

## The Chrism Mass

March 27, 2018    St. Augustine Cathedral    6:00 p.m.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Once again, I welcome one and all to St. Augustine Cathedral, our Mother Church, for this annual **Chrism Mass**.

I am particularly happy to welcome our Bishop Emeritus Murray who is here with us this evening, and also to welcome so many of our priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful from every part of our Diocese.

In the midst of this otherwise somber and solemn Holy Week, this Mass is one of our most festive and joyful gatherings of the entire Liturgical Year, and one that I look forward to with great anticipation every year.

I also want to acknowledge those who are unable to be here with us due to illness or other circumstances. I want to give honorable mention to 3 of our priests who cannot be with us due to distance: our two youngest priests, Father Jeffrey Hanley and Father Maximilian Nightingale, who are continuing their graduate studies in Rome, and Father Bruno Okoli, who is on an extended missionary assignment in our sister Diocese of Lodwar in Kenya, Africa. I assured each of them we would be holding them in our special prayers during this Mass, knowing that they are one with us in spirit.

I'd also like to acknowledge those among us who are completing their process of formation and are about to enter into the Sacramental Life of the Church in just a few days at the Easter Vigil. Would those members of the Elect, Catechumens or Candidates, who are here this evening please stand?.....We all rejoice with you and promise you our prayers in these final days, and look forward so much to you being one with us at the Table of the Lord! Congratulations!

Of course, as we all know, the primary focus of this beautiful **Chrism Mass** is to bless the Holy Oils: the Oil of Catechumens and Oil of the Sick; and to consecrate the Sacred Chrism, then to distribute them to the representatives from each parish, to be taken back to their parishes for their essential use in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and the dedication/consecration of new churches throughout the year. That is the

primary purpose and focus of this beautiful Mass. But there's so much more as well.

*Being anointed*....that's a powerful act, and one that's full of meaning! Most of us here been anointed through our Baptism, and for those of us who have received the Sacrament of Confirmation, we were also anointed. And for us ordained priests, we have been anointed yet again. When we are anointed, the Scriptures tell us, we are "set apart"--- "chosen"-----but only because we have been given a purpose, to share in the life and ministry of Jesus. We heard that message in all of our Scripture Readings this evening.

We heard Isaiah tell us that *"You yourselves shall be named priests of the Lord, ministers of our God shall you be called."* And we heard from the Book of Revelation in our Second Reading that *"Jesus Christ....has made us into a Kingdom, priests for His God and Father"*.

Through our Baptism, we are not only washed clean of Original Sin (and any other sin if we're baptized as an adult), but we are anointed to be set apart---and given a mission! In Baptism, the mission is to "live like Christ as Priest, Prophet and King", and as an active member of His Body.

For those who are confirmed, we are once again anointed with Sacred Chrism and are commissioned to be bold witnesses to the Faith by putting to use the powerful Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And, my dear Brothers, when we were ordained as Priests of Jesus Christ, our hands were anointed with Sacred Chrism so that we could have as part of our ministry to *"sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God."*

These Holy Oils that we bless and consecrate this evening are agents of God's grace to help transform us into God's Holy People, who are charged to share in furthering the Kingdom of God which Jesus has established and entrusted to His Church to continue to build.

This Annual **Chrism Mass** not only replenishes our supply of Holy Oils, but also serves to remind each of us----those who are "the anointed"----of our identity as baptized, confirmed, and for some of us, ordained People of God. But beyond reminding us of our identity, we are called to be re-newed in the ways we are fulfilling the responsibilities that flow from that identity.

In just a few days at the Easter Vigil and/or on Easter Sunday, all of us will be asked to renew our Baptismal Promises. That's the day when we will be reminded of the promises that we made many years, or even decades, ago, and our responsibilities that flow from that Baptism for us to reject sin, to believe in God, the Father—Son---and Holy Spirit, and to faithfully live our lives in God's ways.

For those of us ordained as Priests of Jesus, we will be asked to renew our Priestly Promises in just a few moments. But for us too, our fundamental vocational promises are those that we also made on the day of our Baptism.

But my brothers, before we renew our priestly promises, let me just say a couple things to you. I am privileged to know that we are brothers in the Priesthood of Jesus. And as your Bishop, I am also privileged to be your spiritual father. In that aspect of our relationship, I want you to know that I do love you as sons---each and every one of you. I care about you in every way, and I pray for each of you by name each and every day. I also want you to know that I rely on you, and I entrust you with responsibilities for the pastoral, sacramental and spiritual well-being of every person living within the territory of the Diocese of Kalamazoo. And finally I need you to be my primary collaborators as we work together to build up the Kingdom of God here in this Diocese of Kalamazoo.

Just a few days ago in Rome, while Pope Francis was meeting with a large group of Seminarians from more than 150 Pontifical Seminaries in Rome, he was asked to comment on the Spirituality of Diocesan Priests. Even though some of you are members of Religious Orders, all of us together in our Presbyterate are living as Diocesan Priests.

And so when he was asked about the spirituality of diocesan priests, Pope Francis coined a word to describe it; he called it in Italian "Diocesanite", and it comes across in English pretty much as "Diocese-ness". He said there were 3 components to this unique Diocesan spirituality. First for us to be good sons to our Bishop (and for the Bishop to be a good father to his sons); secondly for us to be a concerned brother to our brother priests, and finally for us to be a loving father to our people; if we can do that, the Holy Father said, we will have a strong spiritual life and a very effective pastoral ministry.

