



Through the Lenten Desert to Easter Waters

Everything we hear, everything we see, everything we celebrate as a Christian community this time of year is an invitation to cross the Lenten desert to the Easter waters of baptism. We journey with the elect through the final days of preparation, but we, the “already-initiated” Catholic, must make this journey our own if we are to find the Vigil’s renewal of baptism significant, life-giving and truly a deepening commitment to the person of Jesus. And so, baptism is the lens through which we will view the gospel of the fourth Sunday in Lent.

This gospel passage, the parable of the Prodigal Son, is so familiar that we may fail to see, to hear, to understand. Perhaps this lens of Baptism will allow us to see, to hear, to understand (and to respond) again as if for the first time.

So often we are asked which of the three characters we most identify with. How am I the younger brother who was lured away making many wrong choices and living with the consequences?

How am I the older brother whose hurt and bitterness block him from sharing his father’s joy at his brother’s return?

How am I called to be like the father reaching out in love and forgiveness?

Instead I would suggest that looking at the experience of each of the brothers empowers us to answer the basic Easter

questions: Do you reject Satan? His empty promises? Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God’s children? Because I see that like the younger brother, my journey has taken me away from love, I can identify the hooks and temptations that draw me away. I see the empty promises I have embraced and what effort will be needed to confront and work against this as I say “I do”.

Like the older brother I need healing for the roots of my sinful choices as I choose to reject sin-choose freedom as I respond “I do”.

When I watch and listen to the father I allow my image of God to heal, to grow, to deepen. And so when asked “Do you believe in God?”, my heart responds “I DO!” this Easter.



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The minor rites: A sacramental duty

St. Augustine saw it as his duty to pass on four essential “sacraments” to the elect. These were the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the font, and the table. He would teach them about the table after their initiation; he would explore the meaning of the font with them on Holy Saturday, before the Vigil. And the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer would be handed over in Lent. Augustine’s motivation was the same as ours as expressed in RCIA 147. The church lovingly entrusts these ancient texts to the elect because they “have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church’s faith and prayer.

The Presentation of the Creed is celebrated during the week following the first scrutiny and the Presentation of the Lord’s Prayer is celebrated after the third scrutiny. The reason the Creed is presented during the period of purification and enlightenment is because it is like a summary chapter in a textbook. If the catechumen is truly ready for initiation, there should be nothing surprising in the Creed. As the RCIA says, the Creed “recalls the wonderful deeds of God for the salvation of the human race...” (147). The catechumens (or elect) are expected to commit the Creed to memory and there will be a test! They recite the Creed publicly on Holy Saturday, before the Vigil. The reason for presenting the Lord’s Prayer is also crucial. “The Lord’s Prayer fills them with a deeper realization of the new spirit of adoption by which they will call God their Father, especially in the midst of the Eucharistic assembly” (147).

History and Meaning of the Scrutinies

The initiation rites of the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent don’t have the most comforting of names. On these days we engage the elect in rites and prayers called scrutinies and exorcisms. The first connotes probing and critical examination of one’s life, and the second—well, let’s just say many of us have had nightmares because of what Hollywood thinks exorcisms look like.

Yet if we understand the history of these initiation rites, we’ll see that they are both more pastoral and comforting than we may think.

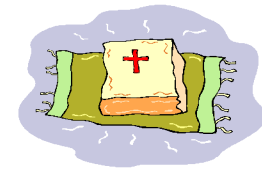
To call the current rite with the elect “scrutiny” is a bit of a misnomer. **Paul Turner** gives a good overview of how we got where we are today in terms of the scrutinies.

There are a few things to note about these presentations.

In many parishes, it is common to present a scroll or written text of the Creed and Lord’s Prayer. This is not what Augustine did. (This is just a symbolic reminder.)

The rite has the Creed and Lord’s Prayer “presented” orally by the presider and the assembly. There is no combined rite for these presentations. The baptized candidates have already made a profession of faith (or their godparents made it for them) at their baptism, and a ritual presentation of the Creed diminishes their original profession of faith. The candidates should absolutely be required to memorize the Creed if they don’t know it. Their participation in the handing on and reciting back rituals, however, would be as members of the baptized faithful and not as members of the unbaptized.

Similarly with the Lord’s Prayer. Many baptized candidates already know the Lord’s Prayer. For those who don’t, it is still a “sacrament” that was entrusted to them at their baptism. **It is redundant to hand it over to them again ritually.** (Nick Wagner, Team RCIA, used with permission)



Two related actions

In the earliest ritual books of the church, exorcisms and scrutinies seemed to be separate events celebrated sometimes on a daily basis. One of these early documents, called the *Apostolic Tradition*, notes that the catechumens’ conduct was examined at a time just before their baptism. After this examination, the bishop laid hands daily on the catechumens and led prayers of exorcism over them until their baptism. The scrutinizing of the catechumens’ lives was meant to prepare them for baptism, while the exorcisms served to prove that the scrutinies were working. The two rites were distinct yet related and were both loving acts of the church for the elect.

