

Celebrating the Scrutinies

Free these elect
from the death-dealing power
of the spirit of evil,
so that they may bear witness
to their new life in the risen Christ,
for he lives and reigns for ever.

Introduction

The Scrutinies are significant liturgies in the Period of Purification and Enlightenment which coincides with the Season of Lent.

After the Rite of Election Catechumens are called the Elect - following the testimony of their godparents, they are elected by the Bishop to celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation at the next Easter Vigil

The language of the Rite (Scrutiny, Exorcism) can be challenging to some. It reflects that This is a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their consciences and do penance. (126)

This should be understood within the context of the whole Church's marking of Lent and preparation for Easter. In the liturgy and liturgical catechesis of Lent the reminder of baptism already received or the preparation for its reception, as well as the themes of repentance, renew the entire community along with those being prepared to celebrate the paschal mystery, in which each of the elect will share through the sacraments of initiation. For both the elect and the local community, therefore, the Lenten season is a time of spiritual recollection in preparation for the celebrations of the paschal mystery. (125)

Background

Who is the liturgy for?

The Scrutinies are celebrated by the Elect, that is those who have been to the Rite of Election and are preparing to receive the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the next Easter Vigil.

For Children of Catechetical Age who seek the Sacraments of Initiation there is a corresponding Penitential Rite — more details under Adaptation below.

The Scrutinies are not celebrated with those who are already baptised and seek Reception into full communion and/or the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist,

Contents

- Introduction
- Background
- Looking at the Liturgy
- Adaptation
- Preparation
- Mystagogy
- What happens next

Note

As a rule **'Rite'** refers to the whole liturgical book — the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; whereas **'rite'** refers to the liturgical text of the Scrutinies.

When does the liturgy happen?

The Scrutinies take place on the 3rd, 4th and 4th Sundays of Lent.

They are intimately connected with the readings for Year A, particularly the Gospels, the texts of which are always used.

Common practice is that the Scrutinies are celebrated within Sunday Mass. (However, the Rite allows for them to be celebrated outside Mass and led by a Deacon, if necessary.)

The Rite presumes that all 3 Scrutinies will be celebrated — there is a progression across the weeks.

The length of the liturgy should be borne in mind. Though the Scrutiny itself is not that long the Gospel on each Sunday is extended and it would be against the spirit of the rite to use the shorter form of the readings. This would suggest that the homily is succinct, perhaps directing people to the ways in which the rite might help them in their own preparation for Easter and also taking the option to omit the Creed and Intercessions.

Where does the liturgy happen?

The Scrutinies take place in the local parish community.

Where the Community has more than one Sunday Mass it may be suggested to celebrate the Scrutinies at different liturgies over the 3 weeks — however practice suggests otherwise.

One of the aims of the period of the Catechumenate should be the integration of Catechumens into the pattern of Sunday Mass — i.e. well before the celebration of the Scrutinies each member of the Elect entering more deeply into what it means to be a 'disciple' of Christ, including encouragement to regular attendance at Sunday Mass, and thereby becoming known to other members of the congregation.

This would suggest that the Scrutinies take place at Sunday Masses which the Elect regularly attend — which may be more than one.

The whole Community can be introduced to the Elect (who will be the focus of their common Easter Vigil) possibly through invitation to come to the Sunday Masses where the scrutinies are being celebrated. In addition, regular 'updates' in the parish bulletin, with names and requests for prayerful accompaniment, would also keep the Community informed and actively involved.

Looking at the Liturgy

Structure of the Rite

Each scrutiny follows the same structure:

Liturgy of the Word

- Readings
- Homily
- Invitation to Silent Prayer
- Intercessions for the Elect
- Exorcism
- Dismissal of the Elect

Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Rite presumes that all 3 Scrutinies will be celebrated — there is a progression across the weeks, intended to gradually uncover the deepest thirst (3rd Sunday, Woman at the Well), any remaining areas of darkness (4th Sunday, the Man born blind), and anything that continues to 'hold' them in a binding grip (5th Sunday, raising of Lazarus), in order to heal all that is weak or 'sinful' in the hearts of the elect, and to bring out and strengthen all that is strong and good. The scrutinies are celebrated in order to free the elect from the power of sin, and protect them from temptations, and at the same time, give them strength in Christ, 'the way, the truth and the life.' The experience of the scrutinies helps to complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their desire to trust and hold fast to Christ.

