

Holy Saturday Retreat and Preparation Rites

Preparatory Notes for Retreat Leader and Team

The Context

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* calls for the Elect to gather together on Holy Saturday in immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil. The Elect are encouraged to “refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast.” (#185 RCIA)

Certain rites of preparation are prescribed, and “the choice and arrangement of these rites should be guided by what best suits the particular circumstances of the Elect.”

This retreat includes the Ephpheta rite, the recitation of the creed, and an adaptation of the rite of choosing a baptismal name. The retreat should be adapted according to need in places where the presentation of the creed has not yet taken place, where the presentation of the Lord’s Prayer has not taken place, or where the choosing of a baptismal name is an appropriate addition. The retreat has four “modules” that can be adapted, interchanged, or used as the basis for creating a retreat suitable to particular groups and circumstances.

The retreat is designed so that it can be adapted to a very small group or even to one person preparing for initiation. Godparents, sponsors, parishioners and Candidates may be invited to be present in support of the Elect who will be participating in the Preparation Rites.

The amount of time designated for each segment of the retreat will depend on the number of participants. Schedule the retreat with a break between each section, and time for reflection as appropriate. The retreat experience is meant to be unhurried, with a gentle, calm pace enhancing the ritual celebrations, reflection and sharing.

The rites are exclusively for those who are preparing for baptism. If the group includes Candidates completing initiation at the Easter Vigil, their preparation may be enhanced by participation in the scripture reflection, sharing and common prayer that are part of the retreat experience.

Word of God

The Scripture texts selected for this retreat are among those recommended in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

- The first text from Isaiah 62, 1-5, is about being called by name and is the centerpiece of the gathering experience for the retreat. If the rite of choosing a baptismal name is appropriate, it may be inserted after the gathering. (#200 RCIA)
- The Ephpheta rite is preceded by the passage from the gospel of Mark 7, 31 – 37 that tells of the deaf-mute person whose ears were opened by Jesus’ command, “Ephpheta!”
- The recitation of the creed takes place after the reading of Matthew 16, 13-17 and a reflection on Jesus’ question to the disciples, “And you, who do you say that I am?”
- Each of these selections draws the Elect to see their own stories in the Word of God proclaimed and lived among them as they prepare to enter the waters of baptism. The retreat design also offers them the opportunity to reflect on a Scripture passage of particular significance to them at this moment in their journey of faith.

Sacred Space

The best place to experience this retreat is somewhere quiet, preferably away from the parish church. Ideally, arrangements would be made to gather at a retreat house, home or convent, or a small chapel. On Holy Saturday morning, the parish church is usually a place of too much activity to provide the atmosphere appropriate for prayer and reflection.

It is important to prepare the space without using the signs and symbols or decor that will be part of the initiation rites to be celebrated in the evening. Candles, water, bread and wine, oil, flowers and other Easter decorations should be avoided. Instead, the sacred space should focus on the Scripture or Book of the Gospels. An appropriate icon may be used. It might be effective to add something from the sacred space created for each of the Scrutiny retreats, such as an empty water jar, a broken lantern, or linen cloths. The simplicity of the sacred space will serve to enhance the atmosphere of fasting and anticipation of what is yet to come.

Living Rite

The central rite in this retreat is the proclamation of the Word. It takes place several times throughout the retreat experience. How the leader handles the Book of the Word, proclaims the Word, and invites both silent and shared reflection on the Word can contribute significantly to the atmosphere of reverence, respect and reflection.

It is of utmost importance that this gathering not be used as a time of rehearsal or instruction for the Easter Vigil. The presider, liturgical ministers and godparents should be familiar with the order of worship and their responsibilities throughout the Vigil, and be prepared to guide the Elect through their initiation. To rehearse with those to be

initiated contributes to their anxiety about doing things “right” and can diminish impact of the experience. Assure the Elect that they will be guided through the celebration by their godparents and the ministers, and leave them free to them to experience fully, in the moment, the sights, sounds, symbols, colors, words, textures, tastes, feelings and discoveries that come from being immersed into the sacramental richness of the Easter Vigil celebration.

What follows is a script that you can follow, adapt, or re-design for your particular community’s needs. Be particularly sensitive to cultural and language needs and sensitivities.

Holy Saturday Retreat and Preparation Rites

I Gathering

Begin with a time for each person to share something about how she or he is at this moment of anticipation.. If the group has not gathered during Holy Week, take time to talk about the experiences of the week, and any questions that may have come up.

