

Thoughts in the Time of COVID-19—#7, March 31, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters:

Today, at Notre Dame Cathedral, I will celebrate the Chrism Mass at which the holy oils (for the Sick, of Catechumens and the Sacred Chrism) that will be used in our celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, of Baptism and Confirmation, for the Ordination of Priests and Bishops, and the Consecration of churches and altars. It is an extraordinary celebration of the local Church, which we are constrained to celebrate very modestly this year because of the COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings. Only the priests at my residence will take part, with a cantor and lector present.

One of the dramatic moments that I cherish at the Chrism Mass is the renewal by the priests of the sacred promises they made on the day of their ordination. At the end of this renewal, the faithful are asked to pray for their priests and for me, their bishop. In these or similar words, the bishop dialogues with the priests and people.

Beloved sons, on the anniversary of that day
when Christ our Lord conferred his priesthood
on his apostles and on us,
are you resolved to renew,
in the presence of your Bishop and God's holy people, the promises you once made?

The priests, all together, respond: I am.

Are you resolved to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him,
denying yourselves and confirming those promises about sacred duties towards Christ's Church
which, prompted by love of him,
you willingly and joyfully pledged
on the day of your priestly ordination?

The priests, all together respond: I am.

Are you resolved to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God in the Holy Eucharist and the
other liturgical rites
and to discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching, following Christ the head and
shepherd, not seeking any gain,
but moved only by zeal for souls?

The priests, all together respond: I am.

Then, turned towards the people, the bishop continues:

As for you, dearest sons and daughters,
pray for your Priests,
that the Lord may pour out his gifts abundantly upon them, and keep them faithful as ministers
of Christ, the High Priest, so that they may lead you to him,
who is the source of salvation.

The people, all together respond: Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

And pray also for me,
that I may be faithful to the apostolic office entrusted to me in my lowliness
and that in your midst I may be made day by day a living and more perfect image of Christ,
the Priest, the Good Shepherd,
the Teacher and the servant of all.

The people, all together respond: Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.

May the Lord keep us all in his charity and lead all of us,
shepherds and flock,
to eternal life.

All, priests and people together, respond: Amen.

For good reasons, the bishop may anticipate the date of the Chrism Mass normally held in Holy Week (as we are doing for the Archdiocese of Ottawa this week). The bishop may also decide for the pastoral good of his people to transfer the date of the Chrism Mass to a more suitable occasion. Thus, I have decided to celebrate the Mass for the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall some 3-6 weeks after the restriction on gatherings due to the Corona Virus is lifted. We will celebrate it with joy at St. Finnan Cathedral in Alexandria at a more opportune time.

Please join in prayer with me and the faithful of our two dioceses today and look forward in hope to that glorious coming day when we will pray these mysteries with solemn festivity.

God bless you.

✠Terrence