

The Scrutinies

Main Thrust of the Rite

The celebrations of the scrutinies are meant to prompt a further self-searching and deeper repentance in the elect as they get closer to initiation sacraments. The scrutinies are a liturgical avenue gradually traversed by the elect with the help of the faith community.

As the three scrutiny rites unfold, the community prays that the elect are delivered from the power of Satan, protected from sin, and guarded from temptation. The community also prays that the elect will be strengthened in Christ and come to know him as the way, the truth, and the life. In effect, the scrutinies intend that the elect deepen their self-searching, intensify their conversion, and firmly fix their resolve to hold fast to Christ in love.

The scrutinies are celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. When, for grave pastoral reasons, the stage of Purification and Enlightenment takes place at another time in the Church year, the scrutinies are of such importance that they are celebrated (see paragraph 146 of the ritual text). The Church intends that all three scrutinies be celebrated. Paragraph 20 clarifies that only the bishop may dispense from one (or, at most, two) of them.

Flow of the Rite

The scrutiny takes place during the Liturgy of the Word. It begins after the homily. Paragraph 145 specifies that the presiding celebrant should lead the scrutiny in a manner conducive to the entire assembly deriving benefit from it. The design of the Sacramentary and the Lectionary supports this in that the Ritual Mass collects are to be used at the scrutiny. Mass and the scripture readings are always taken from Year A. In this fashion, the entire assembly is focused by the prayers and readings for what will unfold. Paragraphs 150 and 151 reinforce this notion.

Invitation to Silent Prayer

Paragraph 152 says that the elect come forward with their godparents. They stand before the priest presider. They are not necessarily called forward by name. The godparents should be ready to bring the

elect forward and then stand with a hand on their shoulder. The priest presider could then prompt the entire assembly to stand with a silent gesture. The less said, the better, given the season and the nature of this celebration.

In keeping with the Lenten season, all are then called to observe a period of silent prayer. The elect are invited to either bow their heads or kneel during the silence.

Intercessions for the Elect

The priest presider introduces the intercessions. Two sets of formularies are given in the ritual text in paragraph 153. The intentions found at option A and B can be adapted to fit the particular circumstances or needs of the elect and community using the ritual text as a model.

Exorcism

The next prayer, which is made by the priest presider, has two parts. The first invokes God the Father. The second part invokes Jesus Christ. In between the two parts, there is an opportunity for a laying on of hands individually for each of the elect.

The exorcism prayer and option B of the intercessions employs images taken from the gospel text for Year A of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. If a parish ignores the directions given in the ritual text, the Sacramentary, and the Lectionary and retains the Year B and Year C gospel passages in those years, the scrutiny prayers will lead to confusion since the assembly and the elect will not have heard about the woman of Samaria, the man born blind, or Lazarus.

Dismissal

The elect are sent forth with their catechist to reflect upon the Liturgy of the Word and the scrutiny celebration they have just experienced. Mass continues with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. As usual, if the assembly does not now take up the General Intercessions, some appropriate petitions would have been added to the Intercessions for the Elect (see paragraph 153).

Tips and Implications

1. Given what the scrutinies attempt to achieve for the elect and among members of the assembly, they could certainly be characterized as solemn. The tone of the Sunday gathering and the first part of Mass which leads up to them should convey this sense of deepening, this heightened spirituality as the elect begin this final course or path toward the Easter sacraments.
2. This would be a perfect time to invite members of the community to join with the elect in the preparation session which readies the elect and their godparents for the first scrutiny. This preparation could be organized around an examination of conscience. It could also pinpoint the sinfulness and evil present in the world around us and all those social and cultural elements that promote sin as well as the manifestation of God's grace and beauty present in the world.
3. The parish music minister should become familiar with the many published resources that support the scrutiny celebrations and use them to assist in this heightened spirituality.
4. The catechist or facilitator who works with the elect immediately after the dismissal needs to be prepared with a few open-ended questions or statements to prompt a sharing based on their experience of the whole Liturgy. The leader of this session may also need to be either very familiar with the prayers of the scrutiny or have the ritual text in hand as the elect talk about what they have just undergone.