

Rite of Election: *For catechumens only?*

By James Cavanagh

The Rite of Election at the Cathedral grows every year and has become increasingly unwieldy. This has prompted us (the liturgy office and the office of evangelization) to consider adding a *fifth rite* to accommodate the growing numbers of people.

But is that really necessary? Consideration of adding still another service to the Archbishop's already busy schedule led me to reflect on the Rite of Election itself and wonder: have we perhaps strayed from the essential meaning of the rite, which is, strictly speaking, for *catechumens*? Besides these, the Rite of Election has come to include not only candidates (Protestants seeking full communion with the Catholic Church) but even those who were baptized Catholic but are looking to complete their sacraments. Many, if not most of the participants are not catechumens. This has had the effect of diluting the meaning of the rite so that many people have come to refer to the Rite of the Election as "going to meet the Archbishop".

The Rite of Election is specifically linked to *baptism*: It "marks the beginning of the period of final, more intense preparation for the sacraments of *initiation*." [RCIA, 118, emphasis added]

"Election" is about the call to belong to the Chosen People of the New Covenant through the sacrament of new birth. The rite doesn't include those who have been baptized in another ecclesial communion because those "who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect." [Decree on Ecumenism, 3].

The adaptation of the rite to include the "rite of welcome" and "call to continuing conversion" was added to provide a pathway for validly baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. But baptized Christians seeking full communion with the Catholic Church can be received any time. The Rite of Election isn't necessary.

The Rite of Election with the Archbishop is important because it brings out the fact that he is the primary minister of baptism, which the Rite of Election is coupled to (indeed, the bishop is the primary minister of all the sacraments and thus the chief Pastor of the whole flock). In the early days, when the Church was small, the bishop presided at both the Rite of Election and baptism. But as the Church grew, that became impractical. Priests and deacons baptize (and celebrate the other sacraments) insofar as that responsibility is delegating to them by the bishop.

Celebrating the Rite of Election at the cathedral is important too because it highlights the *catholicity* of the Church. The elect are called by God to belong to the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" which includes but at the same time transcends the local parish. It makes little sense to include those who are baptized in another church in the Rite of Election; it makes *no sense whatsoever* to include those who are already baptized in the Catholic Church.

The advent of the new translation of the Roman missal is an ideal opportunity for liturgical catechesis. We could easily solve the practical problem of overcrowding at the cathedral by recovering the essential meaning and purpose of the Rite of Election and including just those to whom the rite pertains.