

“Created, Sanctified and Consecrated for the Sanctification of the World” Homily for Chrism Mass, 2018

Introduction

A few days ago the Church observed the Solemnity of St. Joseph, a feast day that is given the highest degree of liturgical observance, even though it always occurs within the season of Lent. Six days later the Church normally celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation, when Mary received the news from the Archangel Gabriel that she was to be the mother of God’s Son (although this year, as occasionally happens whenever it occurs during Holy Week, its observance will be postponed to the Monday after Easter Week).

Our Chrism Mass this year has the distinction of taking place between these two great Solemnities. This provides us an insightful perspective for understanding the familiar Gospel passage we just heard proclaimed for Mass this evening.

God’s Consistent Pattern in His Saving Action

St. Joseph received the unique call to be the foster father of our Lord and head of the Holy Family; it was upon receiving the announcement from the Archangel Gabriel that Mary conceived God’s Son in her womb, and became his mother. There is a certain emphasis given, then, right here in the midst of Lent, to the human nature of Jesus Christ. And we can pick up those messages from within this Gospel passage, too, if we look closely.

We heard in this passage: “Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up.” This, though, does not catch the sense of the actual word used here. It would be more accurate to translate it as, “where he had *been brought* up,” or “where he had been reared.” The word carries with it the sense of being sustained or nourished, especially nourished with food. The point is, then, that Christ freely submitted himself to the authority of Joseph and Mary as his earthly parents, even though, as God, he created them. And he would freely submit himself to other human authorities throughout his public ministry as well, and allow himself to suffer from all of the vicissitudes of a fickle people. And fickle they were.

If we read a little further on after this passage, we hear that the people are impressed by him, but still can’t figure him out: “... all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, ‘Isn’t this the son of Joseph?’” But then they quickly turn on him when he says things they don’t like, namely, that he came to proclaim good news to everyone, not just to their exclusive group (“When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away”).

The problem is that they did not look with the eyes of faith, they could not see beyond the appearance: they saw a human body, but there was something more; they supposed him to be the Son of Joseph, but he was really the Son of God. The mystery of the Incarnation was hidden from their eyes. This, though, is the pattern of God’s saving action: God takes created things, and sanctifies them for the sanctification of His people

Realized in Created Things

Today, we bless and consecrate oil for use in sacraments: to bring God’s healing, and to set apart His people for the sacred mission of being missionary disciples, witnesses of Christ to the world. And we do this within the context of the Mass: bread and wine become for us the

Eucharist, consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ for the life of the world. By the life-giving power of His Spirit, God sanctifies created things for the sanctification of His people. The chrism consecrated tonight is used to anoint the hands of priests: the priest's hands are consecrated for consecrating the Eucharist for sanctification of God's people.

Because of the Chrism Mass' connection with Holy Thursday, it is associated with Christ's institution of the Priesthood, the gift he leaves the Church for the continual renewal of his Sacrifice at Mass until he returns at the end of time; this is why it is customary for priests to renew their ordination promises to their bishop at this Mass, as will be done this evening. I would like to recognize the priests gathered here this evening from parishes from all over our Archdiocese. On behalf of all of us I wish to express a word of thanks for all you do, day after day, to provide pastoral care for God's people, with your hands and your hearts, with your minds and your souls. You may perhaps feel the same movements of the people revealed in this section of St. Luke's Gospel: winning praise at times, and misunderstood other times, perhaps rejected or mistreated, maybe even mocked. We see God's consistent, incarnational pattern repeated here: priests are human creatures whom God consecrates and uses for the greatest purposes in his plan of salvation. Through their hands and through their ministry the merits of Christ's Sacrifice, offered once in history, the grace of his forgiveness, reach his people all throughout history until the consummation of all history.

The chrism, though, is not consecrated only for use in the ordination of priests. All of the faithful are anointed with chrism in their Confirmation, and also in their baptism for those who are baptized as children, in anticipation of their Confirmation. Confirmation is the Pentecost Sacrament: it is the work of all of the people of God to proclaim Jesus Christ; everyone is responsible for the sanctification of the world, each in accordance with their state in life and God-given vocation. Priests sanctify God's people, so that God's people might be agents of sanctification for the world. This is what it means to be missionary disciples, the call to which Pope Francis is constantly urging us. We all have a part to play. As they say, we are all in this together. That is why we come together this evening, from all across our Archdiocese as one family of God in our local church. The marvelous diversity not only of cultures and nationalities, but all the more of personal gifts and vocations and ministries is present here in this church tonight.

Conclusion

I could not do better, then, than to conclude with the words Pope Francis spoke to his listeners at his first Chrism Mass homily as the Bishop of Rome:

Dear lay faithful, be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God's heart.

Dear priests, may God the Father renew in us the Spirit of holiness with whom we have been anointed. May he renew his Spirit in our hearts, that this anointing may spread to everyone, even to those "outskirts" where our faithful people most look for it and most appreciate it. May our people sense that we are the Lord's disciples; may they feel that their names are written upon our priestly vestments and that we seek no other identity; and may they receive through our words and deeds the oil of gladness which Jesus, the Anointed One, came to bring us.

Amen.