



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Homily for Rite of Election March 2014

My dear sisters and brothers, we gather – not as individuals -- but as a growing community of faith. This is a first step in formally welcoming our catechumens and candidates into the Catholic Church – not only the Archdiocese of San Antonio but the Church throughout the world in communion with the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis.

Today's Scripture readings focus on temptation or, better, on testing. The man and the woman in the Garden of Eden have everything they could want and only one command: not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. They have one test, and they fail it and are driven out of the garden.

Today, we are invited to join Jesus, not in a garden but, in the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan. The wilderness in the Bible is the place far removed from divine protection, where God's absence is felt more than his presence. It is the region of lawlessness, terror, wild beasts, demons – Satan. Jesus was tested as the Israelites were tested after the Exodus from Egypt, when they wandered in the wilderness for forty years before being allowed to enter the Promised Land. Jesus, who is both fully human and fully divine, stayed in the wilderness for forty days – tempted by Satan, tested by his heavenly Father. Unlike Israel of old, Jesus passes the test. It is clear that he will eventually be victorious over Satan. The struggle is not yet over – he will have to climb Calvary first – but the outcome is already known. Jesus will overcome the forces of evil once and for all!

My dear brothers and sisters, we do not have to go to a special geographical region to experience the wilderness. It is all around us – in the violence, the deceitfulness, the infidelity, the spitefulness and revenge of human experience – in the decadent signs of human nature left to its own resources – in the empty lives of those who live as though God does not matter or who think they do not need God.

The story of our salvation does not end in the wilderness – but rather in the kingdom of God. That kingdom is already among us – whenever people show compassion for one another, especially for the most vulnerable members of our society – wherever people forgive one another – wherever people strive to nurture and enhance human lives through quality education, adequate health care, and needed social services – where there is unity, harmony, justice, and peace. Yet, as we know so well, the kingdom of God is not yet fully here and now. We share responsibility for making the kingdom more of a reality in our world today.

So, we are called to continuing conversion. We are to change the way we live – to walk in God's ways, not the ways of the world, to incorporate in our lives the values of the Gospel. We are to root out the capital sins of our lives and to put on the virtues of faith hope and love – the virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. We are to show respect for every human being, without exception. In short, we are to imitate the example of Jesus himself.

This is our challenge today – whether we are catechumens or candidates, sponsors or family or friends – lay or clergy or religious. There are no exceptions, and we need to face this challenge every day of our lives.

From the wilderness Jesus leads us to the cleansing, refreshing, life-giving waters of baptism and new life. And so we join the Lord Jesus today and celebrate in a special way the election and call to continuing conversion of our catechumens and candidates. Let us ask God to guide and strengthen all of us for the segment of our journey through Lent that leads to the Easter sacraments and full participation in the

sacramental life of the Church. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome you who are catechumens through the waters of baptism and the Chrism of Confirmation. We will welcome candidates through Confirmation and profession of faith. We will all gather together around the altar – God's table – to share his Body and Blood that is both the source and the sign of our unity, our communion. We look forward with great anticipation to the joy and wonder of that day.

But today in the early days of Lent we join Jesus in the wilderness, realizing that we are both tempted by Satan and tested by God. We need not fear. He will not abandon us. God will give us all we need for our journey and will nurture and strengthen our commitment to walk in his ways. And we will walk together, as a community of faith.

Dear Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, watch over all of us with your maternal care and bring us closer to your beloved Son, Jesus.