

Rite of Election - Homily

Saturday, March 1, 2025, St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat

This is an election year for our federal parliament. We'll go to the polls on or before May 17. Once the prime minister names the election date, the election campaigns will officially begin, but the unofficial campaigning has been going for some time.

We refer to the ceremony we're celebrating today as a "rite of election". How does our rite of election compare to elections in the political field?

In one sense, they're similar, in that they both involve certain people being elected, chosen for particular roles. In the coming federal election, various candidates will be elected to be members of parliament in Canberra. They'll be chosen for these roles. Likewise, in our rite of election, certain people are elected, they're chosen to be among those who will be baptised or received into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter. So both political elections and our rite of election involve people being chosen.

However, in other ways, our rite of election is different from elections in the political arena.

In politics, the candidates campaign to win people's votes. The candidates try to convince voters that they have the right qualities and the right policies to do the job. Candidates are elected because of good things they've done or at least because of good things they promise to do.

By contrast, in our rite of election today, the election doesn't depend on the good things people have done. Rather, the election depends on the generous love of God. It's God who chooses us to be members of the community of the church, and this is not because of any good deeds we've done, but because of God's overflowing kindness.

We read this in various places in the Scriptures. For example, in the letter to Titus we find these words: "When the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy." (Titus 3:4-5)

When it comes to being elected by God, we don't have to run an election campaign. We don't have to convince God that we have a great track record of doing good. God elects us because God is so merciful.

Pope Francis often encourages us to focus on the mercy of God. This is a very appropriate focus for us in this rite of election. In this celebration we give thanks that God has chosen us to be members of the family of Christ and we acknowledge that God has chosen us, not because of any good deeds we've done, but because of God's own loving-kindness. God has chosen us because of God's great mercy. For this we can rightly say, "Thanks be to God."

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR