

Preparation for the Rites of Sending, Election, Call to Continuing Conversion

This begins the final preparations to receive the Sacraments, which will involve a period of purification and enlightenment. Growing in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and reception of the Sacraments as well as studying His teachings in order to be more and more committed as His disciple is a life-long process. However, it will be helpful to think carefully about your preparation thus far, meditating upon how you have responded and how you can open your heart to respond more fully. Your proper disposition and intention matter!

In order to receive a Sacrament fruitfully, we must not only receive the Sacrament but also eagerly seek after God with the hope and expectation that He will show up. We want to repent of past sin, come prepared to change and actively seek the grace of God in order to do so.

In order to prepare for the Rite of Sending at the parish and the Rite of Election for the unbaptized and the Rite of Call to Continuing Conversion for the baptized at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph, it will be helpful to reflect upon the questions that your Godparents and Sponsors will be asked by Bishop Callahan regarding your state of spiritual formation and progress.

(Bolded words are quoted from the Rites; the bulleted questions that follow are to help meditate on that question).

Please consider:

1. How have you taken your formation in the Gospel and in the Catholic way of life seriously?

- Have you given your assent to the teachings that you have heard?
- Do you understand what it means to be faithful to the teachings of the Church?
- Do you show your love for God by committing to active practice of the Catholic faith as evidenced by attending Mass each week? Will you be faithful to your commitment for the rest of your life unless you are sick?

The Holy Eucharist is described as the summit, the apex, and the pinnacle of the Christian life because it contains “the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1324).

- Just as we have to actively climb a mountain summit, we have to make an intentional journey, properly prepared, to fully receive the inexhaustible grace to be found in receiving Jesus in Holy Communion. How will you properly prepare to receive Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament during Mass each Sunday?

2. How have you given evidence of conversion by the example of your life?

A “conversion” can be defined as a specific event or a series of experiences that changes people’s lives by opening them to new spiritual insights and a new sense of meaning or purpose in life. It can lead someone who already believes in God into a deeper dimension of belief and a more personal relationship with the Lord.

- Are you moving away from a sinful habit?
- To what degree do you see yourself developing a particular virtue, which is a good habit that pushes out the bad habit (i.e. replacing the sin of stealing with the virtue of generosity)?
- Are you seeing life from the perspective of faith in God and His plan? How might this differ from the perspective of the world?
- How have your relationships with your family, friends, and co-workers changed during this time?

3. How have you listened to the word of Christ and endeavored to follow His commands more perfectly?

- Are you recognizing that you have God-given gifts and talents that are to be used to build up the Kingdom of God and to carry on the mission of Jesus?
- Do you listen carefully to the readings and homily at Mass? An excellent way to prepare is to read and ponder the readings the day before or before Mass begins.

Actual grace is God’s favor given to us in time of need to help to do what is right, true, and good. (Sanctifying grace is a participation in God’s life given to us in the Sacraments and strengthens us to do what is right, true and good. Sanctifying grace is habitual; we remain united with Jesus in a relationship of love unless we commit a serious sin and separate ourselves from Him.)

- Do you ask God for His help in times of need and do you cooperate with His grace?

- Think about the last time that you ask for God's grace to help you through a difficult situation. How did you cooperate with the grace that God gave you in abundance?

4. How have you shared the company of your Christian brothers and sisters in this community and joined with them in prayer?

Prayer is an encounter with God. In our relationship with Jesus, prayer must come from our heart. One of the best ways to pray is simply to talk to God from your heart. Pour out your pain, fear, questions, and doubts. The essence of true prayer is giving oneself to God. Perhaps the best advice comes from St. Francis de Sales: "When you come before the Lord, talk to Him if you can; if you can't, just stay there, let yourself be seen, and don't try too hard to do anything else." Another way to pray is to read and ponder a short passage of Jesus' words in one of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

- Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). What is your commitment to spending time with Jesus in prayer each day? It helps to plan the night before when and where you will pray. Start small and slowly add on time in order to build the habit of daily prayer.

- How are you becoming part of the community? Acts of charity are part of the Christian life. How are you serving those in need? This can include simple things like smiling at someone.

Catechumens, the prayers of intercession for you include:

That together we may fruitfully employ this Lenten season to renew ourselves through self-denial and works of holiness.

- How are you preparing your heart to receive the Sacrament of Baptism? Look back over your life and think of the major areas of sin. Pray for the grace to be sorry for these sins and then trust the great mercy of God who will wash these sins away with the pouring of the blessed water.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, you will receive the virtue of faith. For this gift to become activated, to become living faith, you must make a personal act of faith in God and then live out this faith through obedience of His teachings. A personal faith actually says, "I believe in God" and then makes choices based upon the Ten Commandments.

- What stood out for you in the paragraph above? What do you want to say to Jesus?

Candidates, below is a question asked of your sponsor and one of the prayers of intercession:

How have they reflected on the mystery of their Baptism and come to appreciate more deeply the presence of Christ in their lives?

- In what ways is your life different because you are baptized? How do you show God your thankfulness that you are His adopted child?

That they may develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit and learn to follow His promptings

- We need to develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit because it is the Holy Spirit who leads us to Jesus. We learn to recognize His promptings in quiet prayer. Do you have a relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Catechumens and Candidates:

These words by Bishop Callahan summarize our call to repentance over the next 40 days in order to die to ourselves and rise to new life with Jesus to share in the joys of Easter:

My brothers and sisters, in beginning this period of Lent, we look forward to celebrating at Easter the life-giving mysteries of our Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection. These elect and candidates will look to us for an example of Christian renewal. Let us pray to the Lord for them and for ourselves, that we may be renewed by one another's efforts and together come to share the joys of Easter.

The Bishop prays the following closing prayer over the Elect and the Candidates:

Lord God, You created the human race and are the Author of its renewal. Bless all Your adopted children and add these chosen ones to the harvest of Your new covenant. As true children of the promise, may they rejoice in eternal life, won, not by the power of nature, but through the mystery of Your grace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen