

THE PREPARATION RITES OF HOLY SATURDAY

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Not another liturgy!

On Holy Saturday you are very busy making last minute preparations for the Easter Vigil. The elect are getting nervous. The musicians are worried about cues. The priest has a homily to prepare. Servers need more rehearsal. And the decorators oh, my they need help and it's all taking too much time and they don't have much time and everyone is calling you and you have work to do at home and visitors are arriving and the laundry isn't done and the house isn't clean and the refrigerator is empty and the kids have practice and I know. It's a busy day. But don't forget the preparation rites.

A lot of people, even those with much experience in the catechumenate, even priests, ask, What preparation rites?

Let's all open our copies of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and turn to number 185. Before the elect are baptized during the Easter Vigil, they celebrate pre-baptismal ceremonies on Holy Saturday. A lot of parishes skip them. After all, the Vigil is plenty of liturgy for one day. But this is important. Those who are to be baptized that night should gather at the church earlier in the day to prepare and to pray.

I admit that RCIA 185 does not require these rites. It says, When it is possible to bring the elect together on Holy Saturday for reflection and prayer, some or all of the following rites may be celebrated as an immediate preparation for the sacraments. But they form a very fitting and important prelude to initiation.

Back in the old days, these rites used to be detached from the Triduum and folded into the ceremony of adult baptism together with the rites of acceptance and election, the scrutinies and the presentations. It was all one marathon liturgy, usually celebrated with just a few people present, and not at Easter.

But the Second Vatican Council called for the restoration of the catechumenate and the revision of the Easter Vigil. The baptismal rites were separated out to different occasions throughout the period of the catechumenate, and some of them ended up on Holy Saturday during the day. Those are the preparation rites.

Challenges for Celebrating

These rites are held in the day for those who are to be baptized that night at the Vigil. The elect, therefore, should be there. But you also need an assembly of the faithful. They're busy, just as you are. How do you get them there?

I like to schedule these rites on Holy Saturday morning at the same time we usually have a weekday mass in our parish. I invite our daily mass-goers to join the elect, the candidates, the godparents, the sponsors, the team, and whoever else is going to be around that morning setting up and rehearsing: the servers, the readers, the musicians, and even the decorators. We all gather for prayer before entering the rest of our busy day.

Getting people there is only part of the challenge. Another part is figuring out what to do. The instructions for this liturgy aren't very clear. Only the parts are there, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

- Beginning at RCIA 193 you find these pieces: recitation of the creed, ephphatha rite, choosing a baptismal name, and concluding rites. But RCIA 186 says the ephphatha should precede the creed. So the pieces are there, but not in order.
- RCIA 149 says you can defer the presentation of the Lord's Prayer to Holy Saturday morning. So the pieces are there, but not in the same part of the book.
- The *Rite of Baptism for Children* says any infants to be baptized at the Vigil should be received at the door, exorcised, and anointed *before* the Vigil begins (28). But those elements are in a completely different book.
- The original Latin edition of the preparatory rites included an anointing with the oil of catechumens. But the American bishops exercised their option to omit the anointing from the preparation rites and baptism, and to place it instead during the period of the catechumenate (33.7; National Statutes 16). Now the new missal says that the elect should be anointed with the oil of catechumens after the renunciations at the Easter Vigil, unless this took place during the preparation rites.

Got all that? Aaaaaaagggghhhh!!

There is a model for this celebration at RCIA 187-192, and it is the best place to turn for help. But even it won't answer all the questions.

First, let's take a look at these pieces and figure out why they're there. Then I'll suggest how you might celebrate the preparation rites in your parish.

Recitation of the Creed

The recitation of the creed (193-196) presumes that you've celebrated the presentation of the creed already. If that was not possible, 186 says you omit this part of the rite.

Normally the creed is to be presented on a weekday following the Third Sunday of Lent; that is, after the first scrutiny. In the early Church, the creed became the textbook for the immediate preparation for baptism. Having learned about the Christian way of life throughout the period of the catechumenate, the elect underwent the first scrutiny to set the spiritual tone for Lent, and then began learning the creed for their proximate preparation for the sacraments.

In those early days, the creed was never written down. It was passed on orally from lips to ears. Godparents helped the elect learn the meaning of the creed and commit it to memory during the weeks preceding their baptism. Today, you can buy a beautifully crafted creed suitable for framing. People in the early church would have been aghast! The creed was never published, for fear it would fall into the wrong hands and be misunderstood. It was only told orally, so that it could always be accompanied with catechesis.