- *Invite the participants to quiet themselves, to enter into this time of retreat with open hearts and minds, and to trust that the Spirit of God will continue to guide them through this day and the sacramental celebrations this evening.*
- *Encourage them to let go of any concerns or anxieties and to allow themselves to experience the love of God, the support of the community, and the action of the Spirit in their lives in all that they experience this day and evening.*
- *Remind them that this time of preparation is bringing them closer to the full incorporation into the life and mission of the Church that they have been longing for.*
- *Assure them that this is a special time of grace and peace for them.*

Gathering Song

Begin with a gathering song such as “Here I Am, Lord” by Dan Schutte, “Gather Us In” by Marty Haugen or a sung version of the prayer attributed to St. Patrick, “This Day God Gives Me.”

Opening Prayer

Leader (*with hands in orans position*)

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

You are the Living Water for [▲] we yearn,

You are the Light of the World, our Hope and our Life.

Gather us to you today and make us a holy people.

Through your Holy Spirit, guide our day and our ways.

May we be drawn more deeply into the mysteries

of love and salvation that we

together with your whole church will celebrate in faith this night.

We pray in your holy name.

Amen.

Reading

Reader:

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Proclamation of Isaiah 62, 1-5

Response

Psalm 103, "The Lord is Kind and Merciful" by Jeanne Cotter or by Marty Haugen, a sung version of Psalm 95, or other appropriate response.

Reflection

Leader:*(in these or similar words)*

God's call to each of us is both personal and intimate. Tonight each of you will be called by name as you are baptized into Christ. You will be made new. In the silence of our own hearts, let us simply listen deep within to the voice of God calling us each by name.

After a few minutes of silence the leader continues addressing each of the Elect (and, if appropriate, each person participating in the retreat) in these or similar words:

_____, you have been called by name.

You shall be called God's Delight, because your God rejoices in you!

Following the call and naming of each person, (or every three or four persons if the group is large) all sing a refrain such as "Blessed Be God" by David Haas or say together

"Blessed be God who calls you, _____, by name!"

It may be that for personal, cultural or other reasons, some of the Elect have chosen a new name for baptism. In these cases, the Naming of the elect as described in #202 RCIA may take place at this time.

II Ephpheta

Gospel Acclamation (sung)

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory.

Presider:

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Proclamation of Mark 7, 31-37

Reflection

Leader: *(in these or similar words)*

“Ephpheta!”

And immediately the man’s ears were opened.

We are looking forward not just to the celebration of the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil tonight. We are looking forward to the rest of our lives. There are three aspects of this gospel that can offer us particular guidance for our ongoing journey through the font, to the table and to the rest of our days as fully initiated members of the church.

Jesus, the gospel says, took the man off by himself away from the crowd and then performed the miracle of healing. We know that the touch of Jesus is individual and personal for each one of us. But how important it is to remember how this man got to Jesus! It was through the community. The people brought him to Jesus. Our personal relationship with Jesus is always in the context of a community. We need each other today and will continue to need a community of faith to help us, to support us, to understand our frailties and impediments, and to guide us always back to the source of

our healing and life. As a community of faith, we must pray for one another, work with each other, support one another, and come to the Lord together.

Secondly, notice how the miracle happened. Jesus put his finger into the man's ears. Jesus spat and touched his tongue. And Jesus groaned. The action of God in our lives is not something far away from us, in some other-worldly realm that is removed from the things, people and experiences of every day life. No, God touches us in the same way that other people touch us. To be aware of God's action in our life, we need to be deeply in touch with our own humanness, the rhythms of our own lives.

Jesus, the Son of God, chose to take on our humanness and then to make water and mud and lilies, tax collectors and prostitutes, lepers and widows, women and children, light and oil, bread and wine, all the means through which we find communion with God. To fully live the miracle of our lives, we need to cultivate an awareness of sight, sound, touch, color, taste, smell, and to discover the connections between daily life and the revelation of God in life and liturgy. We need to develop the sensitivity to see the world as a place where the human and divine are one, where the incarnation and passion and resurrection are all over the place. The true spirituality that will sustain us throughout our daily struggle to live gospel lives is a spirituality that is grounded in the belief that "The word was made flesh and dwells among us" and that God will meet us in our humanity and desires to bring our humanity to its fullness in Christ.

