

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT A

Reference to the Catechumens elected and being sent to Bishop
February 22, 2026

If you attended the noon mass last Sunday, you participated in the Rite of Sending. Four of our catechumens, Darien Gonzales, Harry Collins, Dylan McConway and Keira Pollock, signed the Book of the Elect, their definitive request to be baptized at the Easter Vigil on April 4, and our definitive choosing of them for the Easter mysteries.

This weekend, I will present Darien, in the name of all four, to Bishop Caggiano, who will formally endorse that choice. Henceforth, they will be called the Elect.

When we admitted each of them to the Catechumenate, and this process of conversion, you may remember: I made a simple gesture over each of them, anointing them with oil as I traced the cross on their foreheads, lips, chest, ears and eyes, hands and feet.

And if you were present at those Rites of Admission to the Catechumenate, or at last week's Rite of Sending, you all sang your own promise to accompany them on their pilgrimage to the baptismal font:

(sing) *We stand with you, we pray for you, o holy child of God.*

And of course, just a few moments ago we made part of that same gesture, the Sign of the Cross, on our foreheads and lips and heart, to prepare ourselves to listen to the Gospel.

In that prayer, we ask that the Word of God be always in our minds, lips and heart, ever in our thinking, speaking and living.

Indeed, week after week, we sign ourselves with the Cross, to remind ourselves of the prayer that was made over us at our own baptism, the prayer we utter for Darien, Harry, Dylan and Keira,

a prayer that we, and they, might let God enlighten our minds by the word of Scripture, so as to understand God's ways; that we might proclaim God's truth, not just with our lips but with our lives;

and that our hearts might no longer be divided but centered totally on God.

On this First Sunday of Lent, the Bishop formally chooses the catechumens for the Easter mysteries. And together we all contemplate Jesus in the desert, confronting and defeating the powers of darkness.

That Gospel story depicts Jesus facing down three temptations:

to use his powers for Himself;

to flee his own humanity;

and to win over people by the world's ways of a show of force.

Each of us, catechumens and Catholics alike, faces those same kind of temptations,

to misuse our gifts,

to overlook our own humble and weak dimensions, and thus fail to see them as real gifts;

And worst of all, to do the right thing for the wrong reason.

But the one who shows us the way out is the Lord,

who comes fasting,

deliberately weakening Himself,

so as to experience in His own flesh our human weakness and limitations.

In this, Jesus reveals the God who is never the God we would imagine or create.

We presume that God really would be interested in showing off the divine power, using it for His own ends. That's what we'd do if we were God.

But that God is the Evil One, the Tempter, the Devil
Jesus reveals a God who is always faithful, though on God's terms, not ours;

A God whose power is ordained for service to the plan of our salvation, not to whim fulfillment;

A God of Truth who unmasks as a lie the Satan's claim to hold the power of the Kingdom

Jesus reveals that full humanness is only found in friendship and union with this mysterious, strange God who is so totally "other."

Ours is a strange God, a God of contradictions, whom we cannot control or manipulate.

Our God thunders commands from a mountain,
beckons from a burning bush,
whispers love from a Cross.

Our God permits Pharaoh to enslave the people,
then divides a sea to rescue them.

Our God leads His people to the wilderness, to face hunger and death,

then feeds them with bread from heaven.

Our God loves us even when we abandon Him,
and reveals that love by letting His Only-Begotten Son, His Beloved one, be crucified.

This God's kingdom is joy, joy which no one can take from you;

but you can enter that Kingdom, share in it, only through tears,

tears that will not be fully wiped away until the New Jerusalem descends from Heaven.

Our elect will come to know what we ourselves can testify to,

that if we really decide to serve the Lord,
He will shake us and shiver us and shatter us,
yet give us His peace, which surpasses all understanding.
He lets us die,
only to make of us a new creation,
living His own life, beyond the power of Satan and sin and death to destroy.

And, if our God is a strange and contradictory God, we are a stranger and even more contradictory people.

Our elect come to us because we call ourselves a community of faith, of hope, of love.

Yet they likely will also be scandalized by our failures, our little faith, little hope, little love.

In a moment we will profess with our lips, “I believe in one God...in Jesus Christ his only Son...in the Holy Spirit.”

But our faith can be long on propositions, short on performance.

It's easy to forget that without a genuine “yes,” an “amen” to the living God, enfleshed in our lives of witness and service, our “yes” to propositions is lifeless and sterile.

After all, as the Gospel today shows, even the Evil One can quote scripture for his own devices. Even demons believe in God, believe that Jesus came in the flesh to save us, believe in the Holy Spirit.

Yet still they are severed from God.

Darien, Harry, Dylan and Keira will find in the midst of the Church some who offer only lip service, not suffering service, to God's people;

and some who place their hope, not in God, but in their own abilities, in luck, in power or prestige or possession;

and some who claim they love one another, yet permit or even promote divisions by class or color, or who simply retire into isolation and indifference.

Yes, a strange people, a people of contradiction.

So why then do we invite into our midst these searchers, these young people who so obviously desire to follow the Lord Jesus?

We do so because there is a Presence here; our Church, our community, weak as it is in faith, hope and love, is not just another sin-riddled establishment.

There is a Presence here that pervades and invades us, a Presence that breaks through our sin and smallness, and makes us better and holier than we really are,

a Presence that is real because it is a Person, the Person of Jesus, alive in the Spirit, who breathes into us the same life-giving Spirit.

Darien, Harry, Dylan and Keira will find Jesus all the more easily, not because we put Him here, but because He is here already.

He is present when we are gathered together in His name.

He is present in His Word proclaimed.

He reveals himself as strength and life, again and again, in the breaking of the Bread.

So, at the start of our Lenten journey together, we pray that God might strengthen our Elect, and all of us, with an outpouring of God's own Spirit and Life,

and enlighten all of us,
to understand the Word of God,
to profess genuine faith, and to give our hearts totally to the
Lord.

And may we, God's strange and contradictory people,
follow this mysterious, elusive, strange and contradictory God,
through the desert and the city,
past temptations and the Cross,
to the new life of the Risen Christ in his coming Kingdom.

And the people of God said, Amen.

(cf. Burkhardt first collection for inspiration)