

RITE OF ELECTION 6 MARCH 2022

If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.

Today the Catholic Church extends a very warm welcome to all the catechumens and to those preparing to be received into full communion this Easter. I also thank your sponsors and the parish clergy and catechists who have assisted you on your journey to this moment. You have come together to St Chad's Cathedral, the Mother Church of our diocese, for this moment of election as we begin the season of Lent. At the conclusion of these forty days of Lent, as we celebrate Easter, you will receive the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, taking a full part in the Easter mysteries that renew the life of the Church year by year.

This is the first Rite of Election since the coronavirus pandemic began two years ago. When first planning for today's ceremony it was impossible to know for certain whether all the restrictions would by now have been lifted. And so, as I mentioned earlier, there are another four ceremonies currently taking place in different parts of the Archdiocese. We remember in our prayers all those who are participating.

Today's ceremony marks a turning point in your journey of faith when you are ready to make a solemn commitment to continue on the pathway that has been chosen for you by our Lord himself. The Church also prepares herself for the impact upon her life that your arrival as Catholics is going to make to your own parish communities and to the wider community of our local church. You have come from different parishes and chaplaincies and your presence reminds us of the Holy Spirit at work in so many different people and different settings.

At the outset of Lent we have begun a pilgrimage of faith and repentance together and this pilgrimage is the final stage of preparation for each of you. It will be a very special Lent for you, the last forty days during which you hold back from receiving the Lord in Holy Communion when you are present at Mass. This represents a spiritual fast for each one of you as you long to be united with Christ in the Eucharist.

Lent is also a journey of repentance – an opportunity for every Catholic to repent of our sins and make a firm purpose of amendment. Your experience of conversion has already been along the pathway of repentance leading towards a renewal of life. In this you reflect the pattern of Lent as we accompany our Lord in his forty days in the desert, searching for a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord today.

Even before the formal, sacramental moment when you become members of the Catholic Church, at the end of Lent, your lives have already been touched by the love of Christ and you have heard him beckoning you to be at his side in the desert. You are responding to the invitation in St Paul's Letter to the Romans: *If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved.*

You have also been inspired by the example of others who have been following the Lord for some time in your parish community. Some of them have supported you as catechists and pastors and are with you here today, together with your sponsors who will continue to accompany and support you.

You are already united with all of us in a special way as we begin our Lenten pilgrimage, above all through our recommitment to the three ways that we try to deepen our faith in this season. You are already taking up the weapons of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

These peaceful weapons of self-denial have taken on a different significance this year, as we look with horror and great sadness at what is happening in Ukraine even as we are gathered here. We recall the heartfelt request of Pope Francis this year to fast for peace and to pray that our Lady *the Queen of Peace will preserve the world from the madness of war.*

The pathway that you are walking is a life-long search for holiness and it will lead you towards perfect holiness in the Kingdom of God. That holiness bears fruit in our relationships with others as we bring the gifts of peace, truthfulness, justice and integrity into our daily dealings with one another. May holiness be sustained in you through the scriptures and the sacraments and as you continue to *confess that Jesus is Lord and to believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.*