

Homily
Chrism Mass
April 12, 2019

Bishop Richard Pates

The extent of God's goodness knows no bounds. He reveals his love, his presence to us in symbols and signs that effect what they symbolize. Tonight we come to bless and consecrate those elements which will be used in the coming year to introduce us to the ever expanding embrace of God's care.

The Oil of the Sick demonstrates God's compassion for us. It is His earnest will as the prayer of blessing states: "so that by your holy blessing everyone anointed with this oil as a safeguard for body, soul and spirit may be freed from all pain, all infirmity and all sickness."

These words represent God's deepest desires for us to the extent possible in the present life but certainly to be fulfilled in the heavenly kingdom when we come to the fullness of our days and every pain will be gone and we will be forever healed.

The Oil of Catechumens applied before the waters of baptism is meant to fend off the power of evil and grant courage to those who are being called to the fidelity of their baptismal identity.

Highlighting the gathering this evening is the consecration of the Chrism, a precious blend of olive oil and balsam. Enjoying a sweet fragrance, it roots us deeply in God's very life and thus empowers us to be an agent of God's presence in the world. With others so initiated, we become Christ's body engendering light and hope.

The Chrism is used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. In the baptismal liturgy, immediately after the pouring of the water, the minister prays:

"God the Father now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed

Priest – we are called to offer sacrifice by joining with the ordained priest in making present again and again the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Christ.

As Christ was anointed prophet – we are joined with the people of God to proclaim God’s will allowing the mind and heart of the divine to be revealed in our time . . . unveiling the timeless truth “God’s ways are not our ways . . .”

As Christ was anointed King –we take on our rightful dignity and responsibility to guide God’s church in its mission

The anointing prayer of baptism concludes – “so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.”

The second sacrament in which chrism is imparted is at Confirmation. Most frequently celebrated as teenagers in our diocese, the sacrament instills the power of the Holy Spirit and completes Baptism. It also invites those confirmed to accept their identity as God’s child, as God’s beloved. The bishop prays over them as he signs the forehead of each with a cross using chrism and saying “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit”

The confirmed are enabled to fulfill this identity by the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit poured out abundantly on them: the gifts of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of wonder and awe in God’s presence.

As the ordinary minister of this sacrament it is a great joy and privilege for me to be with the confirmed and to witness their openness and receptivity in this singular moment of their lives.

Since confirmation enables the confirmed to be a witness of Christ to others, I encourage the confirmandi to think of the cross of chrism traced on their forehead as a big red tattoo. It is thereby intended to boldly proclaim to others their identity as children of God and to remind themselves of whom they are as they encounter themselves in the mirror every morning.

The sacred chrism also plays a significant role in the conferral of Holy Orders of both priests and bishops.

In the rite of priestly ordination the palms of the ordained are anointed with chrism. These become the hands that hold the bread and wine that are transformed into the very body and blood of Jesus. They also apply the water on the baptized as the baptized becomes the Father's beloved son or daughter. When the baptismal identity is compromised the priest's hand is raised in reconciliation conferring forgiveness. And God's compassion and healing are imparted as the oil of the sick is applied at a time of suffering.

We look forward to utilizing the Chrism, consecrated this evening, for the ordination of two new priests, James Downey and Mark McGeary, on June 21st in this very place. As newly ordained priests, they will be commissioned to go forth. Their hands will become those of Christ in bringing the wonder of God's grace to people's lives.

Finally, the Sacred Chrism is poured on the head of a newly ordained bishop . . . done so as the ordaining prelate prays: "May God who has made you a sharer of the high priesthood of Christ himself pour out upon you the oil of mystical anointing and make you fruitful with an abundance of spiritual blessings."

I remember the moment when Archbishop Flynn poured the chrism over my head. He poured liberally. It seeped down my face and neck and far down my back. The remembrance of this physical application and the feeling it instilled call to mind again and again my identity as the servant of Christ.

There is a good chance that the sacred chrism consecrated this evening might be used in anointing the next shepherd of our diocesan community. In case you are wondering, the Apostolic Nuncio, the Archbishop who coordinates the appointment of bishops in the United States, assured me: "It's coming. It's coming." By that, I presume he is speaking about our new bishop. He further cautions, "Patience, bishop. You must have patience."

What we are doing tonight is so very central to whom we are as Christians. The oil of the sick, the oil of the catechumens but especially so the sacred chrism strike at the very heart of who we are as God's beloved sons and daughters. We are his disciples and chosen to continue his priestly service and leadership.

In particular, the sacraments enable us to carry on Christ's mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

More than ever our world needs those anointed to expand the ministry of Jesus. May the privilege of sharing in this moment fortify our faith, engender hope and inspire charity.

This evening, the gathering of my brother priests and me is an expression of the unity of the ordained priesthood which we are privileged to exercise in the church of Des Moines.

It has been a great joy and a source of pride for me to experience our common priesthood during the past eleven years as bishop. Our Des Moines' priests are dedicated and generous, always seeking to convey through their ministry the love and compassion of Jesus. They model well the example of the anointed one. "I have come to serve and not to be served."

In the name of all Catholics and all others, I thank our priests for their wholehearted embrace of the priesthood of Christ with its attendant joys and challenges. I commend them especially for the dignity they have manifested as together we have endured, but they obviously so, the crisis of the sexual abuse of children by a few of their brothers.

Tonight, I invite you, my brothers, to renew sacerdotal promises. And may God continue to bless you in fulfilling the promise of the gift of yourselves.