

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Chrism Mass 2019

Monday of Holy Week

Chrism Mass

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

Apr. 15, 2019

Introduction

Each year we gather in joy for the Chrism Mass during which we bless the oils that are used in the Church's sacramental life: the oil of catechumens for those to be baptized at Easter and beyond; the oil of the sick for the anointing of those struggling with serious illnesses; the oil of chrism for those to be baptized, confirmed and ordained to the priesthood. Through anointing with these holy oils, the redemption won by the Risen Christ reaches us, and transforms us inwardly, in the power of the Holy Spirit – a truth and a reality that should always bring us great joy and peace. Tonight the whole Church of Baltimore unites in sharing this joy: priests and deacons; a growing number of seminarians; religious women and men; catechumens and candidates as well as those preparing for Confirmation; and members of the laity representing every parish in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Thank you for your presence and for your enthusiastic participation.

Moments from now, my brother priests serving in the Archdiocese will also renew the promises they made before God and the Church on Ordination Day. This is surely a moment, dear brother priests, for me to thank you and to invite the whole assembly to thank you for your dedicated priestly service! . . . So too, this night all of you will pray for me and my fellow bishops that we might fulfill worthily the responsibilities entrusted to us in our weakness. Dear fellow Christians, let not our joy and enthusiasm diminish if we temper tonight's celebration with a holy and humble realism. If ever there were a year when we, the ordained, must pledge ourselves anew to the Lord and to the Church and to you – this is it – and we do so gladly.

Light from Scripture

The readings for the Chrism Mass never vary from year to year. They shed the light of Christ on what it is we do by God's grace at this Chrism Mass, but they also shed that same light on the situation we are facing in these days, viz., the cloud of scandal, betrayal, and leadership failure that has engulfed our Church. Tonight God's Word teaches us how to model our priestly ministry on that of Jesus, if we would be instrumental in renewing the Church in our times. And it challenges every member of the Church to share in the responsibility of renewing and strengthening the Church that Christ himself loves so dearly.

In the Gospel, Jesus dramatically begins his mission of proclaiming the Word of God. He stands before the people in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth, unrolls the scroll of Isaiah, and proclaims Isaiah's prophetic words. And then, Jesus announces that in him those words find fulfillment. Listen again to the words Jesus proclaimed:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Here in summary form is captured the identity and mission of Jesus. In these words, the form and shape of our priestly ministry is also captured, along with the secret to the renewal of our ministry in these challenging times. Let's consider two points from these words of Isaiah, brought to fulfillment in Jesus:

First, is that Jesus was anointed by the Spirit and sent by the Father, just as we, at ordination, were anointed by the Spirit and sent by Christ to spread the Good News of his love through Word, Sacrament, and pastoral charity. Our priesthood is not our own. It is not a personal privilege. It is not a platform. Our priesthood is a share in Jesus' priesthood. It comes from Christ and it depends wholly upon him. And so, the unrivaled passion of our lives must be to remain in the Presence of Christ. Our lives and ministries make sense only if we draw ever closer to Jesus. And the longer we remain in Jesus, the more completely we will discard the false idols that separate us from the Christ and do harm to God's People. The more deeply we remain in Christ, the more insistently we will beg him to heal and forgive even our most hidden defects, wounds, and heartaches. This requires us to ask the Holy Spirit to make us

humble and docile. It means asking the Lord through prayer, spiritual direction, and sacramental penance for the grace to reorient the desires of our heart so that we may seek God alone. To live in Jesus is to learn, day by day, how to live only for God and for the sake of God. And it is only when we live only for God that we are truly at home with our people in their 'joy and hope, their grief and anguish'.

A second point is that Jesus was anointed by the Spirit and sent by the Father to proclaim and to teach the good news of salvation. It sounds so easy, doesn't it? So effortless! Almost automatic! Jesus is God's very Word in the flesh, anointed by the Spirit— of course, he knew what to say! Unlike ourselves, he didn't need biblical commentaries, worship aids, and laptops! Nor did he preach every Sabbath to the same congregation made up of folks who would have known his stories, his favorite themes, even his pet peeves. Take it from me, there are advantages to being an itinerant preacher! But, in fact, there was nothing effortless or automatic in Jesus' preaching. Not for nothing did Jesus spend entire nights absorbed in prayer to his Father. Not for nothing did the entirety of God's Word course through Jesus' humanity.

When Jesus spoke, people were amazed not only by his brilliance but indeed by the clarity and authority of his words, words that were confirmed by the signs and wonders he worked: the people he cured and liberated from illness, death, demons, and sin. So too our preaching must be confirmed by the loving pastoral care we provide to those who are poor – materially and spiritually; to those who are held captive by sin, by addiction, by injustice, by racism; to those who are sick, distressed, searching, or just trying to make sense out of life.

Jesus' preaching was also authenticated by the infinite goodness of his sinless Being. In a word, there was deep and beautiful transparency in all that Jesus said and did. His words flowed from a pure and open heart, united with his Father in love and united with us in mercy. In these days when the Church must strive afresh for public transparency, its institutional efforts, halting as they can sometimes be, will be effective to the degree that, we who are ordained ministers, strive for deep personal integrity. Let our preaching be authenticated by a virtuous life with nothing to hide, by a heart that is pure, a heart like that of Jesus, generous in its openness.

Jesus' preaching was true, good, and beautiful because it was not his own. Rather, it sprang from the heart of the Father of Mercies who sent his only Son into the world to proclaim Good News to the poor. "My teaching is not mine, it is his who sent me", Jesus says in John's Gospel, that is to say, my message of liberation and healing reflects not the personal views of my humanity, but rather the saving will of the Father who sent and commissioned me to preach. So too our teaching and preaching is validated when it flows, not from us, but from the heart of the Church, the Bride of Christ - whether we are speaking of doctrine or morality or social teaching. All three travel together. All three rise and fall together. When, with our finger on the pulse of our people, we prayerfully and thoughtfully teach authentic doctrine, then it is that we give the Holy Spirit room to do the work of liberating and healing in our midst.

Conclusion

Dear friends: None of this can we, your bishops and priests, do in isolation from men and women in consecrated life and especially from the lay faithful. Your prayers and your presence this evening are, as always, most encouraging but you bring to the Church more than your presence and prayers. The Holy Spirit has come upon you as well in Baptism and Confirmation and has endowed you not only with natural talents so needed by Church's life, but also by many spiritual gifts of discernment, prophecy, and healing, gifts so necessary in these days and in fact, necessary for the Church's mission at all times. And how I thank all of you for your faithful and generous service to the Church!

As you pray with and for the bishops and priests who are privileged to serve you, we, in turn, pledge to form with you a closer and more vibrant partnership in which your gifts of nature and grace can be unleashed to repair, enrich, strengthen, and enrich the social and spiritual fabric of this great and historical local Church, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, such that the Lord's mission of liberation and healing might continue unabated in times good and bad, in times of peace and in times of struggle, for the glory of God, the good of the Church Universal, and the salvation of souls - and may God bless us and keep us always in his love!