

The Chrism Mass

April 16, 2019

6:00 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

I welcome one and all to St. Augustine Cathedral, the Mother Church for our Diocesan Family of Faith, for this beautiful celebration of the Chrism Mass.

As we gather in our Cathedral Church, we are mindful of our sisters and brothers in Paris who, along with all of us I'm sure, watched their beloved Cathedral go up in flames just 24 hours ago. Just as for the Archdiocese of Paris, every Diocese's Cathedral Church is special, and holds a place in our hearts that is very much like our own Family Home. The Cathedral of Notre Dame is near to the hearts, not just of Catholics in Paris, but Catholics---and all people of Faith-- everywhere, one of the most revered, ancient, recognizable, and most visited Churches in the world. During this Mass, we give thanks that this grand Cathedral was spared from complete destruction, and that as this Holy Week focuses our attention on the suffering and death of Christ, as well as His Resurrection and Victory over sin and death, so too may this magnificent Church one day be "resurrected" and returned to that most important of all purposes---to give glory to God and to give honor to Our Lady/Notre Dame.

I think it's safe to say that this annual Chrism Mass may very well be one of our favorite Liturgies of the entire year---a time when the whole Local Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo gathers in microcosm---lay faithful, religious, deacons, priests and bishops---to bless and consecrate the Holy Oils that are to be used in our Sacramental celebrations throughout the year, as well as to celebrate Jesus' Presence among us in His Holy Word and in the Sacred Eucharist.

First of all, I welcome all the members of our faithful lay people, representatives of each of the 59 parishes and 27 Collaboratives, and in a particular way, I welcome any here with us who are Catechumens or Candidates about to be received into full communion with the Church in just 4 days at the Easter Vigil. If you are a Catechumen or Candidate, would you please stand?

I also welcome all the members of our Clergy---all our Deacons, Priests and Bishops---the Presbyterate of our Diocese. I especially want to say how happy we are to have Bishop Murray with us this evening---Bishop Murray, thank you for your years of great leadership as the 3rd Bishop of our Diocese, and for all the ways you continue to inspire us with your presence. I am especially happy to have so many of our priests with us this evening concelebrating this Chrism Mass, you who are my primary collaborators in the ministry of sanctifying our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I want to thank each and every one of you. We are living in very challenging times, and these past 8 months in particular have been quite difficult. I know that we have all had to endure criticisms; perhaps you've even experienced some loss of credibility; maybe you yourselves have questioned those who are entrusted with positions of leadership. But through it all, you have remained faithful to your responsibilities of caring for those entrusted to your pastoral and sacramental care. And that is what we will, in a few moments, solemnly promise God, and all our People, that we renew our commitment to be good and faithful priests of Jesus Christ, despite whatever challenges we may face.

If you would permit me, I'd like to acknowledge some special needs of some of our priests. Please pray for all of our senior priests, and those who are infirm, and are unable to be

present this evening; in particular, please remember our brothers Michael Howell and David Otto who are dealing with some very serious health problems.

Please remember our brother John Peter Ambrose, a member of our Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, who is in the hospital in Chicago recovering from a 2nd surgery to repair a degenerative spinal problem he has developed. While the surgery in general went well, he has developed a severe nerve problem in his left arm that, right now, keeps him from being able to use that arm to any extent at all. I spoke with him briefly this afternoon; he said that the doctor hopes that with time and therapy, that situation will be resolved.

I am glad that our brothers Alphonse Savarimuthu and Don Klingler are both here this evening. They were both in two different, and very serious, automobile accidents on Sunday in that freak April snow storm that hit the northern part of our Diocese very hard. Thanks be to God that they both walked away with no injuries.

I know we continue to give our brother Bob Creagan our prayers and support since he laid his dear mother to rest just five days ago.