Saint Augustine says in the *Confessions* that the catechumens in Rome customarily returned the creed on a raised platform in front of all the people, though the nervous could do so in private (8:2). Even today, the elect should understand the creed, and, ideally, memorize it.

Either the Nicene or the Apostles' Creed may be used. Many people prefer the Nicene because it's the one the newly baptized will proclaim most often Sunday after Sunday. But I prefer the Apostles' Creed because it more nearly resembles the baptismal promises. The revised Roman Missal now promotes the recitation of the Apostles' Creed at Sunday mass throughout Lent and Easter for this very reason. And at the Vigil, having proclaimed the Apostles' Creed as a group earlier in the day, each initiate is asked personally and dramatically, phrase by phrase, Do you believe?

So, back to the preparation rites, the idea now is that the elect will recite back the creed they received from the community of the faithful a few weeks earlier. In Latin, the presentation of the creed is the *traditio*, and the recitation of the creed is the *redditio*. See the connection?

The liturgy calls for a reading and homily. Two gospel alternatives are proposed Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, and Peter's assertion that Jesus has the words of eternal life. The celebrant stretches his hands out over the elect and prays for them. The elect recite the creed.

Ephphatha

The ephphatha rite appears next (RCIA 197-199), but in celebration it comes first. The word comes from the recommended gospel for this event (Mark 7:31-37), in which Jesus cures a deaf man who also has a speech impediment. It is also the gospel for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, wets his lips with spittle, and groans the Aramaic word, Ephphatha, which means Be opened.

The rite may also be celebrated at infant baptisms, where it observes a different tradition and occurs *after* baptism, rather than before.

This scripture passage may have been associated with initiation practices from the very beginning. Other people bring the man to Jesus, just as godparents bring a catechumen to baptism. They ask Jesus to lay a hand on him, just as we frequently do to bless catechumens. Jesus takes the man off by himself away from the crowd, just as catechumens are dismissed from the liturgy for a deeper encounter with Christ. Jesus opens the man's ears and tongue, just as catechumens will have their ears opened to the word of God, and their tongues loosened to announce the good news.

After this reading and a brief explanation, the elect come before the celebrant. A song is sung while the celebrant touches the ears and the lips of the elect with his thumb while saying the formula.

Choosing a Baptismal Name

One rite that you will most likely omit is choosing a baptismal name (200-202). Throughout the universal church, it is omitted if it was already celebrated as part of the acceptance into the order of catechumens (33.4, 73). But in the United States it is always to be omitted. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops establishes as the norm in the dioceses of the United States that there is to be no giving of a new name (33.4).

Still, there is another option. Where it seems better suited to the circumstances and the elect are not too numerous, the naming may consist simply in an explanation of the given name of

each of the elect (200). The elect were called by name at the rite of election, and they will be baptized by name at the Vigil. Here is an opportunity to learn why they have the name they have. Often there is a story attached. They may be named after someone important to the parents. Or the parents just liked the sound of the name. In any case, it can be interesting to hear an explanation.

Presentation of the Lord's Prayer

The elect are to be presented with the Lord's Prayer on a weekday of the fifth week of Lent; that is, following the third scrutiny (178-183). A full liturgy of the word is recommended: first reading, responsorial psalm, second reading, verse before the gospel and the gospel. In this case, the presentation takes place during the proclamation of the gospel. The elect are invited to stand before the ambo, where the gospel is read to them.

You can pick up some beautifully crafted parchments of the Lord's Prayer, suitable for framing. But that's not the idea. The elect are to *hear* the Lord's Prayer just as the first disciples did: from the lips of Jesus. It may look like a deacon or a priest up there, but the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel (29). We present the gospel to the elect within the liturgy, and because of that, they receive it from Christ.

The presentation continues with a homily, prayer over the elect, and a dismissal. This entire liturgy may be transferred from the fifth week of Lent to the preparation rites on Holy Saturday.

You might be thinking, don't we have enough pieces in these rites already without adding another? Well, yes. In recent years, though, I've wrapped the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer into the Holy Saturday preparation rites for a very practical reason. It freed up one more night during Lent not just for me, but for the elect, the godparents and the team as well.

The rite also permits celebrating the presentations of the creed and the Lord's Prayer during the period of the catechumenate (21). Lent is top-heavy with rituals. But I like moving the Lord's Prayer to Holy Saturday because it fills out those rites a little more, and because St. Augustine thought it was a good idea. He had the elect receive the Lord's Prayer on the day they recited the creed (Sermon 59:1). And if it's good enough for St. Augustine, it's good enough for me.

