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Bishop of Rapid City**

**Homily for the First Sunday of Lent – Rite of Election
Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help**

March 5, 2017

Again, welcome to all of you this afternoon for the Rite of Election. It is good that we gather here as a diocesan faith community, coming from all over the Diocese, to celebrate how God is calling you to a deeper relationship with His Son through the Easter sacraments. Thank you for your response to this invitation to God's call.

You have been judged sincere in your desire to respond to Jesus' invitation. This season of Lent begins the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. These 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving – leading to your ongoing conversion – is the time for a final and more intense preparation for the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation for you catechumens, and for those of you who are already baptized, for your entry into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Remembering how Lord has led you to this moment is very important. Recalling how the Lord has been with you and moving your hearts to say "Yes" to this important step in your spiritual and faith life only deepens that faith and trust in Him, especially when we find life challenging. But in this celebration, it is always important to remember that you are here because of God's invitation. You are the "*Elect*" of Jesus Christ. Jesus has invited you into a deeper relationship through the encounters with Him in the sacramental life of the Church.

These ritual encounters will draw you into His love, mercy and redemption. These ritual encounters will give you the courage and the strength to go wherever He leads you. But it takes great courage to follow wherever Jesus leads us. True discipleship is not for the faint of heart!

On Ash Wednesday, a few days ago, as ashes were put on the foreheads of Catholics, we heard the words, "**Repent and believe in the Gospel.**" This is the hallmark of the season of Lent, this period of purification and enlightenment.

Repent & Believe - For much of my life, I have thought of Lent as a season of looking only inward, a time of taking personal inventory, a period of self-examination, taking an honest assessment of myself, looking at my failures and sinfulness. Like Adam and Eve experienced, the temptations of Evil One are very subtle, convincing us that God is our rival and that He does not want what is best for us... that we can do better by ourselves. Satan plays on our passions and desires to convince us that we can be like God. When we give in to this unwanted advice from Satan it leads us to sin.

So it is important for us to look at ourselves, but at the same time keep our gaze upon Jesus.

We see in the Gospel Jesus being tempted by Satan in three different ways. Satan was preying upon three human passions – power, authority and the worldly. These too, are our strongest passions. Each time Jesus was tempted, His heart turned to gaze upon the Father's love. That is

how He could avoid giving in to the temptation. That is why it is important for us keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus as we reflect upon our call to conversion.

But looking at ourselves in such a way isn't the most fun, nor is it easy. In fact it can be very difficult. But yet it is what you and I are called to do during this season, regardless of whether we are already Catholic or desiring to come into the Church. We are all converts this season, asking the Lord to lead us into a new life of grace with Him.

If this self-examination is done in the light of grace, we will see and experience the power of Jesus' redemptive love. As St. Paul shares with us today, *"For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many."* This is what we hold onto when we look at our sins and sinfulness through the light of grace.

When we do this, it gives us resolve to change – to grow in faith – to cultivate new hope, and to be more fervent in our love. This is the "REPENT" part to which Jesus invites us.

But there is the other part of the summons: **"Believe in the Gospel."** The Gospel is the greatest love story ever told. It is about the Father sending His son to tell us how much we are loved and forgiven. In the words of Pope Francis, *"Tenderness and mercy are the heart of the Gospel. Otherwise, one doesn't understand Jesus Christ, or the tenderness of the Father who sends Him to listen to us, to cure us, to save us."* - Interview with *Il Corriere della Sera* March 5, 2014

To "believe in the Gospel" means that we trust in *"the tenderness of the Father who sends Jesus to listen to us, to cure us, to save us."* Jesus is there with in our own desert experience this Lent.

Jesus came out of his desert experience with great confidence, peace and trust in what God was about to do through Him. Jesus was now ready to reveal the Kingdom to anyone who would follow. He was offering a life that was far better than that which people were living or desiring.

My dear catechumens and candidates, this is what Jesus is offering you as you prepare to come into the Catholic faith. May He fill you with great confidence, peace and trust in what God is about to do in you.

These forty days in the desert are meant to prepare you for this new life with Christ. As you take seriously this preparation, be assured that we will surround you in prayer, and that the entire Church will accompany you, leading you to a deeper encounter with Christ on your journey towards the joys of Easter and new life. God bless you all.