

What Is the Period of Purification and Enlightenment?

The whole process of Christian initiation supports a paschal disposition but with a more intense focus during the final period of preparation—the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. This period ordinarily coincides with the annual season of Lent.

The season of Lent began in the early centuries as a baptismal retreat time for the elect (those to be initiated at the Easter Vigil), and the faithful voluntarily joined the elect in the journey to initiation. Today, Lent maintains a twofold purpose: to prepare the elect to enter into the waters of Baptism and to prepare the faithful to be renewed in their baptismal commitment.

Conversion is at the heart of the season of Lent. It is a time of retreat; a time to step back and take a hard look at our lives and seek purification of all that separates us from Christ. It is a time to be enlightened through Christ, who is Living Water, Light of the world, and Resurrection and life. The elect join the faithful in the Lenten journey. The whole Church is on retreat.

The six-week Period of Purification and Enlightenment is different from the previous period. The time of catechetical instruction is now finished. (See *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* 139.) This period calls for time to be given over to personal reflection in order to purify the mind and heart of the elect and to enlighten the mind and heart with a deeper knowledge and love of Christ, the Redeemer.

The period consists of numerous rituals:

- Rite of Election—celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent
- First Scrutiny—celebrated on the Third Sunday of Lent
- The Handing On of the Creed—celebrated during the week after the First Scrutiny
- Second Scrutiny—celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Lent
- Third Scrutiny—celebrated on the Fifth Sunday of Lent
- The Handing On of the Our Father—celebrated during the week after the Third Scrutiny
- Rites of Immediate Preparation—celebrated on Holy Saturday

The liturgies and preparation for these rites are the locus of this third period. Through these celebrations and the preparation for them, the elect are led into a deeper understanding of the reality of sin and the embrace of grace.

The Church shares two of her greatest treasures with the elect: the Creed and the Our Father. These two treasures are given from the heart; they have been handed down through the generations by word of mouth. These treasures celebrate what we believe and they teach us how to pray. In the final weeks of preparation, these treasures are entrusted to the elect, who will pray them publicly for the first time with the community at the Easter Vigil when they make their baptismal promise and join with the faithful at the table of the Eucharist.

During the Period of Purification and Enlightenment, the elect are encouraged to join the faithful in the traditional Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving and works of charity. Through these practices, the whole Church is prepared to renew its baptismal commitment at Easter. These practices help us all—the faithful and the elect—realize our need for ongoing conversion and a deeper understanding of the Paschal Mystery.

Through the prayer, support, and example of the faithful, the elect will grow in their desire for Salvation with their hearts open to receive the gifts of the Redeemer. They will be strengthened in their resolve to pursue a deeper relationship with God in Christ mediated through the Church.

The Period of Purification and Enlightenment is a gift not only to the elect but to the whole Church.

See the following paragraphs in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults for more insights regarding this period of the initiation process: the time of the period (7C), the role of the community (9.3–9.4), rituals belonging to this period (19–22), the unbaptized (138–140), the Scrutinies (141–146), the Rites of Handing On (147–149), those already baptized (408).