

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

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

Apr. 11, 2017

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

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.” Every year at the Chrism Mass, we hear these words of Isaiah. And every year we also hear them repeated by Jesus himself, who in the words of Isaiah, has come “to give them oil of gladness in place of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.” This is always a beautiful and joyful moment in Holy Week, as we enter into the solemn mystery and the final days of Jesus before his death on the cross and his glorious Resurrection. The Church blesses the holy oils at this time of year, during Holy Week, for a good reason: to remind us that it is from the paschal mystery of the passion death, and resurrection of Christ that all sacraments draw their power. Indeed, it is from this paschal mystery that the Church draws her very life.

What happens here concerns the whole Church. It is an occasion of blessing for our entire diocese and each of its members: priests, deacons, religious, and laity, and I’m so glad there are so many of you here to witness this moment of grace. In this celebration, we bless the holy oils that will be used in all our parishes, the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism. Each of us has been marked with holy oil and chrism at baptism and confirmation, and some of us at ordination. Each of us has been anointed with Christ by the Holy Spirit, and this anointing makes the Church a priestly people, as we heard in the second reading from the Book of Revelation.

With these oils we are anointed in the Lord, anointed for mission. Yes, every one of us, young or old, lay or ordained, has a mission in the life of the Church. We are anointed by our Lord, who is the Christ, the “anointed one,” and he allows us to share in his own mission of bringing God’s life and mercy into the world. We all have a duty to proclaim the Gospel, to receive the sacraments as signs of God’s life living within us, and to build up the Church of which we are members. To my brothers and sisters of the laity, you have an essential role in this mission. Our Lord’s anointing sends you out to sanctify our world and our culture, to bring the leaven of the Gospel to every corner, to show to others the reason for our hope in Christ. Much has been said of the new evangelization, a new impetus of mission in the world. Dear friends, you who are anointed in baptism and confirmation will be the principal agents of that new evangelization. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you, so that you may weave the Gospel into the fabric of your lives – your vocation, your family life, your work, your relationships with others. You are called to live differently, to live entirely in Christ, the anointed one, and to be bearers of his glad tidings and his mercy in the world.

In a particular way, this Chrism Mass has special meaning for our priests. On the day of their ordination they were anointed with Sacred Chrism so they might share in a unique way in the priesthood of Jesus. My brothers, you were anointed in Christ to preach his Gospel, to share the saving truth of Jesus with all people. You were anointed to celebrate the Eucharist, to make Christ present at the altar and to nourish his people with his body and blood. You were anointed to offer the forgiveness and mercy of God to his people, to heal their souls and lift them up to our merciful Father. You were anointed to be the presence of Jesus among his people, to act *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ.

To some this might sound a little too exalted, even triumphalistic, but as you know so well, the anointing we have received is actually one of service and of love. It is an anointing that allows us to imitate the humble Jesus as he washes the feet of his disciples, as he prays fervently for the people of Jerusalem, as he pours out his life upon the cross. We are anointed not for our own sakes, but for the sake of those to whom our Lord sends us. And he sends us out to everyone, to those who are near and

those who are far away from his love. In our priestly lives, we serve our brothers and sisters, we usher them into the mystery of God's own action in our lives. As priests we must always keep our eyes fixed on Christ, the great high priest, in order to faithfully carry out our ministry. Our service at times might seem to be solitary, especially in our far-flung diocese. But we are never alone, because we know that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon us." And we know too that we enjoy the solidarity of our brothers who share this priesthood of Jesus with us. So, as we prepare to renew our priestly promises in a few moments, let us recall the sacred anointing that bound us forever to our Lord and sent us out as shepherds among his people.

My brothers and sisters, let us pray for and support our priests and seminarians. They know their unworthiness and limitations, and they depend on your prayers to persevere in the calling they have received. And let us renew our commitment today to pray and actively promote priestly vocations, inviting young men to this beautiful life in Christ, to this great adventure of being his priests, his co-workers in the world.

Of course, welcoming Christ into our hearts and sharing his Gospel 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, and Confirmation, and Holy Orders. We are also anointed in times of serious illness, so that we might bear our sufferings with the strength of Christ and prepare in hope for the eternal life to come. He gives us "the oil of gladness in place of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit." In other words, we are anointed by the Spirit so that Christ might live *in us* and that we might be his witnesses.

As the holy oils are blessed and distributed today, the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Sacred Chrism, may the Spirit of the Lord be upon us all that we might be the Lord's faithful, joyous, and zealous disciples in every part of this diocese and in the world, for the glory of his Name, for the good of the Church, and for the salvation of all. May Mary, who is Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Church, pray for us.