And of course, I know we continue to keep our brothers Jeff Hanley and Max Nightingale in our prayers as they complete their graduate studies in Rome and anxiously look forward to returning to our Diocese at the end of June. I had the great joy of spending time with both of them just last week in Rome, and they have both done amazingly well in their studies, and truly love the priesthood and the Church; we can all be rightfully proud of these, our two youngest priests.

And I also ask you to keep in your minds and hearts our brother Bruno Okoli who continues serving in the Diocese of Lodwar in Kenya, Africa due to some immigration issues; I spoke with him just this afternoon. Fr. Bruno is the Administrator of their Cathedral in the Diocese of Lodwar, which is also under the patronage of St. Augustine, so he is very busy getting ready for their Diocesan Chrism Mass tomorrow in Lodwar. He asked me to extend to all of you his very warm greetings. And of course, we are very glad to have Fr. Albert Kimboi of the Diocese of Lodwar with us, serving here in our Diocese as a sign of our sister-Diocese relationship, thanks to Bishop Dominic Kimengich, the Bishop of Lodwar.

Of course we all know that the primary focus of this beautiful Chrism Mass is on the Holy Oils which we will bless and consecrate later in this Mass. We heard these beautiful words by Isaiah the Prophet in this evening's First Reading: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me.*" And then, in this evening's Gospel, we heard that when Jesus was asked to speak in His hometown synagogue, He purposely sought out this same passage from Isaiah to make His own, as He quoted again: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me.*"

How many of you here this evening are Baptized? Each and every one of you/us can make those words of Isaiah, and Jesus, your own: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me*" since on the day of our Baptism, as we were anointed with the Oil of Catechumens and with Sacred Chrism, we died with Christ and rose with Him to new Life.

How many of you here this evening are Confirmed? Each and every one of you can do the same---those words apply to you because on the day you received the Sacrament of Confirmation, you were anointed with Sacred Chrism and told: "*Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit*" and were filled with His 7-fold Gifts.

And for all of us here this evening who are ordained Priests of Jesus Christ and Deacons of the Church---those words of Isaiah, and Jesus, should resound in our hearts---in our very beings! For those of us who are priests in particular, as we prostrated ourselves on the day of our Ordination, for many of you on this very floor, for others of us on the floor of our home Cathedrals, we willingly---joyfully---gave our lives to Jesus in service to His Church. The palms of our hands were then anointed with Sacred Chrism and given the mandate: "*May the 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 sacrifices to God.*"

Finally---one last question: how many of you/us here are weak, human beings? Since we are all susceptible to the limitations of age and/or illness, some of you already have, and many of us at some point will, receive the special Anointing of the Sick, so that through that blessed Oil, in the words of the anointing prayer, we may "*be helped by the grace of the Holy Spirit*"---and so that the Lord will "*save us and raise us up*".

But...there's much more to being "anointed" than bringing us God's grace, help, strength and healing. Just like Jesus, the Christ---the Anointed One---Who was anointed so that He could be "sent", so too do we share that same "mission". That's why Jesus found that quote from Isaiah, which in its complete text says: "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; he has anointed me; he has SENT me.*" We are not anointed for ourselves; we are anointed and "sent" on a mission. For what? Isaiah gives us 7 purposes; Jesus chose to highlight 4 of them: 1) to bring glad tidings to the poor; 2) to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; 3) to let the oppressed go free; and 4) to announce a year acceptable to the Lord."

That is the "mission" of the Church. When the Apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they were not just sent---they were compelled by the Spirit to go forth, filled with ardor and enthusiasm, fearless, courageous, joyful, ready to go to the ends of the earth to accomplish the mission given them by Jesus: "*Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and know that I am with you always, even until the end of the ages.*"

My brothers, when we renew our Priestly Promises in just a few minutes, please keep this "mission" in your mind and in your heart. We are not ordained to keep the status quo, nor to maintain what is, nor just to keep things the way they've always been. We are ordained to bring the Good News to those who need to hear it. That means much more than the 30-40% of our baptized Catholics who are coming to Mass on a somewhat regular basis; it means the 60 to 70% who are NOT coming to Mass. It doesn't mean just those registered in our parish; it means the more than 50% of the people living within our parish boundaries who are un-churched, some of whom have never, ever heard of Jesus and the Gospel, or know what Salvation means.

