

Chrism Mass Homily
March 25, 2009
St. Joseph Cathedral

Thank you for coming and celebrating this Holy Mass of Chrism with us. May I especially welcome and express appreciation to the deacons and religious who serve the Church and people so well in pastoral ministry and as witnesses of faith. Thank you also to the lay men and women present here tonight and those you represent. Essential to vibrant parish life and visible ambassadors of Christ in the world, thank you for your generosity in so many ways. A special welcome to the religious education and Catholic school students who join us. We pray for you that you will open your hearts to God's will for you whatever that may be. Perhaps God is calling you to the ordained or consecrated life.

I especially want to thank my brother priests many of whom have traveled some hours to be here. Lent is a time for repentance and so I ask your forgiveness for those times I have not been the spiritual father you deserve. There is a plaque in my office with an inscription I ask you to keep in mind: it reads: "Please be patient. . . God isn't finished with me yet." We journey together blessed to be priests in the local church of Sioux Falls. In difficult times and too often with unjust and uncharitable criticism you serve those placed in your care with love and sacrifice. Thank you.

Let us acknowledge with special thanks and appreciation those priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries of ordination this year: Celebrating 50 years of ordination are: Msgr. James Andraschko, Father Leonard Kayser, and Sacred Heart Father Bernard Rosinski, SCJ. Celebrating 25 years are Father Terry Anderson, Father David Roerich and Sacred Heart Father Joseph Dean, SJC. Thank you for touching the lives of so many in beautiful often unknown ways over those years. May God reward you. We pray and remember in a special way those priests who served in our diocese who have died since we gathered together last year. They include Msgr. Jerome Duraczynski, Father James Wolf, Father John Garvey, and Benedictine Father George Lyon, Franciscan Father Joseph Clancy, TOR and Jesuit Father Ed Larkin. May they rest in peace. We also pray for and remember in a special way those priests who are struggling this day spiritually or physically. May Our Lady watch over them.

Chrism Mass focuses in a unique way on the priesthood and the importance of our unity as bishop and clergy. Pope Benedict has declared a holy year for priests beginning in June in part he said to help us focus on "the indispensable struggle for moral perfection which must dwell in every priest's heart." We will take advantage of this gift from the Holy Father to show our support for you and to encourage vocations. In a few moments you my brother priests will be asked to renew your commitment to priestly service, to renew your dedication to Christ. There is no better model for living this dedication than the Blessed Mother. On this the solemnity of the Annunciation, let us seek together to live more fully the commitment of Our Lady: to be servants of the Lord, ever open to God's will.

Jesus in the Gospel reading proclaimed the words of the prophet Isaiah as having been fulfilled in him: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. Christ means the anointed one. One of the great gifts of the Church is the use of signs and symbols, things of the world to raise our minds and hearts to the higher things. One of these is olive oil. Anointing with oil to empower and to strengthen is an act of spiritual significance grounded in the Old Testament and rooted in the sacraments.

Tonight we will bless the oil of the sick and the oil of catechumens and consecrate the sacred oil of chrism which will then be distributed throughout the diocese for use in the sacraments. Canon law (c.847) declares that a parish priest is to obtain the holy oils from his own Bishop and keep them carefully in fitting custody. It is a sign of the communion of the priests with the Bishop and of the parishes with one another. This is an important symbolic moment particularly as we move forward with the hard work of pastoral planning and restoration of this Cathedral. From the Mother Church flow the holy oils to the parishes. From the Mother Church the priests disperse to serve and to shepherd.

The Sacred Oil of Chrism is different from the oil of the sick and the oil of the catechumens not only in the words of the prayer of blessing but in its make-up, in its odor and in the impact of its use. To the olive oil is added the sweet fragrance of balsam. As one source put it (Catholic Encyclopedia) *for olive oil, being of its own nature rich, diffusive, and abiding, is fitted to represent the copious outpouring of sacramental grace, while balsam, which gives forth most agreeable and fragrant odours, typifies the innate sweetness of Christian virtue. . . Thus the anointing with chrism aptly signifies that fullness of grace and spiritual strength by which we are enabled to resist the contagion of sin and produce the sweet flowers of virtue.*

In baptism the sacred chrism is placed on the crown of the head and the words spoken: “The God of power and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King.” As a result of this sacrament the baptized is changed forever.

In confirmation the sacred Chrism is placed on the forehead in the sign of the cross and the words spoken: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” As a result of this sacrament the confirmed is changed forever.

In the ordination of a priest, the sacred chrism is spread over the palms of the hands and the words spoken: “The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, guard and preserve you that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God.” As a result of this sacrament the ordained priest is changed forever.

In the consecration of a Bishop, the sacred chrism is spread on the head and the words spoken: “May God, who made you sharer of the High Priesthood of Christ, himself pour out upon you the oil of mystical anointing and make you fruitful with an abundance of spiritual blessings.” As a result of this sacrament the ordained bishop is changed forever.

Each of us then is changed, transformed more into the likeness of Christ and called to continue his mission and ministry. Each of us therefore is anointed for a purpose. As proclaimed in our readings, that purpose includes: to bring glad tidings to the poor, such as the vulnerable unborn created by God but whose very life is threatened by man, to proclaim liberty to captives such as those us who have yet to open their hearts to the freeing power of Christ’s mercy, to bring recovery of sight to the blind, such as those blinded by greed or selfishness so much a part of our current economic and financial crisis, to bring release to prisoners, such as those imprisoned by addictions to drugs, alcohol and the epidemic of our day which so seriously threatens families, addiction to pornography by way of the Internet.

We are also called to announce a year of favor from the Lord. This year we can and must do this through prayerful support and participation in the pastoral planning process we have entitled: To Hold and to Teach the Catholic Faith. Let us enter this challenging process as people of hope. Change is hard and requires sacrifice but change comes with or without our shaping it. Guided by the Holy Spirit together we can plan with hope on how to be good stewards of the

faith passed onto us from the Apostles and match our personnel, finances and facilities to our mission.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's coat of arms when he was Archbishop of Munich displayed two symbols, a shell and a bear. The shell was to remind us that we are all on pilgrimage, that there is no lasting place in this world. The bear comes from the legend about the patron saint of Munich, St. Corbinian. Corbinian was allegedly traveling to Rome when a bear attacked and killed his pack horse. Corbinian told his servant to rein in the bear and have the bear carry his luggage.

Cardinal Ratzinger, before being elected Pope Benedict XVI, commented: "Isn't Korbinian's bear compelled against his will to carry the Saint's pack a picture of my own life? The legend says that Korbinian set the bear free once he reached Rome. I have carried my pack to Rome and wander for some time now through the streets of the Eternal City. When release will come I cannot know. What I do know is that I am God's pack animal, and as such close to Him."

Indeed are we all, priests, deacons, religious, lay, all of us are on pilgrimage and all of us anointed to be bearers of God's will in our own ways as God calls us. Sometimes the journey seems long and the burden heavy. In those times Our Lord says to us, come to me and I will give you rest. If we remain close to Him, through His Church and His sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, we can journey on our pilgrim way and carry our tasks with joy and hope. Empowered and strengthened by the anointing of the sacraments, we can and will as one family in the local Church of Sioux Falls profess by word and deed: "that Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8) Give Praise to the Lord.