



Mass of Chrism
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
March 15, 2018
Prayed on Thursday during the Fourth Week of Lent
Cathedral of Saint Joseph

Thank you for praying 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 today and those you represent. You are essential to vibrant parish and diocesan life and are visible ambassadors of Christ in the world; thank you for your generosity in so many ways.

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." Surely He has much work yet to do.

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. Yet you serve those placed in your care with love and sacrifice. Thank you.

Every year we acknowledge with special thanks and appreciation those priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries of ordination this year. There is only one, Father Chester Murtha, a priest for 25 years. Thank you for touching the lives of so many in beautiful often unknown ways over those years. May God reward you. The fact is that every year each of us are privileged to serve as a priest is a significant anniversary.

We pray and remember in a special way those priests and deacons who served in our diocese who have died since we gathered together last year. They include: Father Al Krzyzopolski, Father Pius Mardian, Deacon John Baker and Deacon Ed Oliver. 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. In a few moments you, my brother priests, will be asked to renew your commitment to priestly service, to renew your dedication to Christ through His Church. There is no better model for living this dedication than the Blessed Mother. 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.” 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 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.

Today I 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 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. (c.847)” 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

“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 odors, 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.” (Catholic Encyclopedia)

It is good once in a while to be reminded of its significance because its use can become routine. In baptism the sacred chrism is placed on the crown of the head and the words spoken:

“(t)he 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 the rite 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: “(b)e sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” As a result of this rite 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: “(t)he 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 rite the ordained priest is changed forever.

In the consecration of a bishop, the sacred chrism is spread on the head and the words spoken: “(m)ay 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 rite 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 and the frail elderly whose very lives are threatened by man; to proclaim liberty to captives such as those who have yet to open their hearts to the freeing power of Christ's mercy and those caught up in the works of evil; to bring recovery of sight to the blind, such as those blinded by greed, envy or selfishness, so much a part of our current economic, financial and political world; 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.

I am sure I noted this at the time when our Cathedral was rededicated, that in the front entrance etched in marble is the episcopal coat of arms of Pope Benedict XV, pope when the Cathedral was first built and that of Pope Benedict XVI, pope at the time of the restoration. Pope Benedict XVI's includes two meaningful 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. For Pope Benedict XVI, it also reminded him of the legend according to which one day St. Augustine, pondering the mystery of the Trinity, saw a child at the seashore playing with a shell, trying to put the water of the ocean into a little hole. Then he heard the words: 'This hole can no more contain the waters of the ocean than your intellect can comprehend the mystery of God.'

The bear comes from the legend about the patron saint of Munich, St. Korbinian. The saint was allegedly traveling to Rome when a bear attacked and killed his pack horse. Korbinian told his servant to rein in the bear and have the bear carry his luggage.

Cardinal Ratzinger, before being elected Pope, 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."

I recall this so that we might pray for the Pope Emeritus who soon turns 91 and has recently commented: "I can only say that in the slow waning of my physical forces inwardly I am on a pilgrimage toward Home."

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 invites 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, as heavy as they might be, with joy and hope.

Empowered and strengthened by the anointings 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)