

Homily
Chrism Mass
March 18, 2016

In the early days of shepherding the universal church, Pope Francis said: “There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, and once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, because it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. . . . Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls and reveals his love, a love that precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives.” (June, 2013)

As the Church of Des Moines, we gather tonight as people of faith who seek to bring this powerful light to bear on the totality of our lives – but especially in those places where we need God most.

God’s presence will last forever only through you and me – we as persons who have an everlasting destiny. But in the meanwhile, God gives us believers signs that help us on the Faith Journey to absorb and be in touch with this God – who provides indispensable light to guide us as we move along.

We are together tonight to expand the light that reveals the path we should go. We pray the Holy Spirit consecrates oils that will be instruments to create both children of God and the community of disciples. We receive the very gift of Jesus into our hearts giving birth to the unity we share in the Church of Des Moines. We are a kingly people, a priestly people, God’s holy people.

The Chrism, a combination of olive oil and aromatic balsam, stands out in its role as initiating people into god’s life and his kingdom. As Chrism is applied to each baptized person, the Father’s voice, heard so distinctly as John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River reverberates through the ages and is heard at each baptism, “This is my beloved daughter.” “This is my beloved son.”

The cross is traced with Chrism on the forehead of the person who is confirmed. The young person is at the stage of life now being able to accept identity as God's beloved child. The cross can be envisioned as a big red tattoo announcing the confirmand's identity, one that is ingrained forever. Aware of the struggle to live up to this identity, the Holy Spirit comes in confirmation with his seven gifts to enable faithfulness.

The same Chrism will be used in the ordination of priests. It is applied to the hands of the one being ordained symbolizing that it is these hands which will hold the bread transformed into the body of Christ, the hand that will anoint the sick and that which will be raised in forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

The Chrism will be applied liberally in Churches and on altars to be consecrated for God's service. We thereby gain a heightened sense of God's specific interaction with us. They are places and objects that are sacred. They are spaces that extend the incredible reality of the incarnation to our time, God with us.

Another oil to be blessed tonight is that of the sick. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tends to those who are sick, who carry a disability that is restrictive. Christ touches and cures so many of them demonstrating that God is with us in moments of suffering, extending healing and compassion. The oil blessed to become the Oil of the Sick is meant to make present this healing ministry and the reality of the companionship of Jesus with us in the difficult experiences that come our way.

The oil of catechumens which is blessed this evening is that which is used in the Sacrament of Baptism – signaling the strength that all of us need to sustain God's life and presence so generously showered on us but challenging to maintain.

Sufficient reflection enables each of us to attest that indeed we have been beneficiaries of God's goodness. In truth, we are sinners – wandering frequently into the darkness that sin creates. God in his mercy never abandons us and through the wonderful symbols such as the oils present to us

tonight invites us into his very life and provides for that which is necessary to sustain that life. God is mercy. It is who he always reaches out to us with a welcoming and compassionate heart.

Recently, a group of thirty or so Hispanics came to see me. They were in the midst of a serious bible study. They told me that in the course of this study, Jesus with his love, mercy, light and peace came to them individually and as a group. They felt a terrific push originating in love and light to tell others about God. They had internalized the relationship with Jesus to such a meaningful degree that they had no option but to spread it. They had come to request my permission to go door by door, “puerta a puerta,” to share this Gospel of Joy.

What occurred to me as I listened to them is that this is exactly what happened to the first disciples and members of the Church. Their immediate experience of Jesus was so compelling that even in potential danger to themselves, they could not hold it in. Isn't this true of all that excites us? We need to shout out such good news.

I joined the evangelizers in their initial “puerta a puerta” operation. The very first person we encountered responded to the following introduction. “We are Catholics, we have come to visit you about faith.” - with the question, “Catholicos?” Si, Catholicos! He rushed down the steps of his elevated trailer home to encounter us.

“Catholicos?” he repeated when he arrived. I have been waiting for you. I have been visited by the Seventh Day Adventists three times, the Mormons twice and Evangelicos four times. Finalmente Catholicos. Muchas gracias. Bienvenidos!”

We visited about 15 homes that evening. Significant follow-up activity was required. The missionary disciples recognized very clearly they were anointed by the Christ to respond in the ministry of Jesus in a very concrete way to those whom they had reached out to. They realized that in the name of the Son of God, “They were sent to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor of the Lord.”

These inspired people, the “puerta a puerta” disciples, have been active in reaching out and enabling those that they announced the good news to – by not only attending to their spiritual needs, but their physical and personal as well.

What can be so easily conceived is Pope Francis’ image of the Church as a field hospital. These messengers of love, who themselves had been deeply touched by Jesus’ mercy, now became his agents as God’s mercy becomes real to ever so many through their outreach.

We rejoice tonight as the Church of Des Moines. These oils, consecrated in appropriate ceremony, are the symbols through which the Church experiences ongoing re-creation. With them, the Church is consistently reinvented. All of us the ordained, the religiously professed indeed all God’s children continue to be guided by the light of faith as we continually grow God’s priestly people, His kingly people, God’s holy people.

Through Pope Francis we have been enlightened to realize that we live out this identity as God’s merciful people.