

# Chrism Mass 2009

Welcome to all you good People of God from throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore who come to show your respect and gratitude to your priests, and participate in the ancient rite of the Chrism Mass.

May I begin by welcoming with a grateful heart on behalf of all of us our former shepherd, Cardinal William Keeler. Then too, I know that our thoughts and prayers are with Archbishop Borders, unable to attend. Thank you, Bishop William Newman for your continuing shepherd's care, and thank you most especially to my most valuable coworkers in the episcopate, Bishop Mitchell Rozanski and Bishop Denis Madden. I suspect, my brother bishops that your emotions are welling up as are mine, to be surrounded by our archdiocesan presbyterate, our collaborators in religious life, as well as by other priests who join us in this Mass of Chrism, which will include the solemn renewal of our priestly promises. Yes, we are here to renew our commitment before God and in Christ, to serve you, God's people. And we do so in a ceremony that can be traced well before the year 200 when a liturgical book speaks of the blessing of three oils. In fact, the manual speaks of the blessing of the oil of the sick for the healing of soul and body and the blessing of the oil of catechumens to put to flight, before baptism, any and every trace of the devil that might impede the worthy reception of baptism.

But the third oil, holy chrism, is not blessed but is consecrated, a more solemn form of blessing akin to the consecration of the bread and wine in the midst of Mass. In fact, from earliest days the prayer of consecration of the chrism has been called a Eucharistic Prayer and, as you will see, it is a prayer in which all our priest will join in a concelebration.

The word chrism is of the same derivative as the name of Christ. It is poured out on the heads of those other Christs, priests and bishops during their ordination. It is the oil that is signed on the foreheads of those newly initiated into the Church through baptism and confirmation indicating that we are all joined to Christ in his priestly people offering ourselves as living sacrifice, with him, to the Father.

On this evening, therefore, I take the opportunity along with all you faithful gathered here, to thank all our priests for their day-in, day-out service of love, on your behalf, in the name and person of Jesus Christ. You, my brothers, have been particularly generous both in welcoming me as your bishop and in your counsel and collaboration as we seek together to build up the Church, Christ's Body.

Un saludo especial para nuestros sacerdotes que hablan español - saludos, bienvenidos y muchas gracias por su valiosa contribución a la Iglesia de Baltimore. La presencia de los recién llegados que hablan español es para nosotros, un tesoro. Ellos traen muchos dones a nuestra Iglesia, al igual que lo hacen ustedes al servirles tan generosamente, y en el nombre de nuestra Arquidiócesis, les ofrezco todo nuestro cariño y nuestro apoyo.

Our Church's guidance for this Blessing of the Oils and Chrism states that this Mass is "one of the chief expressions of the fullness of the bishop's priesthood and is looked upon on as a symbol of the close bond between the bishop and his priests." The Church also notes that priests "are brought together and concelebrate this Mass as witnesses and cooperators with their bishop in the consecration of the chrism because they share in the office of the bishop in building up, sanctifying and ruling the people of God. This Mass is therefore a clear expression of the unity of the priesthood and the sacrifice of Christ..."

You, all you members of God's Faithful people and most especially you, my priests, can but imagine the privilege I feel to be standing here as your shepherd. It is clear, from the texts just read, that the Mass of Chrism celebrates the identity both of Christ as the anointed one of the Father, and of the ordained priesthood, who through our anointing have become one in the person of Christ our eternal high priest.

Pope John Paul the Great placed our gathering in context:

"Today we gather around our bishops as the presbyterium of the individual local churches in so many places around the world. We concelebrate the Eucharist and renew the priestly promises connected with our vocation and our service to Christ's Church. It is the great priestly day of all the particular churches of the world within the one universal Church."

Who can begin to count the number of souls unburdened from sin through your words of absolution while the light was on these Wednesday Lenten evenings, the emotions and tears experienced as in Christ's name you celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And what a unique experience and singular grace it was for us to be the voice of Christ in extending that forgiveness. It is my fervent prayer that many young men will come to share with us that joy as priests of Jesus Christ.

In spite of our poverty of numbers and our personal shortcomings - indeed because of them - today we appreciate anew the centrality of the daily Eucharist in our priestly lives. And during this singular Eucharistic celebration, as we renew our dedication to Christ as priests of the new covenant, may the Holy Spirit stir into living flames what first fired our zeal through the laying of hands.

And may this most solemn, most graced moment, encourage the people of God throughout the archdiocese to pray for you, our most prized, venerated and esteemed priests of God and to pray for your successors among young men here and beyond who are certainly being called to hear the call to follow Christ in shepherding his Church.