As your spiritual father, I ask that when you renew your Priestly Promises, that you will do so with an intent to be spiritually renewed in your commitment to

work together with me in helping to sanctify our people, and, in the process, that we can all help to spiritually renew our Diocese, so that each of us individually and all of us collectively, can live our Faith as vibrant members of the Body of Christ. I also ask you to let your love for being a priest shine through your words and actions. We all have different personalities; but I ask all of you to let your people know that being a priest brings you joy; that you are happy in your priesthood. I also urge you to speak about what a great Joy it is to be a priest to those young people in your charge. We can't expect them to consider a priestly vocation if they don't hear us talking about what a joy it is for us, and more importantly, that they see that we are joyful priests.

Thank you for being good and holy priests. Let us---priests and bishop---be committed to continue collaborating together to build up God's Kingdom in these 9 counties of southwest Michigan.

To you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, may I also say a few things to you in particular on this special evening. As many of you may know, I recently made Pastoral Visits to each of our five Deaneries to discuss our Diocesan Pastoral Plan and the new Priorities that I have identified as needing our particular attention in the next 3-5 years. You may recall those Priorities are: 1) to foster Priestly Vocations, 2) to accompany Families in becoming true "Domestic Churches", and 3) to activate Missionary Disciples. You may also recall that there is some urgency behind each of these Priorities.

1) We definitely need more priests, and that must begin with more young men responding to God's call to consider a priestly life for their Vocation. And so I urge you to pray for Vocations, but also I ask you to encourage young men, your sons and grandsons, to be open to hear God's call to possibly consider Priesthood as their life's Vocation. I urge each parish to pray consistently and fervently that at least one young man from their parish community might be encouraged to consider a priestly vocation.

2) We also need to have our Homes become welcoming environments where the practice of our Faith, and the encouragement to one another in live as People of Faith, is able to be experienced. That's the basic meaning of having our Families be Domestic Churches. May our homes be places where we can pray together, and foster the values and practices of our lives that are rooted in the

Gospel and the teachings of our Catholic Faith. I encourage each Pastor and every Parish to support and encourage our Families as Domestic Churches. And once again, I ask that every parish plan to go through a time of **spiritual renewal** that will help to bring all their parishioners, both active and inactive, into a deeper relationship with Christ.

And finally, 3) we need to activate Missionary Disciples. As Baptized and Confirmed Catholics, every one of us here needs to reclaim the Power that our Baptism and our Confirmation calls us to be, and what they call us to do! We have to be more than just “faithful believers”. We are called to be Disciples of Jesus Christ! We can’t do that by hiding our Faith under a bushel basket; we have to let the Light of our Faith shine---in us, and thru us---and then, to all the world. And when we are true Disciples of Jesus, we will become Witnesses of the Faith to everyone around us; not in some artificial way, but in the real ways that we practice our faith, and live our lives according to the Values we learned in our Domestic Churches of our Homes. And the more that we are effective and joyful Witnesses to our Faith, the more we will become the Missionary Disciples that we so desperately need---true Evangelizers.

All of us----me, all our priests, assisted by our deacons, all of us in this Cathedral, multiplied by the hundreds and thousands of our sisters and brothers in the Faith in our Parishes----WE are a powerful force for living the Faith, witnessing to the Faith, and being Joyful Missionary Disciples to attract others to consider coming to know Jesus.

What if each and every one of us would invite just one person we know who has fallen away from the practice of the Faith, or has not ever known the Faith, to come to Mass and to consider coming to know and love Jesus as an active member of the Church? What if each and every one of us lived our faith lives with the Love of Jesus that charity and works of justice would naturally be the result of our actions?

We are God’s Anointed---we have been set apart, but only so that we can help others to come to know Jesus, so that they too can be “anointed” to be God’s Holy People.

We can’t let this work of the Lord for someone else to do. This is our time! This is our graced moment. God is relying on US, here and now, in the midst of these circumstances, to take up this challenge.

This Season of Lent has been an opportunity for each of us to be renewed in our relationship with Jesus. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection, and 50 days after that, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the great Feast of Pentecost, we know that what we are being asked/invited/urged to do doesn't depend just on ourselves; we have the unconditional Love of God our Father, we have the Victory of Jesus our Risen Lord, and we have the grace and Gifts of the Holy Spirit to make up for anything within us that might be lacking. In addition, we have the Church, the Sacraments, and most especially the Holy Eucharist to be our nourishment and strength. We have the intercession of our Blessed Mother, the inspiration of the Saints, and the protection of the Angels, to guide us all along the way.

As we heard in this evening's beautiful Gospel Reading, after Jesus found the Isaiah Prophecy, the very one that we heard as our First Reading this evening, He proclaimed that *"the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me, to bring glad tidings to the poor...to be sent to proclaim liberty to captives...recovery of sight to the blind....to let the oppressed go free...to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord"*. He then sat down and said *"This Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing"*.

Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy. He brings about this "year/New Age acceptable to the Lord", and we are living in the midst of it. Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy; now WE, the Anointed, must put it into practice. That same Spirit of the Lord is upon us, we who are Baptized/Confirmed/Ordained to do the same: to bring glad tidings to the world, and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus' Love to all who will listen.

This is definitely our time. This is our moment. May we, the Anointed, faithfully and boldly fulfill our responsibilities; and may those still to be Anointed by these Holy Oils be filled with graces and blessings in each of their lives in the days, and years, to come.

God bless you, now and always!