

Chrism Mass: Homily Reflections on the Blessing of the Oils

It is a joy to welcome so many to the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen for the annual blessing of the holy oils to be used during the coming year in the conferring of the Sacraments Jesus gave to the care of the Church.

For how many is this the first visit to the Cathedral? How many come from the City of Baltimore? From Baltimore, Harford and Anne Arundel Counties? From the rest of the Archdiocese?

At this Eucharist, when we bless the oils, we are reminded that in the Old Testament certain people were destined for anointing: priests, kings and prophets. The anointing by the Holy Spirit touches us as well. Through baptism, we come to participate in the royal priesthood of the Divine Son; through Confirmation, we are given a share in the inner life of the Holy Spirit that we may be strengthened to invite others to the wondrous life God shares with us; through Holy Orders, some receive an anointing of God's Holy Spirit to shepherd others in the name of Jesus in the Church.

This evening we acknowledge the gifts conferred on so many of God's people in the Archdiocese. We do so in the context of a society, a culture in which many have lost their way or do not even want to find it. Yet we see that a motion picture is setting box office records in ways the culture cannot seem to comprehend, *The Passion of the Christ*.

How many have seen this picture? The other day I met a woman who had seen it five times and will have seen it twice more before Easter. She had been away from the Church, alienated during her college years, and she came back after having had her first child. She is now an attorney working out of her home in defense of human life. With her I reflected on what this film has occasioned for all Christians, and especially for Catholics. Even between those of different faith families, the movie has motivated many to express their faith, leading to discussions, even in public forums, about religious issues and matters of deep feelings. Discussion of such issues as how

Jesus died because of the sins of all of us, the profound significance of the Holy Eucharist, the sanctity of life, and the meaning of marriage as the union between man and wife, all of these can be seen and better understood in the perspective of Christ's unwavering love and unchanging law.

With its graphic depiction of the sufferings of Jesus, *The Passion of the Christ* is not a film for everybody. I admit that the scenes of Jesus' suffering were so overwhelming that I missed much of the detail. (Parents should be the ones to determine whether their children may view it. When I asked the woman who had seen it five times whether she permitted her children to watch the movie, she replied that only her 10-year old son was ready to see it; her three daughters, two of them very small, were not mature enough. Her son was familiar with the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross.)

This motion picture, which so emphasizes the bloody sufferings of Jesus, calls for the balance of possible future films on the public life and the risen life of Jesus. But, as it stands, it is in the tradition of religious art that invites the viewer to become part of the event, as one does in meditating on a scene from scripture and imagining that you are there, a part of what is going on. St. Ignatius Loyola asked Father Jerome Nadal, a Spanish Jesuit, to prepare written guidance for artists, to help the artists involve the spectator in the work portrayed. This led to a series of books, illustrated with engravings, which had an enormous impact on Caravaggio and others in Rome and in Holland. One film critic even stated that the sets could well have been designed by Caravaggio, and the film's director, commenting on the relative lack of dialogue, observed that Caravaggio's paintings spoke for themselves.

Our culture, so often closed in heart and mind to the religious dimension of our lives, now finds that dimension a