

Celebrating the Rites

A PRACTICAL GUIDE



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Engaging the Assembly

Scheduling the celebration of the scrutinies so that as many as possible may participate is the most basic step that must be taken. But more must be done to facilitate the “full, conscious and active participation of all the faithful” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 14) in the celebration, which is the aim of true liturgical renewal. Special efforts must be made to connect the “ordinary parishioner” to the very powerful realities that are involved in the Church’s celebration of the scrutinies.

Catechumenate team members may want to brainstorm ways to attract various groups to participate with the elect in the kind of preparation session described in the *Resource Book for Purification and Enlightenment*, pp. 111ff. These sessions are ideal ways for small faith communities, youth ministry Confirmation groups, members of the ladies’ sodality or men’s club, and so forth to get to know better and to offer support to those in the catechumenate. The members of the adult choir in one parish chose to hold a retreat day for themselves during Lent that was modeled on preparation of the elect for the scrutinies. After a day of prayer, reflection, and sharing around the evils from which they sought deliverance, the music ministers celebrated a prayer for healing modeled closely on the scrutinies.

Sample Bulletin Announcement/Background (Second Sunday of Lent) for the scrutinies

Next weekend at the (*times*) Masses we will celebrate the “First Scrutiny” for those in our catechumenal process who are preparing for initiation at the Easter Vigil. The following week, at the (*times*) Masses, we will celebrate the “Second Scrutiny,” and on (*dates and times*) Masses, the “Third Scrutiny.”

The scrutinies are also called by the more exotic name “major exorcisms.” As such, they are among the most ancient prayers in the Christian liturgical tradition. As early as the second century, Christian communities would help those who had been chosen for Baptism to prepare for their initiation by laying on hands and by prayers for protection and deliverance from evil (i.e., exorcisms). At the beginning of the third century, Hippolytus told the Christians at Rome to celebrate these rites with catechumens on a daily basis during the final stages of preparation for Baptism.

Today we continue to celebrate these powerful rituals, convinced that those about to enter into a covenant with God in Christ stand in need of our prayers for deliverance and protection. We also understand today that our prayers for protection from evil are not limited to those formally engaged in the catechumenal process. Just as our entire community is called to journey with the catechumens throughout the Lenten season, we recognize the need we all share for freedom from evil and its effects.

Catechists in the parish’s religious education program and youth ministry should be well informed about the scrutinies and encouraged to incorporate into their Lenten formation efforts some time devoted to preparing for the celebration of the scrutinies. The focus of their efforts might well include topics such as the history of Lent and the role the scrutinies played in its development (see *Resource Book for Purification and Enlightenment*, pp. 9–26), the Church’s tradition of exorcistic prayer and how it is to be understood today, an exercise to name the demonic forces operative in our contemporary world, and the importance of the larger community’s involvement in the faith journey of those preparing for Christian initiation. As preparations are made for the parish’s Lenten communal celebration of the sacrament of Penance, the liturgy team might be invited to think in terms of how insights from the catechumenal process might be applicable to parishioners at large. Catechesis preparing for the communal celebration of Penance could be focused on naming the evils we find in ourselves, in our Church, and in society. And certain elements of the Penance service (e.g., the confession of sins) could be developed along lines similar to the scrutiny (e.g., the litany before the exorcism).

That is why for the next three weeks we will use the Lectionary’s “scrutiny readings” from Year A at all Masses, even when there is no scrutiny at a particular celebration. This week at a special gathering of those in preparation for Confirmation, as well as those in our catechumenal community, we ask their help in naming the evils from which we must seek God’s deliverance and protection. We urge you to prepare for the celebration of the scrutinies in a personal way by discerning what it is in your own life that needs to be freed from sin’s bondage. Join in spirit with all in our community who turn to Jesus for freedom from sin and protection from all evil.

Sample Pulpit Announcement the Week Before the Rite

Next week at the (*times*) Masses, we will celebrate the “(*number*) Scrutiny” with those in our catechumenate. These very moving and powerful prayers ask God’s protection on those who will soon become full members of our Catholic Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. In the scrutinies, we pray for deliverance from evil and protection against all of the demonic forces that would enslave the disciples of Jesus. Your prayers and your support are important for our sisters and brothers who have been journeying for so many months toward the sacraments of Christian initiation. Please join us next week, and please continue to hold in your Lenten prayers the elect who count on you for support in making their faith journey.