As Pope Francis said in a beautiful message to priests recently: "*Our anointing is meant for anointing God's holy and faithful people: for baptizing and confirming them, healing and sanctifying them, blessing, comforting and evangelizing them.*" (Chrism Mass 2014)

That's what we need to do as we renew our promises---to be willing to set out, with renewed hearts and minds, to pursue the "mission" of Jesus, and the Church, in 2019. I thank you for your priesthood, I value your collaboration with me; as I pray for you each and every day, I ask for your daily prayers for me as well. Together, and with God's grace, we can accomplish what Jesus wants us to do.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, I have that same message for each of you. You were not baptized and confirmed just to get yourselves to Heaven. That IS our primary objective, as well as to help those closest to you---your spouses and your family members. But equally important, your Baptism and Confirmation makes you “missionaries” in the sense that, as Jesus taught us, we can not keep the Light of our Faith hidden, or stick it under a bushel basket; it must shine to all in the world. How are we---how are you---sharing the Light of your Faith with others? What are you doing to spread the Good News of Jesus? Since you are anointed---then you are *Christos*, just as Jesus is THE Christ. You are anointed for more than yourselves; you are anointed and “sent” to do what Jesus did---to do what the Church’s mission is. Our parish activities are very important; but we also need to be active beyond the walls of our churches, the property line of our parishes, and beyond the confines of our homes; we are in “mission territory”, and there are many people---almost half of our neighbors and fellow citizens in southwest Michigan---who don’t know Jesus! What are we going to do about it?

Furthermore, we are living in a society that is steadily moving away from God; we are living in a culture that is increasingly secularized. We are living in a world where the “moral compass” has been lost, and where for some people, something as basic as the principles of the natural law , that used to be common ground for most people, are ignored. How can we deal with the ongoing social ills all around us if we’re not willing to apply the teachings of the Gospel to fight against racism, hatred, violence, and injustice. If WE don’t let the “salt” of our faith add zest to the world around us, or “let the Light of Christ shine”, what will happen? If we don’t do something, who will?

Our Diocesan Priorities are critically important needs for our Diocese: 1) Fostering priestly vocations is something we all need to do. I’m convinced that God is calling young men to respond to His Call to be priests? What are YOU doing to help them respond? I’m sure that God is calling young women to enter into Religious Life. What are YOU doing to help them to respond? I’m sure that God is calling young couples to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage---not just to live together, or just to hang out. What are YOU doing to encourage them? We also need to 2) Accompany Families toward Holiness---to help families, in the midst of their struggles, to know that God is with them. And we need to 3) Activate Missionary Disciples---to help ALL of us---and I include here everyone: all our lay faithful, our deacons, priests, and myself---to allow the Fire of the Holy Spirit to re-ignite us and help us to recapture the joy and the enthusiasm of our vocations when we were just Confirmed or when we were newly-ordained. Spreading the Gospel and letting the Light of Jesus shine is a responsibility that each and every one of us shares.

It’s not an optional part of “being anointed”, whether we are anointed thru Baptism, Confirmation or Holy Orders---an essential part of being anointed is *to be sent*: to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to announce a year of favor for the Lord.

May we do our very best to allow the Holy Spirit to set us on fire with Love for Jesus, and send us forth as joyful, missionary disciples to advance the Kingdom of God, and to further the mission of the Church. For as St. John said so beautifully in our Second Reading from the Book of Revelation, summing up what this Holy Week leading to Easter Joy is all about: *“To Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His Blood, Who has made us into a Kingdom, priests for His God and Father, to Him be glory and power, forever and ever. Amen.*