Ministry

Assembly

The role of the Assembly is to:

- Listen to the readings proclaimed
- Hear the homily and take its message to heart
- Pray for the Elect
- In preparation for Easter
- Reflect on their own baptism
- Recognise their failings and seek reconciliation.

Priest

The usual minister of the rite is a priest. As noted above the Scrutinies can be celebrated outside Mass with a deacon.

The Priest should, in the normal course of events, be known to the elect.

Godparents

Godparents stand with the elect, close enough so that

they can place a hand on their should during the Intercessions.

Readings

When the Scrutinies are celebrated the readings are taken from Year A. They are integral to the rite and should not be changed.

The themes of the readings, in particular the Gospel, are picked up in the rite and the other texts of the liturgy.

First Scrutiny

Reading 1 Exodus 17:3–7

Give us water to drink.

Psalm Ps 94:1–2, 6–9

O that today you would listen to his voice:

'Harden not your hearts.'

Reading 2 Romans 5:1–2, 5–8

The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us.

Gospel John 4:5–42

A spring of water welling up to eternal life.

In the Gospel of the Samaritan Woman Jesus reveals himself as the water of the life.

Second Scrutiny

Reading 1 1 Samuel 16:1, 6–7, 10–13

David is anointed king of Israel.

Psalm Ps 22 r. 1

The Lord is my shepherd;

there is nothing I shall want.

Reading 2 Ephesians 5:8–14

Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

Gospel John 9:1–41

He went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored.

In the Gospel of the Man born blind Jesus reveals himself as the light of the world.

Third Scrutiny

Reading 1 Ezekiel 37:12–14

I shall put my spirit in you, and you will live.

Psalm Ps 129 r. 7

With the Lord there is mercy

and fullness of redemption.

Reading 2 Romans 8:8–11

The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you.

Gospel John 11:1–45

I am the resurrection and the life.

In the Gospel of the raising of Lazarus Jesus reveals himself to Martha as the resurrection and the life.

Rite

Invitation to Silent Prayer

The Scrutiny begins with the Priest inviting the Elect and their Godparents to stand and come forward. He then invites the assembly to pray for the Elect. The Elect are invited to pray and may either kneel or bow their heads.

After a period of silent prayer all stand

Intercessions for the Elect

Godparents place their right hand on the shoulders of the Elect.

The texts in the rite may be adapted to include general intercessions (where these are later omitted).

The Elect do not respond to the Intercessions, firstly because the prayers are them, secondly as intercessions are the prayer of the baptised.

It is suggested below that the Intercessions, or at least the response, is sung.

Exorcism

First of all the priest prays with hands joined, then he lays hands on each of the Elect, for the second part of the prayer he prays with hands outstretched over the Elect.

The prayer, which may be sung, should be prayed with clarity and not rushed so that all may hear and understand what is being prayed for (given people's misapprehensions about 'exorcisms').

Dismissal of the Elect

The expected norm is that the Elect are kindly dismissed before the Eucharist continues. Many parishes even if they do not practice dismissal for the rest of the year choose to for the Scrutinies. The merits of Dismissal will be the subject of a separate resource.

Where the Eucharist is celebrated after the dismissal of the Elect there may be the Prayer of the Faithful and then the Creed (note order). They may both be omitted for pastoral reasons and it is noted above that the length of the whole celebration may suggest this option.

Other texts

The Ritual Mass for the Celebration of the Scrutinies (RM 1177–81) replaces the texts of the Sundays of Lent.

Interpolations in the Eucharistic Prayer

The 2010 Missal includes for many of the Ritual Masses texts to be inserted into the Eucharist Prayers.

Texts are provided for Eucharistic Prayers I-III

The texts pray primarily for the Godparents (The Elect having been dismissed)

Music

Apart from the usual music for a Lenten Sunday there are places for singing in the rite:

Though not indicated in the rite a song or simple chant following the homily might be appropriate to 'set the scene' — remembering the comment about the length of the whole rite. This might be something that takes a key phrase from the gospel, expresses penitence or self examination.

The response to the Intercessions might be sung. Indeed the intercessions might be as well. Experience suggests a short response with some sense of urgency.

The Exorcism might also be sung. Singing will add to the solemnity of the occasion.

