



Mass of Chrism
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
March 30, 2017
Prayed on Thursday during the Fourth Week of Lent
Cathedral of Saint Joseph

Thank you for praying with us today. May I note that before us is a Relic of the Holy Cross which is a visible devotional focus as we approach Holy Week.

The Chrism Mass raises up the priesthood as we recall when Our Lord instituted that holy order at the Last Supper. As we do so it is important to also recognize the essential role of permanent deacons, men and women religious and laity both professional and volunteer. We are one in Christ only with differing roles; different branches attached to the vine that is Christ expressed in His Church. Thank you to all who walk with and support one another.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me.” That gift of anointing is the core of what we celebrate with grateful hearts today. When we priests renew our promises made at our ordination we recall that special moment when we individually were anointed by the Lord. In the blessings and consecration of the holy oils for the anointing of the sick, catechumens and sacred chrism, we assure that the gift of anointing will be extended to others in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy orders. The prayers over each of the oils are powerful and packed with meaning. When I pray them, please listen carefully not to me but to the inspired words of the Church.

Every year it is a privilege for me to gather with you to thank God for having anointed you and invite us all to recommit ourselves to our ordination promises which can easily get lost in the busyness of our ministries. It also gives me the opportunity to thank you for your sacrificial service to the faithful placed under your care. The incivility and disrespect for others so prevalent in our culture is not lacking in the Church and toward you. Thank you for keeping focused on our mission to share the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and risen so that others might encounter the beauty and perspective, the mercy and love that a personal relationship with Christ offers.

These are especially difficult times to stand strong for the prophetic teachings of the Church. The culture in which we live seeks to exile God to the ash heap of history replaced by a narcissistic focus on self. Standing up for respect for life from conception to natural death, for adherence to the Creator as giver of life, for marriage as Christ taught, for gender identity consistent with God’s creation, for the rights of immigrants and for the poor, and for forgiveness not anger for all is not without hostile reactions and divisions. These Truths have created some hard pastoral situations in families and within the Church. Yet we must stand up for the revealed truth even when not well received. Thank you for doing so always with charity and while pastorally accompanying.

Each year with grateful hearts we recognize those of our brothers who are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year:

65 years: Father Charles Duman and Msgr. Carlton Hermann

60 years: Msgr James Doyle and Father Jerry Holtzman

50 years: Father Hal Barber and Father Gerry Thury, and

25 years: Father Bill Hamak and Father Mark Lichter.

Together they witness 400 years of priestly service. Could they tell us stories! In fact many do, to our amusement. Thank you for your witness over the years and support of us all as brothers in the Lord.

We also remember those who have died since the last Chrism Mass:

Fathers James Joyce, Tony Opem, Tony Imberi, TJ Ryan and

Deacon Ed Gruhot

May they rest in peace and all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

Chrism Mass is an opportunity to recall the joy of all our ordinations and reflect on all that has happened since. It is brief pause to rest our thoughts in memories of sacred moments past which are sustaining and to reinvigorate our dreams for the future, perhaps chastened a bit, but being reassured that we are only instruments of God's love and mercy, not the savior.

On previous occasions I have shared a list of ten priestly virtues which might serve as an examination of conscience as we look back and look forward.

First, priests are men of prayer. This is essential.

Most of us have experienced some moments when prayer is dry, Christ seems far away and the influence of the evil one seeks to take advantage. It is like being lost in the desert. I have experienced this desert. Evaluating my prayer I discovered that it had become routine, scheduled, surface and selfish. Most mornings when I woke up I would first check for e-mails, then seek a report on the weather, Google to learn if there were any tragedies overnight, none of which I could do anything about. Then I would cleanup, drink something and enter the chapel for prayer. Where was God in all this; what was the priority in my life? No wonder I was anxious from morning to night.

My prayer now begins before I leave bed. I now pray: "Almighty God, thank you for this day and for having preserved me during the night. Help to me use this day for your greater glory. Forgive me my sins of pride, selfishness and self-centered ness. I pray for all those who have asked for my prayers, those who need prayers and those who do not have anyone to pray for them especially the poor souls in purgatory." The cold winter floors have become less shocking now. And Christ envelops all of my day from my first waking moment. I must remain alert that I do not drift back into the old routine tempted to warm myself by the fire and not be on fire for our Lord.

Second, priests are men of the Church.

This includes keeping perspective, learning from history and not putting undue burdens on ourselves, recognizing that it is Christ's Church, we are only his instruments. He alone is the Messiah.

Third, priests stand in humble awe of God's call of them.

When we pray "Lord I am not worthy," it is a true statement. At our ordinations we prostrate ourselves on the floor while the intercession of the saints is invoked. It is a gesture of recognition that only with the help of God can we serve well.

Fourth, priests are faithful and courageous.

At least according to one account, when Saint Maximilian Kolbe offered himself in place of a husband and father destined for death he was confronted by the hostile Nazi in charge with the question "who are you?" He could have tried to hide knowing the hostility toward the Church. He stated simply, "I am a Catholic priest."

Fifth, priests trust in God's will and God's way even when we question, doubt, do not understand or are frightened, God's will and way are always what is best, so we are able to stay the course however hard that might be.

Sixth, priests love, care about and sacrifice for the people even those we have a hard time liking. That includes being available when called upon even if inconvenient and sharing Christ's invitation to mercy and healing.

Seventh, priests are realistic about the fallen nature of man, our own frailties and mistakes, the lure of the devil, and the need for mercy for all including us. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who transgress against us. The measure you measure with will be measured back to you."

Eighth, priests expect the cross.

"Whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (Lk 14:27) We pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Jesus carried his cross, fell three times and got up and carried on up to Calvary with help but with obedience to the Father. One prayer suggested to offer before the relic of the Holy Cross is this: "Lord Jesus Christ, through your suffering the cross grant me strength to bear my Cross without fear or dread and give me the grace that I may follow you."

Ninth, priests yearn for salvation for us and others; Salvation of souls is our task and our goal.

Finally number ten: priests rest in the Blessed Mother. From the Cross: "There is your mother." She is our companion, our comfort, our advocate, our model for faithfulness who always leads us to her son.

That is a tough job description. How can we rise to its high standards?

I have always related to Simon Peter. The day I professed faith in the Church I was confirmed with the name Peter. During Holy Week we will walk with Jesus on his journey to the Cross. I especially relate to the struggle Peter had during the Passion when he felt torn between the hostility of the crowd and fidelity to Jesus. When Jesus under arrest passed by Simon we are told that Peter was standing in front of a fire to keep himself warm, himself. That is a great danger for us all, focus on ourselves.

St. Ambrose had an interesting insight about Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. In the words of the saint:

“Peter denied Jesus the first time and did not share a tear. . . he denied him a second time and did not share a tear; he denied him a third time, Christ's gaze fell upon him, and he cried bitterly. Gaze upon us, Lord Jesus, the saint prayed, so that we may learn to cry for our sins.”

May the gaze of Jesus touch our lives each day. His gaze is one of love and mercy. His gaze asks the question of Simon Peter, do you love me? more than these?, more than gadgets?, more than comforts?, more than the opinions of others?, more than the evil one?, more than ourselves?. At our ordinations we said yes I love Lord you that much. In a few minutes let us renew our promises made on that day. May we do so from the heart as his anointed ones.