

Chrism Mass

Homily

March 26, 2015

Recently, a group of 25 or so Hispanics came to see me. They were representatives of Our Lady of the Americas and Sacred Heart Parishes in Des Moines.

They were very excited. Over a period of a number of months they had been engaged in bible study. They were supported and assisted by their priests in this venture.

The experience led to transformation. Through the Scriptures God touched their hearts. They could tangibly feel God's love for them. His consoling spirit became a companion in their lives. Moreover, a sense of mutual support, unity and love for one another and the broader community took hold.

They told me the time together had generated an urgency within them as a group to go out to their fellow Hispanics who had recently settled in Des Moines. They knew exactly where they lived. They wanted to knock on their doors to share the joy of the gospel among so many who lived in fear, in lonely darkness, at a distance from others. Their motivation stemmed from an identity which was revealed to them through the Spirit. This Spirit through initiation in the life of God conveyed what had been communicated to Isaiah and Jesus: that all were anointed – they indeed were beloved by God. They were daughters and sons in whom the Father was well pleased.

These friends can't contain themselves. They feel impelled to make known what Pope Francis cites as the first proclamation to believers: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #104)

The liturgy of the Chrism Mass especially when participated in with open hearts effects our ongoing transformation in Christ and potentially adds that same dimension of excitement and movement of my Hispanic friends as we take ownership of our identity in the Lord. The Oil of Catechumens represents God's presence defending us against the incursion and habitation of evil in us. The oil of the sick tells us that God is with us in our suffering whether it be physical, mental or emotional. He is with us in our pain instigating the healing which will ultimately be experienced in fullness in eternity.

But it is the Sacred Chrism which imparts the identity and transformation into Christ – giving birth and sustaining us as God's beloved children.

And so to those of you who are to be baptized be prepared for a transformation of yourselves which is destined to grow through the bread for the journey, the Eucharist and the ongoing imbibing of the sacred Word. This growth pushes down even more deeply the roots of our relationship with God in order to survive the inevitable storms, winds and driving blizzards of our lives.

To those to be confirmed, allow wholeheartedly the Chrism to be traced on your head in the form of a cross, the sign of ultimate love so that it becomes representative of who you are. Similar to the permanency of a tattoo, let it be a sign of you as the beneficiary of the enduring gifts of the Holy Spirit – courage, understanding, knowledge, wonder and awe, wisdom, piety and counsel.

The anointing is not simply a ritual action with the no consequences. Once the spirit and love of God take possession, they will propel us to action similar to the experience of our Hispanic pilgrims. We will be driven to minister as an integral part of the body of Christ, being its extension in space and time – perpetuating the incarnation.

How privileged we are as God's chosen ones:

- To bring glad tidings to the poor enabling them to appreciate their value, their importance, their dignity which God attributes to them;

- To let those who are bound by the captivity of personal or social sin, know that God is there to liberate them;
- To open the eyes to truth of those who experience the myopia of worldliness and moral laxity;
- To let those oppressed by social sin and immobilizing structures of our personal accompaniment with them along with our tireless pursuit of social justice.

In this process, we proclaim a favorable year, one in which the Lord blesses his beloved.

As we reach out in our anointed identity, Pope Francis encourages us as follows: “We may not always be able to reflect the beauty of the Gospel, but there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #195)

The Church in its liturgical cycle chooses to highlight particular ministries, from time to time, which contribute to the Body of Christ. It does so not in a spirit of exclusivity or superiority but in one of intercessory support. Tonight, the Chrism Mass insofar as Chrism is intimately involved in ordination has an orientation to the priesthood.

I feel enormously privileged and blessed to share ministry with the members of the presbyterate of Des Moines. We strive to grow in the unity of the Spirit. Exhorted by Pope Francis we lead with love, patience, compassion and understanding in opening doors to truth.

Expressive of the value which the lay community attributes to you, my brother priests, is their incessant call to me to place highest priority on vocational recruitment. Your spousal role in the giving of yourselves to our communities is inseparable to their faith and their relationship to God.

The consecration of Chrism will be utilized, God willing, in the ordination of two priests for the diocese this year. But its application is ongoing. May our gathering tonight allow the Chrism

which consecrated your hands for the ministry of the Lord, to moisten again signaling renewed fervor and dedication to the privileged ministry entrusted to each of you.

In this era of the New Evangelization Pope Francis challenges our ministry to take on an ever reformed shape. It is not enough to be absorbed totally by the maintenance of a parish. We are called to find the lost, to gather the sheep who have wandered back into the fold.

Father Robert Barron, Rector of Mundelein Seminary, and a leader in the era of the new evangelization, suggests a three-fold strategy in this contemporary mission of our priesthood, namely – prayer, inviting by attraction and growing in the radical living of the Gospel.

In the history of the Church community, beginning with the example of the Lord Jesus, nothing of significance happens without prayer. Those who are apart from the church will benefit from our intercessory prayer and it will increase the love for them in the heart of each of us priests.

Secondly, the priest is advised to attract rather than wag the finger. In this outreach, he is encouraged to highlight the attractive qualities of the Catholic faith and set aside, at least for the moment, moral correction. Father Barron notes “. . . there is just something winsome and unthreatening about the beautiful and Catholicism has so much beauty to offer. To the post-modern skeptic, the evangelist might say “Just look at the Sistine Chapel ceiling or just listen to one of Mozart’s Masses or just spend some time with the Missionaries of Calcutta. The wage is that the beautiful will lead, gently and ineluctably, toward the true and the good.”

The third strategy that Father Barron cites is the call to live the Gospel radically. “In times of crisis in the history of the Church, great saints have arisen, who called the people back to the evangelical basics. Think in this context of St. Benedict, St. Theresa of Avila, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Jeanne Jugan or St. Ignatius of Loyola. All of these figures reemphasized poverty, radical service, detachment and trust in God’s providence. Is not Pope Francis in his personal witness of simplicity of similar ilk? We have been passing through the darkest period in the history of the Church in America and, therefore, the priests of this time cannot compromise or

settle for spiritual mediocrity. We have to summon people precisely through an enthusiastic embrace of the Gospel demands.” (The Bridge/Fall 2014-Winter 2015)

At this moment, our priests will renew their sacerdotal promises advisedly with renewed conviction and purpose. Indicative of the mutually fulfilling relationship of people and priest, the congregation gathered will, in turn, express their promise of continued prayerful support of them.