As fewer adults were being initiated and the number of infant baptisms increased, these two rites were condensed into one liturgy, like we have today. Yet, no longer were these rites seen as preparation for baptism. Rather they became somewhat perfunctory rites done just before baptism as part of the tradition. By the 12th century, the elect participated only in an exorcism on Saturday morning right before the baptismal liturgy. By the 17th century, even this was moved to the beginning of the baptismal rite itself—we still do this in today’s Rite of Baptism of infants. Perhaps it was this diminishing, not only in time but also in meaning, that spurred on some of our more negative connotations of these two rituals.

Paul Turner summarizes the **history of scrutinies** best in this way:

They consistently served as a way of ritually assessing one’s readiness for baptism, but what they investigated changed from one generation to the next. They scrutinized spiritual development, moral behavior, intellectual understanding, and even the intelligence of godparents....By the time of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council the scrutinies had been transformed into a series of exorcisms invoked within the baptismal liturgy, in Latin, where no real scrutinizing was expected.

Renewing the purpose

In the renewal of the initiation rites, the scrutiny is meant not simply to critique and assess one’s readiness—remember that readiness was established at the Rite of Election with the godparents’ testimony and the bishop’s acceptance of the catechumens’ names. The purpose of each of the scrutinies is “to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect” and “to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good” (RCIA, 141). The true pastoral sense of this two-fold act of uncovering and strengthening is emphasized in the next sentence of 141: “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....”

At its core, the scrutinies are not about the sinfulness of the elect but about the overwhelming grace of God in Christ. The exorcisms are not fear-laden bouts with Satan but are grace-filled encounters with the healing power of the Spirit.

In the current rite, it is difficult to name what is the “scrutinizing” event. I would argue that the proclamation of Scripture, especially the gospel, serves to scrutinize the elect, for it is in the word proclaimed that we encounter Christ. As Rita Ferrone, one of our TeamRCIA writers, says, “A scrutiny is...very different from submitting one’s conduct to the judgment of the church. Better to say that Jesus is the one who scrutinizes the elect, whom he loves and has called to himself” (“Lazarus, Come Out! The Story and Ritual of the Third Scrutiny” in *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*, Liturgy Training Publications, January 1992, p. 3.) Further, “next to the proclamation of the word, the intercessions are the crucial element within the ritual, for within them the cutting edge of the word is concretely focused on the human heart” (Michael Marchal, “Scrutinies: Words That Cut” in *Catechumenate: A Journal of Christian Initiation*, January 1993, p. 21).

What does this mean for us then? I think this brief look at the history and purpose of the scrutinies gives us three points to remember:

The scrutinies and their accompanying exorcisms are a series of rites that **cannot be condensed in time**; they need time “to work.” Nor should we diminish their ritual symbols of silence, posture, litany, and hand laying.

The scrutinies focus as much on the grace of God as on the sin of humanity. We can’t truly call a scrutiny a *Christian* rite of initiation unless our self-searching leads to acknowledgment and praise of Christ who saves us.

The scrutinies are for the elect, not for the baptized, for we believe that baptism matters. That is, when one is baptized, one is freed from the power of sin. The baptized are no longer enslaved by Satan. Those who have not yet entered the waters of the font are still vulnerable; they have not yet been clothed with Christ; they have not yet been reborn as new creations. That is why those who have already been released from the devil’s grip are able to pray these scrutinies and exorcisms for the elect.

(Diane Macalintal, Team RCIA, used with permission.)


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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Sunday, March 14	Second Scrutiny at 8:30	
Tuesday, March 16	Meeting of sponsors & godparent of the elect at 7:30	
Thursday, March 18	Preparation of third scrutiny at 7:30	
Sunday, March 21	Third Scrutiny at 5:00	
Thursday, March 25	Presentation of the Lord's Prayer at evening Mas	
Saturday, March 27	Easter Vigil run-through for godparents at 1:00	
Saturday, April 3	Anticipated rites at 11:30	
Sundays, April 11, 18, 25, May 2, 16, 23	Neophyte Mass at 10:30 followed by pot luck lunch	
Saturday, May 22	RCIA retreat 9 to 5	
Sunday, May 23	Neophyte commissioning at 8:30 Rite of reception at 5:00	

RCIA AND YOU

The RCIA process is a gift of the Spirit to the church and especially to the local community. Through it, we can accompany an individual's journey of conversion to the person of Jesus lived out in the Catholic Christian community and are reminded of our own need to continue and deepen our own conversion.

Persons come to us who wish to be baptized. Others who were baptized within the Catholic church as infants now choose to complete their initiation through confirmation and Eucharist. Still others, who have been baptized in other Christian traditions come to explore the possibility of full communion with the Catholic church. Each of these journeys is unique and we seek to honor this as we walk through this process together.

Some members of the community assume leadership roles as sponsors, catechists, prayer partners, and inquiry facilitators but the community remains the primary minister primarily through example, prayer and spirit of welcome and hospitality.

Please consider joining in the evening of reflection to prepare the scrutiny, attending the brief prayer service of "anticipated rite" on Easter Saturday morning and the neophyte pot luck lunches. And pray for our elect: Colleen McCormack, Jeff Urkevich, Hannah Johnson, Tegan Johnson, Renee McClelland, Kiren Midbo, Tristan Midbo, Casey Midbo and Dillon Rogers and be there to welcome and congratulate them after the Vigil.



Fr Wilf confirms Bob Papineau at the Easter Vigil 2009