

# Rite of Election

## Introduction

On the first Sunday of Lent the Church invites all of us, but especially those of you preparing for initiation at Easter, to confront the all-too-human tendency to give in to temptation and to fall into sin. And, at the conclusion of Lent, during the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday, the Church will invite you to make and/or renew your baptismal promises. You will be asked: “Do you renounce sin so as to live in the freedom of the children of God?” And then: “Do you renounce the lure of evil, so that sin may have no mastery over you?” And finally: “Do you renounce Satan, the author and prince of sin?”

So at the very beginning of Lent the Church looks ahead to the celebration of the Lord’s Resurrection. The Church wants to guide us through these forty days of Lent, this intense time of prayer and self-sacrifice leading to the Easter Vigil, so that when the great day dawns you will not half-heartedly pronounce your baptismal promises. No, you will do so as disciples, as followers of Christ, who truly share in the victory of Christ over sin and death, as men and women who are truly free from the bondage, discord, and misery which sin, contrary what it promises, introduces into our lives.

## In the Garden

And that is why the Church introduces us yet again to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, [a kind of earthly paradise] in our reading from Genesis. Adam and Eve were created in God’s image and endowed with great dignity. Life was good. God had provided for them in every way.

But in the midst of the garden was that one tree, *that one enticing tree*, of which God had forbidden them to eat. Satan convinced Adam and Eve to do the one thing God had asked them not to do. He led them not to believe God when he said that the fruit of that tree would bring death. Instead, Satan lured them to decide for themselves what is good and what is evil. So the story about Adam and Eve lays bare the core of all sinfulness: it’s our egotism and self-assertion, it’s our pride, it’s our quest to be in control, the desire to substitute our will for God’s will.

## **In the Desert**

Let's fast forward to the Gospel reading from St. Matthew where Jesus is tempted, not in the Garden, but in the desert of our sinfulness. Satan hurled three temptations against Jesus: the temptation to indulge the flesh by turning stones into bread; the temptation to test the Father's love by hurling himself from the top of the Temple; and finally the devil promises Jesus earthly power if Jesus would worship him. But the gist of all three temptations was for Jesus to assert his own ego, to substitute his plans for God's plans, to control his own destiny.

The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are but never sinned (cf. Heb. 4:15). Indeed, Jesus' temptations were very real & powerful yet he prevailed over them. In turn, Jesus forgives our sins and enables us to win the victory over sin, but only if we are willing to surrender to him the egotism and self-assertion that is mainstay of our sinfulness.

St. Paul tells us that through the one sin of Adam, sin entered the world, and with it, death. He goes on to say that through one gift, Jesus' gift of self to the Father and to us, God's merciful forgiveness has reached us all. Jesus would not put his Father to the test by leaping from the top of the temple into the abyss, but in accord with the Father's saving will, Jesus did leap into the abyss of our sinfulness and its companion, death. Taking on our egotism, self-assertion, and desire to control, he commended himself into the hands of the Father for our sake. In doing so, he bestowed on us the power and the courage to surrender our sinfulness, indeed our very lives, to God's love.

## **Conclusion: The Sacraments of Initiation**

The power of Christ's gift of self reaches us through the Sacraments. Through the Sacrament of Baptism you will die to sin & be re-born as children of God and as members of the Church. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will receive the strength of the Holy Spirit so that you may become more like Christ and bear witness to His love which is stronger death and more powerful than sin. In the Holy Eucharist you will receive the true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, so that Christ may dwell in you, stay close to you, and shape your very lives to reflect his truth and love.

Candidates for initiation will also experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of God's forgiveness and mercy in preparation for the Easter Vigil. When we confess our sins and seek the true grace of contrition, God grants us the forgiveness of our sins and the strength we need to break free of the gravitational pull of sin so as to live in authentic freedom and sinless joy. Thus do we prepare our hearts for that joyous day of the Resurrection when we will reject sin & pledge to live sons & daughters of our heavenly Father!

Your presence here today brings joy to the whole Church. It is a sign that the Lord and His Holy Spirit are working in our midst. As you prepare for initiation into the Church, please count on my prayers and the prayers of the whole Church. Please know how welcome you are! May God bless you and keep you always in His love!