



Diocese of Buffalo

Department of Lifelong Faith Formation

A member of the Division for Evangelization and Catechesis

What are the Scrutinies? Why are they essential?

Whenever we undergo a life-changing event, we take time to get ready. Leaving home, starting a new job, getting married . . . all of these involve countless practical arrangements *and* spiritual and emotional preparation. Becoming Catholic is no different. The RCIA process designates Lent as a time of intense spiritual preparation for those preparing for Baptism and the Easter Sacraments. On the First Sunday of Lent, catechumens celebrate the Rite of Election thereby becoming “The Elect,” those chosen by God to receive the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. The scrutinies invite the Assembly to pray with the Elect as they prepare.

Celebrated on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, the scrutinies strengthen their conversion, open their hearts to receive the grace of baptism and strengthen their desire to receive Christ in the Eucharist. The scrutinies are powerful rituals that contain intercessions for the Elect and a prayer of exorcism. The exorcism frees them from the effects of sin and the influence of Satan, and calls down God’s blessing and protection. It points out that the Elect share in the victory over sin and death that Jesus has won, once and for all.

When the scrutinies are celebrated, the Gospel readings are those of cycle A from the Gospel of John: The Woman at Well; The Man Born Blind and The Raising of Lazarus. These readings illustrate steps along the conversion process: the Samaritan woman is thirsting for truth, for life, for freedom. She encounters Jesus and realizes he is the “water of life” that quenches her thirst. Jesus opens the eyes of the blind man, enabling him to “see,” a physical and spiritual healing that leads him to proclaim Jesus as Lord. When Jesus raises Lazarus, he reveals that belief in him will ultimately lead us to the fullness of eternal life.

These readings are rich sources of reflection for the Elect and for all of us. What are we really thirsting for? What areas of blindness prevent us from seeing our sins, both the personal and social sins that we all engage in? How do we hold on to hope when we are faced with desperate situations?

Help the Elect to prepare for the scrutinies by inviting them to name and pray for whatever they need to be freed from and for the new life they seek. Unpack the ritual afterward: ask, “What did you see, feel, experience? What do you most remember? What insights did you gain? What is different now? How will you live differently now?”

The scrutinies unite the Elect and the Assembly – they call us all to self-searching and repentance and remind us of the gift of salvation in Christ. Let the scrutinies touch *your* heart along with hearts of the Elect this Lent.

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