

Sunday, February 26, 2012
Rite of Election and Enrollment of Names of Catechumens
Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates
Homily

You probably know that some of the most amazing observations about God and our faith in God are expressed by children.

A group of kindergarten age students were gathered for religious education class on a Sunday morning. It was Lent, and the teacher wanted to help them prepare for the celebration of suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ that is the focus of the Sacred Triduum at the end of Holy Week.

The teacher had the children sit down in a circle and explained that she was going to tell them the story of Jesus. Obviously, most of the children had hear the story of Jesus before, and like many of us gathered here, we become familiar with that story over a period of time as

- we hear God's word proclaimed every Sunday at Mass or
- we hear parts of it talked about at home or
- we hear it during religious education or RCIA classes.

On that particular Sunday morning, there was one boy who had not heard the story of Jesus in any of those ways.

- Tommy was not a member of that Sunday morning kindergarten religious education class.
- He was not a member of that parish.
- Little Tommy was not Catholic.

He had been spending the weekend with the family of one of the other children in the class. Tommy's parents had to be away and they said that it would be OK for him to attend kindergarten religious education class.

Tommy's parents did not belong to any church and they only attended church services a couple of times a year. If anyone asked their religion they would say that they were Christian. However, neither of them had ever been baptized.

As the kindergarten religious education teacher started to tell the story this little boy who had not heard it before began to listen with great interest.

- Tommy was amazed at how the angel came to Mary and said that she would have a son who would become the king of kings.
- He was astounded that this important baby would be born in a stable, and that as a boy he would learn to be a carpenter.

But what interested Tommy the most was what Jesus did in his ministry. The fact that Jesus healed the sick, helped the helpless, and made friends with people who others would push away made this little boy really start to appreciate Jesus.

Then the teacher started to talk about how some people were plotting against Jesus. Tommy did not understand how such a good person could have enemies. A part of him wanted to ask why, but he was too caught up in the story to interrupt; Tommy wanted to find out what happened next.

Then the teacher started to tell what happened next. She explained that after the Last Supper when Jesus showed his apostles how to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, beaten, and nailed to a cross to die.

All of these kindergarten children were quiet and listening attentively, but Tommy couldn't hold in his emotions as he heard about Christ's passion and death; so he just blurted out, "That's awful!" He said it loud enough for everyone to hear.

The teacher didn't want to make a big thing out of Tommy's remark. She knew that he was just a visitor that Sunday morning and was thinking it would take too long to explain to him what the passion and death of Jesus meant.

But before the teacher could resume the story, one of the other kindergarten students sitting next to Tommy, leaned in and said in an affirming and reassuring voice, "Don't worry, that's not the end of the story."

What a great response: "Don't worry, that's not the end of the story." I wish I could find the kindergarten student who shared that with Tommy. He or she would make not just a wonderful kindergarten religious education teacher, but an even better teacher, mentor, or sponsor in the RCIA process.

Leading up to this celebration of

- The rite of election and enrollment of names of catechumens and
- The call to continuing conversion of candidates

I received dozens of letters of introduction from those who have come to this moment in their journey of seeking God and responding to God's call in their lives.

In your letters, you shared with me some of the things that are mentioned in the story of how little Tommy first came to hear about Jesus Christ and what was his reaction. You have told me

- How you heard and learned about Christ our Savior through a friend, a husband, wife, or even young children
- How something about the faith of others made you want to listen more carefully to the story of Jesus Christ
- How something of the experiences of your life and others around you made you say over and over, "That's awful!"
- How sooner or later, someone leaned in real close and whispered "Don't worry; that's not the end of the story."

That experience has been repeated over and over again for so many of you who have come here today

- as catechumens, those who are not yet baptized, to participate in the rite of election and enrollment of your names in recognition of this important step in your journey to faith
- as candidates, those who are baptized, but you have come to formally hear and respond to the continuing call to conversion in your lives.

You catechumens are the elect, the ones chosen by God to be his people, like Abraham who was

- chosen by God
- blessed by God
- directed by God in his journey of faith.

And just as God made Abraham's name great, your name is made great by God and this is symbolized in the enrollment of your names in a special book as a reminder that this is all about God recognizing and choosing you, even before you decided to choose to answer God's invitation.

You candidates, are the like the ones spoken of by Jesus in the Gospel reading; those who have believed in the Son of God will not be condemned but will find eternal life. And that search for God's gift of eternal life is going to remain a part of your experience as you continue to move away from the darkness of sin and the absence of God to the light that is the Son of God who wishes not only to shine all around you, but shine in you and through you.

All of you catechumens and candidates who have heard the story of Jesus are like a little boy Tommy, kindergarten age, whose emerging faith was strengthened by the encouragement of another child who said, "Don't worry; that's not the end of the story."

Although today is an important milestone for you, it is not the end of the story.

Although the celebration of the Easter sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Holy Eucharist are not too far away, that is not the end of the story.

In your letters to me, you explained that you know that. Many of you told me that there is so much more to

- learn
- understand
- experience and
- live, in regards to your emerging faith in Jesus Christ.

We are grateful to you and we thank God for you as St. Paul says in the second reading today, for you are to us a joy and a crown; a living symbol of the share in God's hope of glory that only Christ can bring to us.

I know that you catechumens and candidates are grateful to those persons, young and old, who have assisted you in your coming to the Church. We are grateful for them too because like a little boy said with a firm faith, "Don't worry; its not the end of the story," they have stood firm in their faith and in doing so, have shown you that the light of Christ that has come into the world is to shine through all of us, whether we are in kindergarten or are moving into the senior years of our lives.

I encourage you catechumens and candidates not to ever lose the joy, the inspiration, the spirit of encouragement and support from others. Please, pass it on as you go forward.

Remember, it's not the end of the story until the Risen Christ will come again to claim all of his elect, all of his chosen ones, all who have made the continuing journey of conversion that leads to him.