Finally, notice that the healed man just had to tell anyone and everyone what had happened to him. He spoke plainly. He told his story. He shared his truth. But the reason he did this was so that the people could know about Jesus. The result was that the man's friends and neighbors exclaimed about Jesus, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

What a wondrous thing we look forward to, knowing that our community of faith indeed will be able to say because of each of you, "God has done all things well. God has brought you to our community. We have seen God's glory through the miracle of your

lives, your presence, your faith, and your witness. God's miracle of healing the man who was deaf and could not speak clearly is the same miracle that God is working in and among us today.

II Ephpheta Rite

The ordinary minister of this rite is a priest or a deacon. The minister touches both ears and the lips of each of the elect and says, "Ephphetha: that is, be opened, that you may profess the faith you hear, to the praise and glory of God." (#199 RCIA)

If there is no priest or deacon present, an adaptation of the rite may be used.

Leader

Invite each of the Elect to come forward. Make the sign of the cross on the ears and on the lips as you pray:

May you continue to hear the Story of God in your own lives, in the Scripture, and in the Church.

May your ears be opened + to receive the Word of God in the Word proclaimed, explained and lived in this community of faith.

May your lips be opened + to proclaim the glory of God in your own words of compassion, justice, truth, and love.

Follow the ephphetha rite or adaptation with a song such as "Open My Eyes, Lord" by Jessie Manibusan or "Servant Song" by Donna Marie McGargill, OSM.

III Recitation of the Creed

Proclamation of the Gospel

Gospel Acclamation (sung) Glory and Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Proclamation of Matthew 16, 13-17

Reflection

Leader (*in these or similar words*)

“And you, who do you say that I am?”

Tonight you will answer that question with your lives. As you enter the waters of baptism, you will die with Christ and rise with him to new life. As you are anointed with the oil of chrism, you will be confirmed and strengthened in your baptismal mission to proclaim the message of the gospel in all that you do and say and are from tonight until the rest of your life. As you share at the Table of Eucharist, you will receive and become the Body of Christ, and be sent forth to do your part to bring about the reign of justice and peace to your sisters and brothers.

“And you, who do you say that I am?” Tonight you will say that Jesus Christ is all in all, your brother, your Savior, your life, the life of the world.

“And you, who do you say that I am?” Tonight you will be asked to publicly profess your faith. May the Lord open your lips and may your mouth proclaim God’s praise. It is your duty and your privilege to join this community of faith in professing the Creed that has been entrusted to you. With one voice, you and the whole church will proclaim what we profess, what we teach and what we believe.

Prayer

Leader *(with hands outstretched)*

Let us pray.

Lord, we pray to you for these elect,

who have now accepted for themselves

the loving purpose and the mysteries

that you revealed in the life of your Son.

As they profess their belief with their lips,

may they have faith in their hearts

and accomplish your will in their lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

And so, I ask you, the Elect of God's Church, what do you believe?

The Elect respond by reciting the Creed that was entrusted to them in the presentation of the Creed, either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed.

Hymn

Sing a hymn such as "Onward to the Kingdom" by David Haas or a traditional hymn such as "The Church's One Foundation."

IV Scripture Sharing

Invite the Elect (and, if you wish, the Candidates, Godparents and Sponsors) to reflect on the Scripture passages and/or liturgical experiences that have been most significant for them during their catechumenal journey. Ask them to spend some time thinking about what that passage or experience adds to their anticipation of the sacraments of initiation this evening. After some time for private reflection, encourage them to share their insights with the group. In large groups it may be necessary to break up into smaller circles for sharing.

Intercessions

Conclude the sharing with an invitation to prayer. Encourage those gathered to bring to prayer the needs of the world, the church, the parish community and those who will be initiated this evening. If the group is comfortable with shared prayer, do not structure this time of intercession; if necessary, guide it and invite each person to add her or his prayer. It may be helpful to respond as a group to each intercession with a common response such as “Lord, hear our Prayer.”

At the conclusion of the intercessions, the leader invites all to stand and pray together with hands in orans position.

Leader:

With confidence and gratitude, let us join together in the prayer which has been given to us by Jesus and which we are privileged to say as his sisters and brothers:
Our Father...

Dismissal

Leader:

May the Spirit of God be with you until we gather again to celebrate the paschal mystery at our Easter Vigil.