

CHRISM MASS HOMILY

(Isaiah 61:1-9; Revelations 1:5-8; Luke 4:16-21)

There are two ways to get up in the morning. One way is to wake up, look at your watch, and say prayerfully, “Good morning God.” The other way is to get up, look at your watch, and say, “Good God, its morning!”

You are the oil of gladness - bearers of Good News to all people!

Less than six months ago, before the altar in this cathedral, I was ordained coadjutor archbishop of this diocese. As part of the ceremony, two helpers wrapped me in towels, and the now Archbishop Emeritus Peter Sutton, poured the oil of chrism on my head and rubbed it in tenderly, as a father would a son. That gesture, that scent, that oil, left me feeling blessed, truly ordained. And now, I get up oily in the morning!

The Sacramentary has significant words about this chrism mass ceremony. This celebration is the fullness of expression of the bishop’s priesthood, and signifies the close unity of the ordained priests with him.

The Christian liturgy has assimilated this Old Testament usage of anointing kings, priests and prophets with consecratory oil because the title of Christ, whom they prefigured, means “the anointed of the Lord.”

Chrism is a sign: by baptism, all of us, as Christians, are plunged into the Paschal Mystery of Christ; our suffering takes on new meaning; we die with him; we are buried with him, and we rise with him to a new life within the reign of God. We are all sharers in his royal and prophetic priesthood.

In the words of the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate – in our poverty and wounded humanity, we are all of us, through baptism into Jesus, priests, prophets, kings and queens, even close to gods, with the greatest dignity possible. We are all “anointed in the Lord and called to bring Good News to the poor – more, to BE Good News to the poor!

The poor figure more prominently in Jesus’ teachings in Luke than in any other Gospel. Jesus released persons from various forms of bondage and oppression: economic (the poor), physical (the lame and crippled), political

(the condemned), and the demonic. Forgiveness of sin can also be seen as a form of release from bondage to iniquity.

This gospel scene is more important than its brevity might suggest. Its position at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, its emphasis on the Spirit and Scripture, and its depiction of themes that will dominate the rest of the gospel (liberation, release, joy, freedom) all make it a model for the whole gospel.

Readers of this gospel now understand that all Jesus does in the coming chapters occurs by the power of the Spirit. Jesus teaches, preaches, heals, and casts out demons. He moves among the poor, the outcast, the sick and the blind. His actions fulfill the Scriptures, especially the Prophets, and more specifically Isaiah of the first reading today.

In a rather appropriate way, I believe that this celebration of our priesthood, both ordained and baptismal, is calling us to live out, as a diocesan Church, the mottos of both Bishop Emeritus Peter and myself: "My Brother, My Joy", and "The Reign of God is Among You"

The Good News is that because of the Incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas, the Paschal Mystery that we celebrate at Easter, and the gift of his Spirit that we celebrate at Pentecost, the Reign of God has already begun, and we are called to live within that Reign.

We do so by loving and serving all our brothers and sisters, inclusively, as Jesus has loved and served us with the gift of his life. We are to express and realize this reign of God by finding our joy in serving our brothers and sisters, especially the least and the poorest among us.

That is the core of the message that Pope Benedict XVI shared with us in his new encyclical. It is all about love – love that begins on the human level of Eros, love that moves to the level of friendship or Philia, and culminates in a love that is caring, sharing, intimacy, trust, compassion – in short, Agape.

By the way, did you know that those are the names of the two girlfriends that a priest can have? Sharon and Karen! Sharing and Caring!

One commentator even made the observation that the encyclical of Pope Benedict, compares to the calling of the Second Vatican council by Pope John XXIII. As that event opened the windows to a fresh breeze blowing through the Church and influenced the world, so this surprising encyclical on love by Pope Benedict will also open windows and allow a fresh new breeze to blow through the Church, and perhaps even the world.

It is true that the oils that are blessed today are ordinarily reserved for the ordained ministerial priesthood as those who preside over the sacraments, at least for now. By confirmation, Christians receive the spiritual anointing of the Spirit who is given to them. By the oil of catechumens the effect of the baptismal exorcism is extended. By the use of the oil of the sick, to which St. James is a witness, the sick receive a remedy for the illness of mind and body, so that they may have strength to bear suffering, resist evil and obtain the forgiveness of sins.

However, as baptized Christians, we become, ourselves, sacramental oil, the oil of gladness, as we live out our own freedom, growth and healing as Church, the Body of Christ, and as disciples of Jesus, called to love and serve as he did, finding our own joy in living our baptism and serving our brothers and sisters. In that sense, we ourselves become the oil of gladness, the presence of the healing Spirit of Jesus especially among the poor.

Just yesterday I was in the community of Pine House where those who had taken the Christopher Leadership course were now offering the youth version of that leadership course to the grade nine class. They were brimming with pride and joy as they shared that venture with me, how it was going, and who was all involved. They have a whole team and are including music. They are doing it their own way, and finding great meaning, fulfillment and joy in giving what they have received away to others. That, to my mind, is what living our baptism, and being the oil of gladness to others, is all about.

The Eucharist we celebrate on this occasion is for us, today, a sacramental meal as a diocesan Church community. It makes present for us the love of Christ that revealed his relationship with the Father, and calls us into that intimacy with him and with one another.

So, brothers and sisters, as we pray, celebrate and bless these oils together tonight, let us be open to being the oil of gladness ourselves, to being bearers of the Good News to all peoples