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Art by Julie Lonneman

by Barbara O'Neill

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Earth's crammed with heaven,
and every bush afire with God.

But only he who sees,
takes off his shoes.

The rest sit round it
and pluck blackberries.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Have you ever felt powerless? Other people are making decisions that directly affect your life, yet you have no say in the matter. Situations like this are unpleasant, confusing and painful, fraught with worry and anxiety. There's lack of communication, misunderstanding — someone says something, but the other party hears it completely different from what the first person intended. The light goes out, and it becomes difficult to see our way through the situation at hand.

As the season of Lent intensifies, drawing nearer to the most sacred time of the liturgical year, we journey with the elect toward the font. The elect are counting down the days to the moment of baptism and full incorporation into this community, the body of Christ. The call to conversion deepens as much for us as it does for them. The last three Sundays of Lent, we celebrate the scrutinies, honestly facing sin, seeing it for what it is, supported by God's love and grace.

These Sundays call us to look beyond just a laundry list of sins committed in daily life to examine the intentions, motives and patterns of behavior that keep us from being our best selves. The gift of sight is offered to everyone who is open and ready to receive it. The scrutinies shine light into the areas of darkness we'd rather just leave be; the journey inward can be frightening.

If we were alone this might be daunting, but together, as God's people, we find strength, courage, love and support as we resolve to do better. For most people, I

think, sin is not about deliberately setting out to do something destructive or evil. Rather, sin presents itself as something good. We often fail to see the potential consequences of choices we are making; we think something is good, yet it turns out to cause pain. For example, someone might lie or cheat — not because they intentionally want to do what is wrong, but to cover up a failure, to make themselves look better, or to get ahead in some way. The scrutinies are designed to shine a spotlight on those areas of our lives most in need of healing and forgiveness.

For parishes with candidates and catechumens, the last three Sundays of Lent use the Gospels from John instead of Luke. In them we encounter the woman at the well (John 4) who honestly faces her inner demons; the man born blind (John 9), who goes from darkness to the radiance of sight; and finally (John 11), the raising of Lazarus, who dances in the freedom and joy of life restored. We stand with them, asking for their courage. We share the same intimate relationship with Jesus as they did. Together we encounter Jesus, and we are never the same.

Is your parish celebrating the scrutinies? Careful preparation on the part of the presider, homilist, formation team and music directors, under the guidance of the parish liturgist, will serve to impact your entire assembly in ways we cannot predict. This preparation ought to involve the entire parish with the elect. Be creative. The possibilities are endless.

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The following, taken from the introduction to the initiation rite, applies to all of us:

The scrutinies, which are solemnly celebrated on Sundays and are reinforced by an exorcism, are rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, and then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.

(#141, Rite of Christian Initiation)

The scrutinies are all about remembering heaven — where we came from and where we are going. In the meantime, heaven is all around us and within us. God's grace is being poured out in every moment, enabling us to face our own demons courageously and honestly so we can move from the darkness into light, with new vision of the goodness that is ours and new freedom from the bondage of deadly sin.

Together with our elect, we are all called to trust anew in God's love, to see what Moses saw in the burning bush, God present in the moment and in the lives of all those around us.

Editor's note: *This reflection was originally published in the March 2013 issue of [Celebration](#). Sign up to receive [daily Lenten reflections](#).*

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