Concluding Rites

The rites conclude with a prayer of blessing and dismissal (203-205). The celebrant extends hands over the elect during the prayer. Practical announcements may be made before the dismissal. Among these might be the reminder that the elect should refrain from their usual activities, spend their time in prayer and reflection, and, as far as they can, observe a fast (185). In fact, the entire community is urged to fast on Holy Saturday, in solidarity with the elect (*Sacrosanctum concilium* 110). This joint fast first entered the Church's tradition at the turn of the second century in North Africa. It is still recommended today, but very few Catholics are even aware of it.

Putting it Together

Again, the model for celebrating the preparation rites can be found at 187-192. Here's what I suggest at your parish church this Holy Saturday morning. I've outlined everything the whole works. But you can simplify it if you want.

Get a server, a musician, a lector, infants and parents, elect and godparents, and, of course, the People of God. Surround the elect with prayer and love. The priest or deacon who presides should be vested. No color is recommended for the stole, but I like to wear white, not violet, because this is a prebaptismal liturgy and Lent is over. Everyone should gather at the entrance to the church, not at their places inside.

1. **Song:** Choose a song about faith. A hymn for passiontide could also work, such as O Sacred Head or even Be Still My Soul.
2. **Greeting:** The celebrant greets the faithful with a formula such as, The Lord be with you. He does not begin with the sign of the cross. It's not mass.
3. **Reception of Infants:** With everyone standing at the door of the church, the celebrant leads the reception of infants from the Rite of Baptism for Children (35-41). He asks the parents for the name of the children, and everyone traces the sign of the cross on the children's forehead.
4. **Song and Procession:** Everyone enters the church and takes a seat near the ambo. The celebrant goes to his chair. The musicians lead a song based on one recommended in the Rite of Baptism for Children.
5. **[Prayer:]** No prayer is recommended, but if you felt one would be appropriate, you could choose the one for today's morning prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours.
6. **Liturgy of the Word:** I suggest lifting the whole liturgy from the fourth volume of the lectionary, #749, where you'll find the texts for the Presentation of the Lord's Prayer. They should work just fine. A cantor should lead the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamation.
7. **Presentation of the Lord's Prayer:** Before reading the gospel, however, the priest or deacon invites the elect forward (RCIA 180). I usually have them stand close to the ambo, backs to the assembly, facing me, while I proclaim the text to them.
8. **Homily:** During this time the elect may be seated again.
9. **Exorcism and anointing of infants:** The exorcism and anointing with the oil of catechumens (RBC 49-50) takes place. If the adult elect have never been anointed, and if you are not planning to have them anointed during the Vigil, I think you could anoint them here. It's true that the US bishops called for the omission of the anointing on Holy Saturday, but the new missal seems to have reinstated it. In any event, catechumens may be anointed more than once during their time of preparation (98). I invite the adults and infants to be anointed into the sanctuary.
10. **Ephphatha:** The celebrant conducts the ephphatha for both infants and adults (RCIA 199). I usually invite those to be baptized to face the assembly. Infants normally receive the ephphatha after baptism, but an exception could be made in light of the nature of this liturgy. Musicians may lead a song, such as Open my eyes, Lord.
11. **Prayer before the Recitation:** I extend hands over the elect, and offer the prayer (195).
12. **Recitation of the Creed:** I invite the elect to recite the creed (195). I usually let them cheat and read it from a printed copy. But some of them have it memorized. I also let them do this together, even though St. Augustine would probably want to hear each one

of them recite it by memory alone. Standing on a platform. In front of everyone else. Again, I like to use the Apostles's Creed. Then the elect take their places again.

13. **Choosing a Baptismal Name:** I like to ask the elect to explain why they have the name they have (RCIA 200-202). I also like to ask parents of infants to be baptized that night why they are giving this particular name to their children. I ask each speaker to go to the cantor's microphone so everyone can hear.
14. **Prayer of Blessing:** I extend hands over the elect and offer the prayer (204).
15. **Announcements:** Remind people about the particulars when to meet and where this evening. And invite everyone to spend the day in prayer and fasting, refraining from normal activities as much as possible (185, 205).
16. **Dismissal:** The celebrant dismisses the assembly (205). There's no need for a closing song.

Then you'll have a spirit of prayer with you as you go about the rest of your busy day.

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