

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Chrism Mass 2019; Wheeling, WV

Tuesday of Holy Week

Chrism Mass

St. Joseph Cathedral, Wheeling

Apr. 16, 2019

Introduction

This afternoon we will bless the oils used in the Church's sacramental life: the oil of chrism for those to be baptized, confirmed and ordained to the priesthood. The oil of the sick for the anointing of those struggling with serious illnesses; the oil of catechumens for those to be baptized at Easter and beyond; 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.

Moments from now, my brother priests will also renew the promises made before God and the Church on Ordination Day. This is surely a moment, dear brother priests, for me and for us all to thank you for your dedicated priestly service during this very challenging time. So too, this afternoon all of you will pray for me as your interim bishop, that in my weakness I might fulfill the responsibilities entrusted to me on your behalf. Dear brother priests: accompanied by the incorruptible heart of St. John Vianney, let us, with a holy and humble realism, we pledge ourselves anew to the Lord and to the Church and to the people we are privileged to serve.

Light from Scripture

The Scripture readings for the Chrism Mass shed the light of Christ on what it is we do by God's grace at this Chrism Mass. But they also shed Christ's light on the situation we are facing in these days, viz., the cloud of scandal, betrayal, and leadership failure that has engulfed our Church. God's Word teaches us priests how to model our priestly ministry on that of Jesus, if we would be instrumental in

renewing the Church in our times. It also 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 begins his mission of proclaiming the Word of God. He stands before the people in the Nazareth synagogue, proclaims the words of Isaiah, then, 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 or 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. Isn't this, dear brother priests, what attracts us to our patron, St. John Vianney? His priestly heart was radically open to Jesus. This saintly priest attained the heights of friendship with Jesus through prayer, devotion to the Eucharist, penance and asceticism.

So too, 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 longer we remain in Christ, the more insistently we will beg him to heal and forgive even our most hidden defects, wounds, and heartaches. Thru prayer, spiritual direction, and sacramental penance, we must ask the Lord for the grace to reorient the root 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 the Incarnate Word, 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 by the authority of his words, for his preaching was confirmed by the signs and wonders he worked: the people he cured and liberated from illness, death, demons, and sin. In the same way, St. John Vianney's preaching was confirmed by the devotion with which he celebrated the Holy Eucharist by the confessions which he heard for hours on end, with insight into each penitent, and by his endless pastoral care for those who streamed to the remote village of Ars. 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; 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 the same way, St. John Vianney's priestly heart was beautiful in its transparency but only because he was willing to confront evil and in God's grace overcome it. In these days when the Church must strive afresh for public transparency, its 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.

Finally, 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 and commissioned him to proclaim the Gospel. "My teaching is not mine, it is his who sent me", Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospels. In his sacred humanity, Jesus came to accomplish the will of his Father. who sent to preach and then to suffer, die, and rise for us and our salvation. This is also how St. John Vianney preached - he conveyed not his own opinions but the Church's teaching with simplicity and holiness of life. 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. When, with our finger on the pulse of our people, we teach authentically, 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. The Risen Lord 'who loves us and frees us from sin has made you into a Kingdom, priests for his God and Father and to him be glory forever and ever!' And so he has endowed you not only with natural talents so needed by Church's life, but also with many spiritual gifts of discernment, prophecy, and healing, gifts needed in these days and in fact needed at all times for the Church's mission. And how I thank all of you for your faithful and generous service to the Church! As you pray with and for me and my fellow 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, strengthen, and enrich the social and spiritual fabric of this diocese as it prayerfully awaits the arrival of a new and loving shepherd. In this way the Lord's mission of liberation and healing might continue unabated throughout the State of West

Virginia, 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!