

Chrism Mass Homily  
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Thank you all for coming tonight. This special Mass reminds us of the importance of the communion of priests with their bishop. And so tonight we focus in a deeper way on the priesthood. It also includes the beautiful prayers of blessing over the holy oils to be used in the sacraments including Holy Orders when this May, God willing, we will ordain four to the priesthood and two transitional and six permanent deacons.

I especially want to recognize tonight those priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries of ordination this year. Father Holtzhauser and Father Tschakert 25 years. And Fathers Holtzman, Offerman and Petrosky 50 years. Also celebrating 50 years is Msgr. Doyle who continues his recovery from surgery. They, you, are an inspiration to us all, and men to whom we owe special appreciation.

I can tell you from my heart it is a humbling privilege for me to be here as your bishop, and to celebrate my first Chrism Mass. A year ago I never would have imagined standing here, and none of you would have imagined it either. Some are still shocked or at least puzzled I am sure. I am.

Chrism Masses have been especially moving for me from the moment of my conversion. It was at a Chrism Mass in Madison Wisconsin that I finally decided to surrender and go to seminary to see if God was really calling me to the priesthood. Little did I know where He was leading me. For 18 years the Renewal of Commitment to Priestly Service we will soon repeat has been uplifting and a new beginning for me. Each time I pray, maybe I can do better this next year.

Our readings today might be summarized in the words: it's not about me; it's not about us; it's about Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a message for priests. It is a message also for all believers. Our culture tends to focus on me and mine. Our faith calls us to focus on the other and the divine. Isaiah proclaims in our first reading what Jesus quotes in the Gospel reading, that it is the Lord who anoints, names priests as ministers of God. Then he details our assignment as ministers of God: to bring glad tidings, to heal, to proclaim, to release, to announce, to comfort. Each is an invitation to love; each is an invitation to share Christ's love. Therefore the priesthood is not simply a job or an occupation. Nor is the priesthood something we priests define. It's about Christ.

There are two series of questions we priests will be asked to answer tonight in renewal of our commitment to priestly service. The first is: *At your ordination you accepted the responsibilities of the priesthood out of love for the Lord Jesus and his Church. Are you resolved to unite yourselves more closely to Christ and to try to*

*become more like him by joyfully sacrificing your own pleasure and ambition to bring his peace and love to your brothers and sisters? It's not about me.*

The second is: *Are you resolved to be faithful ministers of the mysteries of God, to celebrate the Eucharist and the other liturgical services with sincere devotion? Are you resolved to imitate Jesus Christ, the head and shepherd of the Church, by teaching the Christian faith without thinking of your own profit, solely for the well-being of the people you were sent to serve? It's not about us.*

Joyfully sacrificing; without thinking of our own profit is our call and our mission. We are asked to do that for a purpose, to offer His peace and love, His mercy and forgiveness, to be instruments of Christ to our brothers and sisters. We are asked to do so, as the questions remind us, solely for the well being of the people we are sent to serve.

Because of our prominent and very public role as pastors, we must ever be on guard about it becoming more about me than about Christ. My standing here before you as bishop can be awesome in the sense of humbling or arrogant in the sense of tribute. Last week Pope Benedict XVI issued an Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritas*, a reflection on a synod of bishops at which the Holy Eucharist was the topic. He noted that priestly ordination is the indispensable condition for a valid Mass and that it is in fact Jesus Christ who is present to his Church at Holy Mass through the priest. Then he offers this advice for us to ponder:

*As a result, he writes, priests should be conscious of the fact that in their ministry they must never put themselves or their personal opinions in first place, but Jesus Christ. Any attempt to make themselves the center of liturgical action contradicts their very identity as priests. The priest is above all a servant of others, and he must continually work at being a sign pointing to Christ, a docile instrument in the Lord's hands. He continued, this is seen particularly in his humility in leading the liturgical assembly, in obedience to the rite, uniting himself to it in mind and heart, and avoiding anything that might give the impression of an inordinate emphasis on his own personality. I encourage the clergy always to see their Eucharistic ministry as a humble service offered to Christ and his Church.*

*Never put themselves or their personal opinion in first place, but Jesus Christ. Avoid anything that might give the impression of an inordinate emphasis on his own personality.* I must say that is tough for me to do as a bishop and priest when I see my picture displayed almost everywhere I go. Yet it is what we are called to do because of what we have been ordained to be. It does not mean we hide our personalities and special talents and gifts. We should use them for the glory of God. We just should not think or act in ways that suggest we know better than inspired Scripture or the Spirit guided Church, especially in celebrating the sacraments. It's not about me. It's not about us. It's about Christ. All of us therefore should follow the approved texts, the rubrics and rites as approved by the Church. They allow Christ to be present through us.

I know it is not easy being a priest these days. The hours are long, the driving hard, the demands many, the parish tensions wearing, the affirmations too few. I ask the laity to help us be good priests keeping proper perspective by being measured in your expectations and demands; charitable in your critiques, generous in your support of time, talent and treasure, and forgiving in your hearts. Each priest is unique as are we all. Each has strengths and human frailties. Each however is a man who has been anointed by the Lord to be a minister of God, as Isaiah so beautifully put it. Thank you to the priests of our diocese who are on the front lines for the faith, ever being challenged by nonbelievers, by misinformed believers, by hostile forces and the lures and arrows of the evil one.

The key is to keep our eyes and our hearts fixed on Christ crucified and risen. The bishop of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in the early 1800s told this story. A young man would stand outside the Cathedral and shout derogatory words at the worshipers, calling them fools and other names. The people tried to ignore him but it was difficult. One day the parish priest went out to confront the young man who objected to everything the priest said to him. Finally the priest said, *Let's get this over once and for all. I'm going to dare you to do something and I bet you can't do it. I can do anything you propose, you white robed wimp*, was the retort. *Fine*, said the priest, *all I ask is that you come into the sanctuary with me. I want you to stare at the figure of Christ and scream at the top of your lungs, Christ died on the cross for me and I don't care one bit.*

So the young man went into the sanctuary, stared at the crucifix and screamed, *Christ died on the cross for me and I don't care one bit. Now do it again*, said the priest. The young man did so but with a little less intensity. *You're almost done*, said the priest. *Do it one more time.* The young man raised his fist, stared at the figure of Christ but no words came out. He just could not look at the face of the crucified Christ and say that he didn't care.

The bishop concluded the story by saying: *I was that young man. That defiant young man was me. I thought I didn't need God, but found out that I did.*

My conversion was not so dramatic but the end result is the same, as I suspect it is for us all. Once it was too much about me. Now, by the grace of God, it's about Christ, though each day is a new conversion challenge to keep my priorities right. Christ died on the cross for me, and for you. And I do care.

As we prepare for Holy Week and walk with Christ to the cross, let us fix our gaze on the crucifix, ponder Christ Crucified and risen. When we do, we will know deep in our sinful and hopeful souls that it is, and must always be, about Christ. Give Praise to the Lord.