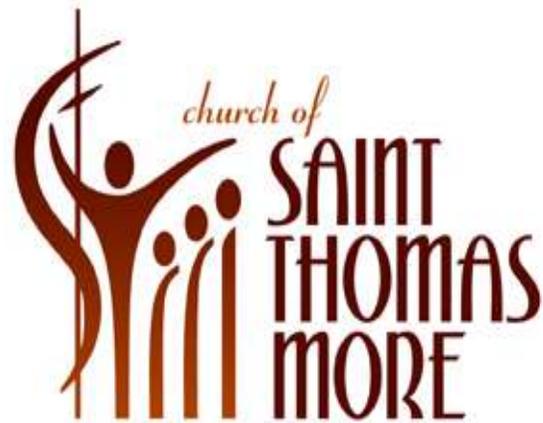


Lent – Scrutinies

Lent is more than “giving up” candy, smoking or something else we crave. This holy season calls us to “give up” sin and “give in” to Christ.

Lent is about conversion, turning our lives completely over to Christ and his way of life. That always involves giving up sin in some form. The goal is not just to abstain from sin for the duration of Lent but to root sin out of our lives forever. Conversion means leaving behind an old way of living and acting in order to embrace new life in Christ.



As an example, we have the Catechumens, now also called the “Elect” after the Rite of Election during the first week of Lent. These are the people preparing to join our community at Easter. For them and for us, Lent is a period intended to bring an initial conversion to completion.

The primary way that the Church assists the Elect in this conversion process during Lent is through the Scrutinies. We celebrate the rites of the Scrutinies on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sunday of Lent. To scrutinize something means to examine it closely. The community does not scrutinize the Catechumens; the Catechumens scrutinize their own lives and allow God to scrutinize them.

There is a danger in celebrating the Scrutinies if we think of the Elect as the *only* sinners in our midst who need conversion. All of us are called to continuing conversion throughout our lives, so we join with the Elect in scrutinizing our own lives and praying to God for the grace to overcome the power of sin that still infects our hearts.

We must spend time reflecting on what obstacles to gospel living exist in our lives. Then when the Scrutinies are celebrated in these weeks, we will know that the prayers are for us as well as for the elect.

Taking seriously this dynamic of scrutiny and conversion gives us a richer perspective on Lenten “giving up.” What we are to give up more than anything else is sin, which is to say we are to give up whatever keeps us from living out our baptismal promises fully. Along with the elect, we all need to approach the season of Lent asking ourselves what needs to change in our lives if we are to live the gospel values that Jesus taught us. Our journey through these forty days should be a movement ever closer to Christ.

Scrutinize Ourselves

Lent is a time to reflect on our behavior, our habits, our lives. It is a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter.

The Church has long taught us that Easter is the most appropriate time to baptize adults and welcome those from other faith traditions into the Catholic Church. We celebrate this in a big way at the Easter Vigil.

These 40 days before Easter are a time of purification for those we call “the Elect”; those preparing for Baptism. There are three Scrutiny rituals that take place, starting today, the Third Sunday of Lent and continuing on the Fourth and Fifth Sundays. These rituals are used to help the Elect examine their lives - to see where they might need healing from past wounds or where there may need some reconciliation - so that when they enter the Baptismal font, they enter the water with a clean and peace-filled heart. It is also a time of prayer and enlightenment, as each of the Elect search for a deeper understanding of Christ the Savior.

In a very visible way, the Scrutinies are focused on the Elect, for they are the ones that come forward. But this is also a great time for **all of us** who are baptized to scrutinize ourselves, to look at our own lives. If we enter into the prayers for the Elect and ask God to heal their wounds, we can also ask God to be with us and heal the brokenness in our lives.

We are all broken and wounded, we all have a need for healing or a need to ask for forgiveness from someone we have hurt. We are all tempted and sinful, sometimes in ways we are not even aware of. These Scrutiny rituals are a wonderful way to ask God to heal the aches and pains of our fragile relationships, to help us avoid the temptations that confront us and to strengthen the relationships that bless our lives.

Use this time of Lent and the rituals of the Scrutinies, to open your hearts to the grace and loving mercy of God. Then we, like the Elect, can come to the water at Easter with a clean and peace filled heart.

As the prayers and petitions, litanies and readings are proclaimed, allow the Scrutiny questions to fill your heart and mind. Then at the end of the 40 days of Lent, you will be ready to celebrate the Easter Triduum with a new heart - one that that is healed and filled with joy.

Steve Raml
Director of Liturgy & Music