

Chrism Mass 2015

Healing, Hope, and Joy

Well, here we are again, gathered together as the Archdiocesan family of faith. Gracing us with their presence are my brother priests and many priests who serve so generously in parishes and other ministries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Dear brother priests, how much all of us want to thank you for your faithful ministry, day in and day out, in season and out of season! I'm delighted this evening to greet my brother deacons as well as the seminarians of the Archdiocese. Young people are here tonight, some considering the possibility of a priestly vocation. We are praying for you and all of us are very glad to see you! In this year dedicated to consecrated life, it is a special joy to welcome many religious women and men and to thank you for showing us the face of Christ, chaste, poor, and obedient, and for serving in such a wide variety of ministries in this local Church. With us are Pastoral Life Directors, who serve in a number of parishes, parish staff members, especially directors of formation, thank you, and welcome! How warmly we welcome those who are preparing for Baptism and reception into the Church at the Easter Vigil. What a sign of hope and joy you are to all of us! And many of you are faithful parishioners, life-long Catholics, who strive to live your faith day in and day out in these challenging times, especially in the vocation of marriage and family life, thank you, and welcome!

Gathered together as we are tonight, we are perhaps a bit larger than the audience Jesus encountered in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth. Nonetheless, he steps into our midst and using the words of Isaiah the Prophet, Jesus announces to us what he announced to them: *"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 and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."* Dare I sum up Jesus' message in three little words: healing, hope, and gladness? This is not a message which Jesus delivered dispassionately. Knowing he would face an incredulous audience among his relatives and kinsman, he nonetheless proclaimed that he is the very embodiment, the ultimate fulfillment of that divine message of healing, hope, and gladness, the deepest longing of every human heart.

Please God, Jesus has not met an incredulous audience here tonight. Indeed, if all goes according to plan, we will “sacramentalize” his message of healing, hope, and joy by blessing the Oil of the Sick which imparts the healing touch of his love; the Oil of Catechumens, the oil of hope, one might say, for when catechumens are anointed with this oil the hope of eternal life shines on them; and the oil of gladness, that is, Holy Chrism, through which we are consecrated and made sharers in the priesthood of Jesus, those baptized and confirmed as members of a priestly people, and those ordained to the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ. Nothing should bring us more joy than to be true disciples of the Lord and ordained priests of the new covenant who bring to life for the faithful all that Jesus said and did to bring about our salvation.

The Pervasiveness of Healing, Hope, and Joy

Tonight, when the Chrism Mass has concluded, parish representatives will receive renewed supplies of the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Oil of holy Chrism. Once back at the parish, these holy oils will be displayed in what is called an “ambry”. In many parishes, the oils are clearly visible, in gleaming glass containers, often in some prominent place near the baptismal font. Let us not see the Holy Oils as mere decoration, a kind of ecclesiastical knickknack. Rather, these oils are symbolic of the entirety of the Church’s ministry, which is a ministry of healing, hope, and gladness... allow me to explain.

The blessing of the Oil of the Sick reminds us priests of the many times we have been at the bedside of parishioners who are seriously ill. It reminds us of the times when we gather parishioners facing ongoing illnesses and the consequences of advancing years to celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In this Sacrament, human frailty is redeemed by the Lord’s own suffering. Many experience healing; many others renewed spiritual strength amid their illness. Yet this sacrament goes beyond the individuals to whom it is administered and speaks to the whole healing ministry of the Church, the continuation of the Lord’s healing touch. This is embodied in the Church’s healthcare ministry which is not a secular business with a churchy name but an extension of the Lord’s own ministry of healing. It is expressed in the many programs of Catholic Charities, St. Vincent de Paul, and the many social and charitable ministries of our parishes. Pope Francis indeed famously called the Church “a field hospital” where the deepest wounds of human existence,

the wounds of the soul, can be healed. May we be that field hospital here the City of Baltimore and the nine counties of Maryland we are privileged to serve.

In that spirit, please reflect with me for a moment about the Oil of Catechumens. Dear brother priests, how often has a parent or a godparent struggled to open the collar of the baby's baptismal dress so we could anoint her with the oil of catechumens? This happens all the time. Why do we baptize infants? Why do we welcome adult catechumens? Why do we evangelize families and seek to draw all people to the Crucified One? Dear brother priests and all dear friends: Is it not because our minds and hearts look beyond life as we know it and see in the distance the peace of the Kingdom of the Beatitudes for which we long? Pope Benedict once said that "one who hopes ... lives differently". The Oil of Catechumens with which we've all been anointed, continues to challenge us to undergo that moral transformation and that growth in virtue by which we show that we are longing for the peace of God's Kingdom so truly that we want to introduce it right now in the broken world where we live and work. It is largely by our example more than our words that we attract others to Christ and to the Church, and that we welcome back those who have left our ranks. Every one of us here tonight knows deep down the importance of confessing our sins as an act of profound hope in the One whose love is stronger than sin. Every priest who stands in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday knows this. When we speak in the midst of the assembly, we know how important it is that our words align with our deeds and that our deeds align with our words.

Do give me yet another moment to speak of the Oil of Chrism, the oil by which we are consecrated by the Holy Spirit so as to share in the likeness of Christ and his sacrificial love. It is the oil of gladness because its fruit is joy in the Holy Spirit. Dear brother priests, every time we celebrate an ordination anniversary, and when we gather like this to renew the promises we made on ordination day, it is as if the Oil of Holy Chrism is fresh on the palms of our hands. Not only does it take us back to all that inspired our vocation, it takes us to the very heart of our priestly existence: the joy of imparting the life of Christ to others, in Word, in Sacrament, and in the art of being a pastor, a good and loving shepherd, for those we serve. The goal of our life, the preoccupation of our waking hours, is to form individuals who constitute a people that deeply shares in Christ's self-giving love, a people formed in the truth of that love by sharing in the Word of God and by being nurtured by the blood and

water flowing from the wounded side of the Risen Christ in the Church's sacramental life. In turn, this is the people who give life to our ministry, who help us live our vocation faithfully, effectively, and fruitfully, and who extend our ministry far beyond our limitations. This is what get us up in the morning and this is what makes the whole Church glad.

Conclusion

For this reason, dear friends, we your bishops and priests are only too happy this night to renew the promises we made on the day of our ordination. We do this not merely to be true to our word or to conform to the Church's expectations. We do this as an act of love for the Lord and for you. It is only in this way that we can be both your leaders and your partners as together we open our hearts to the Lord, who stands among us this night, calling us to be a local church that embodies and proclaims his message of healing, hope, and joy.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!