

## RCIA AND THE SCRUTINIES

On the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent, the Church celebrates solemn and ancient Rites called “Scrutinies” at Masses where the Elect - those preparing for Baptism - are present. At St. Augustine, they will be celebrated at the 11:30am Mass on each of the Sundays. Although the word “scrutiny” sounds rather harsh, suggesting that the Elect are being “scrutinized” by the Church, it is actually the Elect who are asked to scrutinize their own lives: to uncover and heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in their hearts and to strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. We, as a community of faith, are there to pray with them and support them in this effort and to reflect on our need to scrutinize our own lives.

After the homily, the Elect are invited to come forward and kneel before the celebrant accompanied by their godparents. The whole assembly is then invited to pray in silence for the elect, asking the Lord to protect and heal them in the coming weeks. The assembly then responds to a series of intercessions for the Elect, followed by a prayer of exorcism by the celebrant. The Rite concludes with the celebrant placing his hands on the head of each of the Elect and praying that the Lord protect them in these final days before Baptism.

The Scrutinies are celebrated over three weeks so as to be a gradual and continual process. The readings for Masses where the Scrutinies are celebrated will be different from those at the other Masses because they are from cycle A. These readings, from the Gospel of John, reflect the spiritual journey of the Elect on their way to Baptism. As we celebrate the first Scrutiny, we hear of the Samaritan woman’s acknowledgement of her sin and her longing for living water that brings eternal life. Jesus slowly reveals to her that He is what she has been longing for. Filled with this faith, she is transformed so that, no longer ashamed of her sin, she boldly proclaims to her fellow townspeople that she has encountered the Lord.

How like the journey of the Elect: they have encountered the Lord, recognized and acknowledged the reality of sin and their longing for eternal life as Jesus has slowly revealed Himself to them during their RCIA journey. They are now prepared to receive the living water in Baptism that will fill them with the power of the Spirit to bring the Gospel to those they encounter.