At the end of the rite it suggests that a song maybe sung and gives a number of psalms (the list is the same for each Scrutiny). They are:

Psalm 6: *Lord, do not reprove me in your anger*

Psalm 25 (26): *Give judgment for me, O Lord*

Psalm 31 (32): *Happy the man whose offence is forgiven.*

Psalm 37 (38): *O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger*

Psalm 38 (39): *I said, 'I will be watchful of my ways'*

Psalm 39 (40): *I waited, waited for the Lord.*

Psalm 50 (51): *Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness*

Psalm 114 (116a): *I love the Lord for he has heard*

Psalm 129 (130): *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord*

Psalm 138 (139): *O Lord, you search me and you know me*

or Psalm 141 (142): *With all my voice I cry to the Lord*

These suggest songs about penance and reconciliation, mercy and compassion, reflection and examination.

It would be quite possible, and appropriate, to use the same music for each scrutiny. This might be balanced with the element of progression that characterises the 3 weeks.

Silence is also an important element within the rite and whatever the possible pressures of time the liturgy should not feel rushed.

Space

Consideration should be given to where the elect and their godparents stand. Whether they stay in the places or come before the sanctuary

Posture and gesture are important aspects of the rite and should not be done halfheartedly.

Adaptation

Children

The Rite provides a distinct Penitential Rite for children seeking initiation.

It proposes that it might be done with children celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time.

Candidates for Reception

As stated above the Scrutinies are not intended for those who have already been baptised.

Outside Lent

The Rite allows for the celebration of the Scrutinies outside Lent when the Sacraments of Initiation are deferred. This would take place in the weeks preceding the Sacraments

Such is the intimate connection between the Scrutinies and Lent that such an arrangement would have to be exceptional

Preparation

Team

An essential role of the team, and the whole community, is to pray for the elect

To help the Elect prepare team members may wish to reflect on the aspects of their own lives that need the water of life, light of the world or raising from the dead, and be prepared to share these in the catechetical session with the elect in preparation for the scrutinies.

Though the rite is short and simple it needs careful preparation as indicated above to be effective for both elect and community.

The team should be familiar with both the rite and the Lectionary readings.

During the period of purification and enlightenment the group's time together should be different to that which has come before.

The team should be comfortable with the language of the Scrutinies and appreciate the development of understanding and intensity over the three weeks as key to the preparation for Easter.

As noted with the Rite of Election the group should be familiar at early stage of the distinctiveness of those preparing for baptism and those already baptised.

Catechists support the elect with preparation sessions for the scrutinies, through engagement with the Gospels for each scrutiny in the week prior to the celebration. They also have the opportunity to explain the background and purpose, as well as the language of the scrutinies, for the elect, allaying any concerns, and affirming the benefit for the elect and the whole community who participate.

The catechists will also offer opportunity for reflection on the experience, either after the Mass, or in the week following the celebration.

Catechumens

As suggested above the team should be ready to explain the language and purpose of the rites so that the elect are ready to celebrate the Scrutinies

It will be helpful to listen to the Gospel and reflect on it as a group, as well as providing some further questions for people to take away.

Some questions that help the elect to identify those parts of their lives which will be 'scrutinised' will also be helpful.

These questions might be usefully shared with the godparent.

Liturgy Office

ENGLAND
& WALES

This one of a series of resources produced by the Liturgy Office with the RCIA Network looking at the celebration of the liturgies of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults © 2015 www.rcia.org.uk

Candidates

Though candidates may not be included in the Scrutinies they should support and pray for the elect and, along with the whole of the community, they may experience the rite and its benefits for self-examination and gaining of renewed strength and hope, and later, as appropriate, be invited to take part in the parish's Lenten penitential service. Penance is a normal part of our preparation for Easter, and therefore it is important for candidates who are to be received at Easter, or at another time of year, to be offered the opportunity, should they wish, for examination of conscience and confession of sins, towards and state of readiness for their profession of faith in the Rite of Reception into full communion. (RCIA 395)

Parish

All the parish should be invited to pray for the elect as they approach the Sacraments of Easter

The liturgies of RCIA are intended to be part of the pattern of parish life celebrated in the course of the year. This suggests that though the Scrutinies may be special and significant they should not be treated as rare and unusual.

Establishing patterns of celebration, e.g. through use of space and music, will help this.

That said the elect should be focus of the community throughout Lent

Mystagogy

Given the riches of the scriptures and the intensity of the liturgy it will be important that when the group meet following a scrutiny there is mystagogical reflection on the experience.

Different members of the group will make their own connections between what they heard proclaimed in the word and what they experienced in the rite

A possible starting point might be through the imagination — 'If you met the Samaritan Woman, what questions would you ask her?'

What next?

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment also contains the following rites:

- Presentation of the Lord's Prayer
- Presentation of the Creed
- Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday

Each has its importance but Lent must not become an end in itself but a pathway leading to the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil.

