

Rite of Election 2015

Introduction

Let me begin by saying how happy I am to see all of you here this afternoon, those of you who are prepared to be baptized at the Easter Vigil, those of you who are already baptized but now embracing the fullness of the faith, as well as those of you who are finding your way back to the Church after an absence. I welcome you - your presence here today is a sign of hope and joy - not just for me but for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and for the whole Church.

In the same breath, I want to welcome your sponsors - thank you for your prayers, good example, and your love for your faith. You were chosen by a loved one or friend who is being baptized and received into the Church. How much they must think of you! How much they trust you! What's more, the Lord himself is asking you to help them not just to make their way to the Baptismal Font or to Confirmation or to first Holy Communion - the Lord is asking you to help our catechumens and our candidates to persevere in practicing the Catholic faith for the rest of their lives - and to do this by what you say and by your own continued good example.

With us today are priests, deacons, & PLD's from all around the Archdiocese. You are sitting with the catechumens and candidates from your parishes. Your witness to the Word of God and your pastoral love have played a large role in encouraging these men and women to open their hearts to Christ and to want to become fully members of Christ's Body, the Church. I thank you for your zeal and for the pastoral care you will continue to give to our catechumens and candidates. And I also want to thank the RCIA coordinators with us today - together with many catechists and others who assist in this ministry. You have done so much to lead our catechumens and candidates to this moment of grace in their own lives and in the life of the Church.

Getting There from Here

But this is not just a day for giving thanks. It is also a day when we unite as God's

people in facing the challenge of being a Catholic Christian in this day and age. It has never been easy and we should not expect it to be easy for us. Our readings alert us to this – so let's briefly turn to them so that we may be nourished by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The first thing we heard was about the great flood and Noah's ark. All of us know about floods and how devastating they can be. It's not always just a matter of getting water in the basement or a leaky roof. Floods can sweep away our homes, our possessions, and life itself, unless one is fortunate enough to get into a boat.

St. Peter in our second reading tells us that, when the great flood came, only eight people made it into Noah's ark, together with quite a few animals, – and they were in that boat for 40 days—talk about a long Lent!

St. Peter also reminds us that the flood and Noah's ark tells us something about Baptism. Water is essential for life and it is a means of getting from one place to another, but it can be the cause of death – that is, if we miss the boat or jump ship.

When we are baptized, water becomes the source of life for us – not just bodily life but a whole new life of grace won for us by Jesus Christ by his death on the Cross and by his Resurrection from the dead. In a word, Baptism is the way God's own life comes into our souls. There opens for us the possibility of a warm friendship with Jesus Christ who wants to walk with us every day throughout our lives. But we also have to make sure that we don't drown in other waters less friendly, the turbulent waters of a sinful, self-centered, meaningless life. So, as we are baptized, we climb aboard a boat, an ark, called the Church. These days it has a lot more than 8 people in it – now it's over a billion people. And this is the boat that takes us over the stormy waters of time to the peace, holiness, and joy of the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, a lot of people like to think they can go it alone – that they can be “spiritual” without being part of the Church or without embracing what the Church believes and teaches. You are here today not only to be baptized but also to become fully a part of the Church – where Christ is not only the Captain of your soul but indeed the Captain who guides the whole Church to its heavenly destination.

Temptations

Today the Word of God also warns us that we and our shipmates will be tempted. After all, Jesus himself was tempted during his 40 day fast in the desert, so we too should expect that we'll be tempted – by the allurements of the worldly like power and glamour, by the desires of the flesh to satisfy the hunger of our souls in degrading ways, by the devil who tells us we ought to jump ship or start a mutiny. Jesus who resisted the devil gives you and me the strength to overcome temptation.

If you and I want to be strong enough to defeat the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to be active, helpful, loving members of the crew, we need to follow the example of our Captain, that is, Jesus – who fasted, who prayed, and who went about doing good for others. We need to do these things all the time but we need to do them with special fervor during Lent when you, our catechumens and candidates are making final preparations for baptism and reception into the Church.

This afternoon, let me say, welcome aboard! May the Lord continue to bless and guide you as we journey to that joyful night when together we will make the passage with the sinless Christ, the Paschal Victim, from the death of sin to the new life of grace – to honor and glory of God and for the salvation of our souls. May God bless us and keep us in his love!