

**Chrism Mass**  
**Friday, March 22**  
**7:00 pm**  
**Homily**

Jesus read the scroll with the passage of Isaiah 61 to his fellow Nazareans:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me.”

Jesus is the chosen one of God entrusted with the mission of the Father. His role is authentic and leads to fulfillment of the Father’s will. In time, he will be fully revealed as the Son of God.

This same Jesus is present in the world today through His Body, the Church. The Body is you and I in all our rich diversity. At the center of this identity is the relationship we share with Christ – individually and in unity. His life,

his being has been introduced into our systems and we have become a part of him. With St. Paul we rejoice: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.”

Highlighted by the incarnation, God’s revelation occurs through human means. No less is this true in our day. The sacramental life utilizes signs that effect the reality they signal. Thus, the Chrism we consecrate and the oil we bless confer the penetrating presence of Christ in our lives.

The Oil of Catechumens which is blessed this evening will be applied to those receiving Baptism. Associated with Exorcism or the dismissal and rejection of evil spirits, it helps to prepare the soon to be initiated person by sending forth the evil compromising the presence of Christ in one’s life.

The Oil of the Sick is blessed to extend the healing presence of Christ in time. Jesus of the Gospels reached out in compassion to the blind, to the lame, to the possessed

with evil spirits, to the bleeding woman, to ever so many. Utilizing this Oil, God continuously communicates in the sacrament of the sick his will that we be whole, that we be integral. Whether our suffering is emotional, psychological or physical the loving Father cares deeply and identifies with our pain as the cross forever testifies. God assures us the transitional healing will be permanently realized in the eternal kingdom.

The full identification with Christ and the highlight of this evening is the consecration of Chrism. It is the Chrism which will be used as a central sign in conferring Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination of bishops and priests.

In Baptism, the Chrism implanted on our head signifies and effects the presence of the life of the Trinitarian God in our very being. Joining Christ we now say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Power is spoken of often in our culture. Think of the power instilled in this Chrism which endows the very character of Christ in the person so anointed. They

are initiated into God's life, proclaimed a beloved daughter and son and entrusted with the responsibility for the life of the Church.

While Baptism highlights the receptive nature of initiation into God's love, the Sacrament of Confirmation emphasizes the responsive, actuating nature of the identity. As the Chrism is applied, the Bishop says, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit." What a joy it is for me to anoint those who approach the sacrament and communicate with their eyes and their demeanor positive commitment. They accept the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to actively take on their role in the transformation of the world as a full member of the body of Christ.

This June 7<sup>th</sup>, God willing, three young men – Ross Parker, Fabian Moncada and Adam Westphal will be ordained priests. Their hands will be liberally anointed with the Chrism consecrated this evening. These hands will become the hands of Christ as they administer the sacraments and

bring human compassion and comfort to those whom they are privileged to serve.

Pope Benedict XVI, when in Milan last summer, stated that this privilege, in turn, means the priest must ever more depend on Christ.

“If Christ, to build his Church, puts himself into the hands of the priest, the priest must entrust himself to Christ without reserve; love for the Lord Jesus is the soul of the priestly ministry and the reason for it, just as it was the premise for him to assign to Peter the mission to feed his flock: ‘Simon . . . do you love me more than these? . . . Feed my lambs (Jn. 21:15)’” (L’Osservatore Romano – Wednesday, June 6, 2012)

As we grow excited about the anticipated events this coming June, this evening we also recognize those who currently minister to us in the Diocese of Des Moines.

When I conclude this homily, our priests will stand together

and renew their priestly commitment. May that Chrism applied to their hands some two, five, twenty-five, or sixty years ago moisten once again – reminding them that their hands are those of Christ.

Pope Benedict, at the same gathering in Milan, zeroed in on this reality: “The Second Vatican Council recalled that Christ ‘remains always the principle and source of the unity of their lives. Therefore priests will be the unity of their lives by joining themselves with Christ in the recognition of the Father’s will and in the gift of themselves to the flock entrusted to them. In this way, by adopting the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity” (Presbyterorum Ordinis, N. 14). (idem).

From my own experience, I know the priests of our diocese strive to live what they promised to do. While in no way do I intend to justify the grave evil of clerical sexual abuse

either as it has been perpetrated or dealt with, the question might be asked in the face of this evil why haven't more of our people left our churches? I would respond it is because of the 95% plus of our priests whom the faithful have come to know, love and cherish as the priests have ministered to them as best they can.

In my name and in the name of those you serve, I thank you my brother priests for your ministry, fidelity and service. We thank also the Christ who has inspired and enabled you to fulfill the call which has captured your lives.

Father Godfrey Diekmann, a monk of St. John's in Collegeville, Minnesota, was in his day a renowned expert in the liturgical renewal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with many others, I revered his leadership in enlightening the Church of our time regarding the power and impact of the liturgy. His strong German voice would thunder – do not inhibit the liturgy – let it speak out with its inherent meaning.

That is why tonight I have asked that all of the oils of the catechumens and of the sick but especially the sacred chrism be brought before us, at the expense of minor inconvenience, so that we can see that therein dwells the Christ – and the extent to which it will be used. This Chrism, once consecrated will contain Christ, which will be used to anoint all of those receiving Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders this year. He is the source of our unity. This one Christ builds the One Body, the source of life and love. As we look upon the Chrism, may we ponder its significance.

Pope Francis has not only taken the Catholic Church but I also dare say the world by storm. His humility, his openness, his love for all of Christ's favorites - namely the vulnerable and the poor, his reverence for creation are all appealing and have engendered the open response of a humanity that yearns for the truth.



In his installation homily, in speaking of Joseph, the Pope identified Joseph's particular role which is applicable to all of us – of being a custos, of being a protector. The Holy Father specifically challenged us to be the protector of Christ within each of us.

The oil and chrism we pray over tonight clearly shows us the easy accessibility of Christ. How generous he is. How much the Lord wants to be one with us.

But, from experience, we know this presence is not guaranteed. May we take to heart the words of the Holy Father and do what needs to be done to protect this Christ, the God who dwells within, the God who brings happiness and eternal life in abundance as the oils blessed and consecrated so clearly testify. May they never grow dry. May they continuously activate what they signify.