

We are blessed to have 4 adults and 2 children in our St James RCIA program this year. We call those preparing for baptism, "The Elect," because they have been called by God to join His community. At the Rite of Election on Feb 17th, they began a period of intense preparation to receive the Sacraments of Initiation including Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil. In John 3:5 Jesus says, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." This new birth will happen for them in a few weeks.

Today, we will reflect with the elect on designated scripture readings called, "The Scrutinies." The Scrutinies are God's way of taking a close, loving look at the Elect, not to find what's wrong with them, but to celebrate all that's beautiful, good, and true in them. The scrutinies are like the process of squeezing out the amniotic fluid from a baby's lungs, as it travels through the birth canal and prepares to breathe the air that will sustain them in their life on earth. Today we will accompany the Elect as they prepare to ENTER INTO THE GRACE OF GOD and reflect on two individuals who were also called to this path, looking at their physical and spiritual journeys and the challenges they faced.

To begin, we dive into the anointing of Dave in 1st Samuel. Samuel comes to the house of Jesse, and meets Jesse's seven sons, saying, "Surely the Lords' anointed is here." But the Lord tells him, "Do not judge from his appearance." But instead, he says, "Look into the heart." David is called to be anointed, not based on his family's status or his physical features, but for his radical and humble trust in God. Like David, our Elect are chosen for their hearts and their openness to God.

David is physically anointed by Samuel with the horn of oil. In the same way, we use a special oil, blessed by our bishop, to perform Baptisms and Confirmations. The spiritual element of David's anointing is described in the reading as, "From that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David." Sacraments are visible signs of an invisible grace. The Spirit of the Lord is the Holy Spirit which is poured out by God in the sacraments. You, as the Elect, will ENTER INTO THE GRACE of the Holy Spirit which will rush upon you, and give you strength and courage to overcome darkness and temptation as you join us and become the light of Christ in the world.

David faces many challenges after his holy anointing, yet the grace of his anointing allows him to do many things. He becomes one of Saul's high performing generals and he wins the hearts of many people through his military victories. Saul however, responds with jealousy and paranoia, and hunts David down to kill him. So, David runs into the wilderness to ensure his own safety. Along the way, David has many opportunities to kill Saul and take over the throne, but he overcomes this temptation, trusting in God and patiently waiting for God's plan for his life to emerge. Again, we see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in David's patience.

Moving to a total reliance on God, modeled by David, is the journey of Christian life. We are especially called to find our strength in God during times of uncertainty, whether we are waiting for a job, or a spouse, or a child, or the results of a medical test.

This total reliance on God was written by David into today's psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." As Christians we give Jesus the role of shepherd, to lead us from earth to heaven, feeds us our daily bread, both physically and spiritually, and make us spotless before the Father through his sacrifice on the cross.

Now let's look at our second example of a man who ENTERS INTO THE GRACE OF GOD. In today's gospel reading, Jesus heals a man born blind. The healing begins as a physical act, but we also see the man respond to a spiritual call like our Elect have. Jesus physically places saliva and clay into the man's eyes and tells him, "Go and wash." This is a kind of baptism.

Once his eyes are healed, we begin to see a spiritual transformation as the man proclaims his faith, saying, "I do believe, Lord," and he worships our savior." Our elect, through their Baptisms and Confirmations, pledge their lives to following and worshiping Christ. We see what this means as we follow the man born blind's new life in Christ. He draws on the grace to not only to endure suffering, but to evangelize others into the faith.

He is tested by the unbelieving religious authorities, and he boldly responds to their questioning with evangelization. He asks, "Do you want to become his disciples, too?" Then they ridicule him and eventually throw him out of their assembly. His new eyesight lets him see Jesus, but his new faith helps him see the reality of Jesus' mission that we all share in. You, as the Elect, may have already experienced some ridicule from family or friends questioning your decision to become Catholic. We are inspired by your courage and are here to support you, just as Jesus was when he came back to the man born blind and consoled him.

Jesus says in Matthew 5, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." The man born blind spreads the light of Christ by his total reliance on God. Think of the billions of people, throughout history, who have read this gospel and have been inspired by this man's story!

ENTERING INTO THE GRACE OF GOD is a calling that begins a journey that lasts a lifetime. But, it's a joyful life, a life of total reliance on our God, our shepherd, who watches over us and provides for our physical and spiritual needs. Let us pray for our beloved Elect as they make their way through the Scrutinies and receive their anointing into our Church at the Easter Vigil. We also ask for David's patience with God and the courage of the man born blind as together, we work to spread the light of Christ and build up kingdom of God.