you will then receive the Sacraments of Initiation of Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.
- That is what flows from this special day when you are counted among the "Elect" and the "Enlightened". That is why the Catechumens will sign the Book of the Elect when you come forward. And that is why the Candidates, when you are called to stand, will renew your commitment

to the Baptism you've already received, and be counted among the "Enlightened".

- My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, thank you for the "choice" you are making by being present here today, and for your willingness to continuing to move forward to your reception into the Church.
- In a very particular way, I want to thank and commend all those who are accompanying you on this Journey of Faith---your Godparents/Sponsors, Catechists, Family members, your priests and deacons, and the remainder of the Body of Christ.
- The whole Church rejoices today because God, our Loving Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has chosen, that is "elected", you for His very own. May you live your Faith with Joy, with enthusiasm, and with confidence. May God, Who has begun this good work in you, bring it to fulfillment throughout the rest of your lives.

God bless you, now and always!