

Archbishop Smith: Chosen and Tempted

This past weekend we celebrated the Rite of Election. For the last months or even years, men, women and children have been following a catechumenal journey towards full membership in the Catholic Church. Now, having discerned with their sponsors and catechists their state of readiness, they were formally elected – or chosen – to proceed to the Easter sacraments. As I met each of them on the weekend, their joy was palpable! How could it be otherwise? Through the mediation of the Church, they have been chosen by Christ to be members of his Body.

I often say that the people who journey to the Church via the RCIA are wonderful witnesses before everyone who already are counted among her members. They remind us of the wondrous blessing it is to be chosen by our Lord, something never to be taken for granted.

The fact of being chosen both gladdens and astonishes. Throughout Scripture, narratives of call invariably recount the wonderment that seizes the one chosen. Think of Moses (“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” – Ex 3:11), Isaiah (“Woe is me! I am lost...” – Is 6:5), or Peter (“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” – Lk 5:8). As the Lord draws near and makes known to us his choice, we are instinctively aware of our sinfulness and weakness. This, in turn, makes us susceptible to the temptation to turn – even run – away from the call of the Lord.

On the same day that the catechumens were chosen for the sacraments of initiation, they and we heard the Gospel passage recalling the temptations that Jesus suffered in the desert following his Baptism. He was tempted by the devil in three different ways to surrender his trust in the wisdom and providence of the Father and turn away from the mission he had received. Of course, Jesus would have none of it and sent the devil packing.

To be chosen to live as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father is to be called to rely in all things upon his mercy and love, and not to rely upon ourselves. It is no surprise, therefore, that the devil will tempt us to run away from our call by substituting reliance upon God with dependence upon ourselves. This leads to disaster. Note well: the name by which the devil is usually called – Satan – means adversary. The evil one is in no way for us but entirely against us. His temptations aim at our ruin. He is also known as our accuser (cf. Rev 12:10), and thus will tempt us to make the reality of our sinful state – rather than the wisdom and mercy of God – the prime determinant of our response to the Lord’s call. With the strength that comes from Christ himself, in virtue of our union with him in Baptism, we can and must resist any seduction that entices us away from readiness, in faith, to accept God’s choice and call.

It is truly wonderful to be chosen by Christ. It is a joy to experience the healing power of his mercy, by which he enables us to live in accordance with this choice. Life in Christ is not without temptation, so long as we live in a world corrupted by sin. Yet, life in Christ is one in which we live by the power of his victory over sin and death. Therefore, let's not be afraid. Let us welcome his choice and follow him in joy.