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Clifton Cathedral - The Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Catholic Diocese of Clifton, Bristol

In that first reading Isaiah seems to be saying in effect, if you are going to do this do it properly, and the Gospel shows Jesus doing the sort of thing that people even now from polite society may be glancing at one another nudging and pointing with a disapproving look. He sits down at table with the wrong crowd and talks to a tax collector on first name terms. Today I was asked to do one of those online identification checks at the bank, you know the kind of thing, take a photo of your driving licence take a selfie, and slowly turn your head to the left as if you are auditioning for a very slow motion film. And it took longer than it should have but apparently the bank is now satisfied that I am me. But do you know how we have become so used to proving ourselves before we are allowed in, but the Gospel today is just the opposite. Jesus looks at Levi and says "*follow me*", no hoops, just a simple call.

Now, I'm reading a book at the moment about the Great American Bishop Fulton Sheen. Some of you may have read some of his talks. He tells this lovely little moment from his own life. He was living at the time in an apartment building in New York and he kept hearing violin music through the wall, and the quality of the music was so good that he had to find out who it was who was playing. And it turned out be Fritz Chrysler, one of the great musicians of the day. And Sheen did what Bishops are not always brave enough to do, he rang the door bell. He introduced himself and then asked very simply whether this chap Fritz and his wife had ever thought about becoming Catholic. They said no but they said tell us more and 6 months later they were at Holy Communion. And I love that because the beginning was so ordinary. A doorbell, a greeting, an invitation. **And that is so often how the Lord works. He comes close, he calls by name, he opens a door. This is the atmosphere of the Rite of Election. God's call comes first. Today is a moment that began in the heart of God before you were even born.**

I'm told that there are 190 or so preparing for the sacraments at Easter. And, you are here because **something or rather someone has been at work in you quietly, patiently, persistently, perhaps you might say even inconveniently.** Maybe you thought at the beginning, you were just a bit curious about the Catholic faith. Just exploring at first. Maybe you were coming with a friend or a partner just asking questions. **But the Holy Spirit knows better.** The Church calls this celebration today, which is taking place in every Diocese of the world, it calls it the **Rite of Election**, and it's quite a deliberate word. **You are not simply deciding to become a Catholic you are being chosen, selected, elected long before you began your search for God. God was searching for you long before you knocked on the door of the church. Christ had already written your name on his heart .**

Your name will be inscribed in that book there, at the front of the Cathedral. But in truth your names were inscribed long ago in the Divine Mercy.

Some of you are preparing for baptism. You are about to step into waters that are older than the oceans themselves. Waters that drowned sin. Waters that opened the red sea, flowed from Christ's

pierced side. You'll hear all about that at the Easter Vigil. And stepping into those waters you will belong to Christ.

Some of you are already baptised and coming into full communion You have known Christ's name. You have loved him in your own way, and **now he is drawing you deeper into the fullness of his Church, into the sacramental life, into that great communion that stretches across the centuries and continents.**

Now I want to say something this morning very plainly. You're not joining a club becoming Catholics. There is no membership card. There is no secret handshake, you'll be relieved to hear. **You're entering what is essentially a mystery**, because despite what we sometimes think the church is not held together by administration or architecture, or even Bishops. **The church is a mystery held together by a living person, Jesus Christ risen from the dead who looks at you today just like he once looked at a fisherman by the lake, just as he once looked at a tax collector in a tree, at a Samaritan woman by a well and says "come"**. So I hope you feel somewhat joyful today. Some will feel peaceful, some may be feeling nervous or unworthy. Some might be wondering what on earth you've let yourselves in for. If so, you are in excellent company. Most of the Saints started with that thought as well. It's ok, its good, because I'm sure you know by now, that **faith is not the absence of questions, faith is the decision to trust a person in the middle of a hundred questions.**

Today the Church asks you *"do you wish to enter more deeply into this life"*, and you are saying yes. But I hope you know that your yes is echoing a far greater yes. **On the day that you were conceived God said Yes to you. On the day Christ went to the cross he said Yes to you. And at the Easter vigil when the water is poured and the oil is placed upon your forehead that eternal yes will become sacramentally visible.**

So dear Catechumens you are now called the elect. Now that doesn't mean you are superior. It doesn't mean that you have won an election, well maybe in a way it does. It means **beloved** it means **called** it means that you are entrusted with a future in Christ. And this is a joyful celebration today and it sets us up for a wonderful lent. And its joyful not just because our numbers are very strong this year, but because grace is strong and God is faithful .

Now I want to say something to the rest of us. The people sometimes referred to as cradle Catholics. The Sponsors , the families, the Priests and Deacons and Clergy here. There are 190 odd people – well they are not odd, I mean approximately 190, you know what I mean, but these Catechumens and Candidates are not simply entering the church. They are renewing the Church. Because most of you, I guess, will have been part of RCIA groups or Catechumen classes, and you know their questions sharpen our faith, that courage humbles our complacency in faith, that hunger can expose our luke warmness. So seeing them say yes today kind of challenges our yes. I always think that every Rite of Election is a quiet examination of conscience for the rest of us. Do we still burn with the joy that we once had ? Do we still believe what we profess to believe? Do we still live as though Christ is alive in the Church? and the world?

This weekend Lent now deepens. The desert is not an empty place. It is the place where God speaks to the heart. Over the coming weeks we will pray more deeply. We will be scrutinized, which is not a great word I admit, it sounds like something that happens at passport control. **But the scrutinies of lent are not meant to shame us in some way they are meant to free us. God gently uncovering**

what needs healing, what needs strengthening, what needs forgiving. Don't be afraid of that. The Church accompanies us in order to present us as radiant at Easter. And Easter is coming.

The night of fire, the night of water, the night when death loses and heaven opens. Today is the threshold to that and Easter will be if you like the door flung wide open.

So I want to say **walk forward with courage and trust** and if you forget every word that I've said by lunchtime today, remember just one thing. **Jesus has called you by name and he does not make random careless invitations. You are not alone you are surrounded by the Church on earth and the Saints in Glory and above all you are deeply loved.**

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