



## Rite of Election Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

As I was preparing these few words last week, I was reminded that elections are in the air. The National Party had just elected a new leader and deputy leader, we are getting constant reminders that we will have a state election here in Western Australia next year, the Prime Minister is making noises about the timing of next year's federal election and, for those who are interested in world politics, all eyes are on the United States as the lengthy process of electing a new president gets under way.

Tonight, here in the Cathedral, we are also focusing on an election – but it is an election with a difference. For tonight's celebration, no one has been campaigning, no one has been offering policies or making outlandish promises, and no one has been touting for votes. While, in our day-to-day experience, elections have to be won, often as the result of a lot of hard work, in tonight's liturgy, we are celebrating the fact that this election, your election, is the result of a free and generous gift of God, and your own free and generous response to that gift. The word "*election*" originally comes from a Latin word, *eligere*, which means *to choose*. In a sense, it means that you have chosen to enter into the community of faith we call the Catholic Church and, of course, we thank you for making that choice and really want to welcome you with open arms and hearts. In a much more fundamental way, however, to speak of your election means that God has chosen you. You have cooperated with Him generously and, in many cases, courageously – perhaps some of your own family and friends will find it incomprehensible that you have made such a choice – but it is God who has been at work in your life, often quietly and unobtrusively, gently leading you to the time and place in your life where you have been able to hear His call and respond with your "yes".

This idea of choice is captured beautifully in tonight's liturgy. Our opening hymn has echoed throughout the Cathedral with the constant refrain: *we are called – to act, to love, to serve, to walk – to be a light for others and a sign of hope*. The first reading from the Prophet Isaiah takes up this theme with some of the most beautiful words to be found in the Scriptures: *do not be afraid, I have called you by your name, you are mine, I will be with you*. The psalm we sang repeats those words and the second reading from St Paul's letter to the Romans develops the



theme even further, reminding us that God cooperates with all those who love Him, all those whom He has called, those whom He chose especially long ago.

You, our catechumens and candidates, are those people. Each of these words is addressed personally to each one of you tonight, and also to all of you together as you prepare to enter fully and joyfully into the community of the Church. This is a remarkable moment in your lives, and a remarkable moment in our lives as the Church. We are enriched by your faith, your courage and the hope that is within you. We pray that we will be able to enrich you in the same way.

I said, when speaking of electioneering, that candidates for high office often make outlandish promises. The promises you will make on the day of your baptism, or which you will renew as you enter into full communion with us, are not outlandish, but they are significant. But, as you make them in just a few weeks' time, be attentive to the words you use. Most of what you will say is not about promises at all but rather about faith. Over and over, you will be asked, "*Do you believe? Do you believe in God the Father? Do you believe in His Son Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you believe in the Church?*"

Another word for faith, or belief, is trust. And so you will be asked: *Do you trust in God our loving Father? Do you trust in His Son Jesus? Do you trust in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you trust in the Church as God's instrument and the sign of His ongoing presence in the world?*

If the idea of being chosen is strong in tonight's liturgy, so, too, is this idea of trust. God reassures us in the first reading with these words: *Should you pass through the sea, I will be with you; Or through rivers, they will not swallow you up. Should you walk through fire, you will not be scorched and the flames will not burn you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your saviour.* St Paul assures us in the second reading that God can turn everything – everything – to our good. And this evening's Gospel passage – that strange story of the tempting of Jesus in the desert – helps us to understand, among other things, that, no matter what comes our way, the power of God and the presence of God and the grace of God will always be there to protect us and if, unlike Jesus, we should fail, that same grace and power will be there to forgive, to heal, to lift up and to lead forward.

Tonight, then, I want to encourage you to reflect deeply on the idea that you, in the mysterious ways of God, have been chosen out of all the people God could have chosen to receive this extraordinary gift of faith and of being given a place, a home, in His Church. My prayer is that, as you reflect on this wonderful gift of God to you, a deep faith, that is, a deep and sustaining trust, will be borne and grow in your hearts and in your lives. Each day, and especially as you approach your baptism or your entry into full communion with us, allow yourselves to hear in the



depths of your heart the voice of God saying to you, *“Do not be afraid, I have called you by your name, you are mine. I will be with you.”*