

We are anointed and sent forth in the Spirit

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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*Chrism Mass
Cathedral of St. Mary
Fargo, ND*

My brother priests, my brothers and sisters in Christ, in our readings today we heard both the prophet Isaiah and Jesus announce a Jubilee year - "a year of favor from the Lord, a year acceptable to the Lord." In the Scriptures, as we know, the jubilee is a time of conversion and reconciliation. A time when God opens the doors to salvation a little wider, so that everyone can discover in a new way his grace, his mercy, and his peace.

As we all know, Pope Francis has called the entire Church to a Jubilee, a Holy Year of Mercy. We began it last Dec. 8th, and it will continue until the Solemnity of Christ the King in November. It is a graced time, a *kairos*, during which we contemplate and live the mercy of God. And now, during this Holy Week, and in a special way at this Chrism Mass today, we are invited to delve even more deeply into that mercy.

My dear brother priests, today I think especially of you who have been anointed for the service of mercy. Mercy is our special calling. My brothers, we have a great vocation, a ministry of mercy! Jesus has called us to be his co-workers in the vineyard, co-workers in this mission of mercy. And what a wonderful privilege this is. Our mission is the mission that Jesus described in today's passage of the Gospel, the same mission of mercy foretold by the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading, "...to bring glad tidings to the poor, 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."

My brothers, we are anointed for mercy, filled with the Spirit of the Lord to spread the mercy of God to every corner of our diocese. In our preaching we share the word of God with his people, which offers them consolation and hope, but also challenges them to holiness. In our celebration of Mass, we remember and experience the mercy of God who desires to dwell intimately among his people, especially in the sacrament of his Body and Blood. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, we bestow God's mercy on sinners, healing their souls and sending them forth free from the sins that weighed them down. And in the sacrament of anointing, we bring Christ's healing and strength to those who are burdened by illness and old age. And these are just a few key examples in the whole panorama of our priesthood.

My brothers, the Spirit of the Lord is indeed upon us, sending us forth as apostles of mercy. In fact, everything about our priesthood should convey the mercy of Jesus, who is our eternal high priest. The more we conform ourselves to him, in our prayer, in our pastoral charity, in our preaching and sacramental ministry, the more we become his instruments of mercy in the world. Today, as we renew our priestly promises, let us pray that the mercy of God will take root in our priestly lives, so we might share that mercy freely with his people. On behalf of all the people of our diocese, I thank you for your acceptance of the Lord's anointing, and for your service of mercy in the Diocese of Fargo.

But this mission isn't only for our priests. No, on the contrary, mercy is the mission of every Christian and the mission of the entire Church. Brothers and sisters, each one of us has received the mercy of God. In baptism, we were cleansed of our sins and made sharers in the divine life of God. We were made Christians, which means "anointed ones." In Confirmation, we were anointed again to be Christ's witnesses in the world, missionary disciples who go forth boldly and joyfully to live and share the good news of salvation in Christ. Mercy is always at the heart of our Christian lives, and it is mercy that sends us forth. Just as Jesus was anointed and sent forth in the Spirit, so are we. Pope Francis and his predecessors have all reminded us that the Church exists to evangelize. And the mercy of God is always the "content" of evangelization, the good news, the glad tidings that the Church proclaims. We must be a

Church that makes God's love real for every person in our society. My friends, mercy is our mission, and this is not just the duty of priests, or of deacons, or religious. It is the mission of all those who have been anointed by the Lord.

In a short time, the holy oils that have been prepared for this Mass will be brought forward to be blessed and consecrated. They will become a sign of our mission of mercy. We bring these oils to the altar so God can bless them and make them oils of anointing and healing, oils that will communicate his mercy and the gladness of his salvation to a wounded world.

Today, my brothers and sisters, let us ask for the grace to make a new commitment to live as Jesus taught us to live, "merciful like the Father." Let us be renewed in the anointing of the Spirit that we all received in Baptism and Confirmation, and let us renew our willingness to be missionaries of the Lord's mercy wherever we are.

Welcoming the Gospel into our hearts and sharing it with others is not merely a matter of human effort. Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and so too are we, in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. We are anointed as well in times of serious illness, so that we might bear our sufferings with the strength of Christ. In a word, we are anointed by the Spirit so that Christ might live in us and we might be his witnesses.

As the holy oils are blessed and distributed this day, the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Oil of Chrism, may the Spirit of the Lord be upon us all, that we may be the Lord's faithful, joyous, and zealous disciples in every part of this Diocese, for the glory of his name, for the good of his Church, and for the salvation of all. Mary, Mother of Mercy and Mother of the Church, pray for us.