

Sermon for the Rite of Election

**St George's Cathedral, Southwark
on Saturday March 4th 2006**

I would like to welcome all of you today and in particular I would like to welcome those of you who will be entering into full communion with the Catholic Church this Easter. Today is a very important day in your life. You are here because of a decision you have made, because of a commitment you have entered into.

But this decision, this commitment, is not something you have done in isolation. You are going forward with the support of your family, of friends, of parishioners, but most importantly of all you are responding to the action of the Holy Spirit in your own life. Your decision is not simply the result of your own ponderings and reflections. It is not simply something you have figured out for yourself. The fact that you have come here today means that you are responding to and cooperating with the grace of God in your own life. A grace is something given to us and the scriptures explain to us how best to understand the way in which it has given to us. A seed has been sown which is bearing fruit. The stirrings of faith in your heart is a work of God and God began this work a long time ago-long, long before you were aware of it. Long before you realised what was happening to you.

The gospel uses the analogy of how growth takes place in a natural world. Once the seed has been sown, once fertilisation has taken place then growth happens continually, progressively, organically. It just happens.

But it is also true that the process of growth has to be fostered. Plants need water and sunshine. They need protection from disease. And there are various stages of growth. But growth follows its own momentum and will blossom and bear fruit in its own time.

Today's Rite of Election is a key moment in the growth and development of the life of faith in your lives. You are here with other people in whose lives faith is being cultivated and is growing and you are here together, catechumens and candidates mature and ready to request to go forward for the celebration of the Easter sacraments. Those who have been journeying with you will attest that this is a key moment in the maturing of your faith.

What is important is that the Holy Spirit has not been working in isolation; the Holy Spirit draws us on and draws us together. When we receive the Eucharist at Easter it is precisely something that we celebrate together. The word 'communion' literally means to participate in something together, to share something together. We participate together in the Body and Blood of the Lord and in so doing we become one

Body, we become part of the Body of Christ. So the Holy Spirit that has been at work in each one of us has been gradually forming you to become members of the Body of Christ.

Hence the importance of the relationships that you have formed and will continue to form- with those who have led the RCIA process, with those with whom we have journeyed as part of this process. With parishioners, friends, priests, deacons, religious- the whole network of those who make up the Body of Christ.

And it is also important that as candidates and Catechumens you have come here to the Cathedral with god parents and sponsors so that you make your commitment to me, the bishop of the diocese. When you celebrate the sacraments in your parishes, you will not only become part of the parish community, you become part of the diocese of Southwark and of the Catholic Church throughout the world. As a bishop in communion with Pope Benedict I represent the whole Catholic Church, that whole network of relationships which you will become part of through the celebration of the Easter Sacraments.

The Catholic Church throughout the world is united in One Lord, one faith, one baptism. Wherever you go in the world you will take your place as of right in any Eucharistic community. So the final fruit of the slow, gradual working of the Holy Spirit is your life in full membership of the universal Church.

Today, therefore we thank God for that, gradual and progressive process of growth that has brought you to this moment. We thank God for the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in your lives in the future, we look forward to the outpouring of gifts in the sacrament of Confirmation and to the unique vocation that each one of you will have in the life of the Church and in the world.

May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment.