

# Chrism Mass 2012

Holy Rosary Cathedral

4 April 2012

Dear brothers in the priesthood, especially dear jubilarians; dear deacons Pablo, Paul and Leo and seminarians, dear consecrated men and women, and dear friends in Christ:

## *Introduction*

This evening we are celebrating one of the Church's most moving and significant liturgies. It expresses the unity and communion of all the priests, whether Religious or diocesan, together with the faithful, gathered with me, your unworthy servant. This is the Church of Jesus Christ in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. The ministerial priesthood – let us never forget – has been generated from and is sustained by this great faith community to which all priests belong. But, as today's Preface affirms, "Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own, but with a brother's kindness he also chooses men – those of us gathered here – to become sharers in his sacred ministry through the laying on of hands." Priests are anointed to serve the flock entrusted to their care by nourishing them with the power of the Word of God and strengthening them with the grace of the Sacraments.

This year our celebration is made more joyful by those priests who are celebrating jubilees of their ordinations: Father Oscar Pauwels, who is unable to be with us tonight, for his sixty years of priestly ministry; Father Bill Comerford, for his fifty years; Fathers Rudy D'Souza, Bruce-John Hamilton, John McCarthy, and Claude Noel, for twenty-five years of serving selflessly and faithfully. We are all pleased to congratulate these men for conforming their lives closely to Christ, offering us a shining witness of faith and love, and giving their lives for the salvation of their brothers and sisters. Please God, they will continue to bear much fruit in the Lord's Vineyard.

Today, a number of seminarians also join us. As you, young men, look towards a future that, through God's grace, will one day see you at this altar, look to these jubilarians and know that there is nothing more beautiful than to know Christ and, as a priest, to share and communicate to others one's friendship with him. As you continue in your path of formation remember the words of the Holy Father: "The core of the priesthood is being friends of Jesus Christ. . . . Being a priest means

becoming an ever closer friend of Jesus Christ with the whole of our existence.”<sup>1</sup>

Dear seminarians: we shall pray for your perseverance. We also pray fervently that the Lord will speedily send more workers into the vast harvest to be reaped in our Archdiocese. At the same time, we must all call forth vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. That is the task of each of us in this cathedral: every priest, every consecrated person and every lay man and lay woman.

### *Anointing in the Readings*

Beginning with the Prophet Isaiah, fulfilled by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, the readings of our Chrism Mass stress the idea of anointing. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed with oil as a sign of dignity, of the strength that comes from God and of responsibility. Anointing was the sign of being taken into service; kings and priests emptied themselves, so as to serve by making themselves available for the Lord’s mission.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the ordained priest of the new Covenant is removed from worldly bonds, emptying himself in imitation of Jesus the eternal High Priest, in order to give himself totally over to God, “and precisely in this way, starting with God, he must be available for others, for everyone.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Gospel, we heard Jesus tell his hearers that the prophecy of the anointed one who was to come was realized in himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). He is God’s Anointed One; he is the Messiah, the Christ. What happened symbolically to the kings and priests of the Old Testament, when they were instituted into their ministry by an anointing with oil, takes place in the Incarnation in all its reality: his sacred humanity is penetrated by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The very name that all of us bear as “Christians” refers to the Anointed One. To be a Christian is to belong to Christ, whom God himself anointed – not with material oil – but with the One whom the oil represents: the Holy Spirit.

Fascinated by Psalm 45 – traditionally held to be Solomon’s wedding song – the Fathers of the Church reinterpreted it to apply to the marriage of the new Solomon,

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (13 April 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (13 April 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (9 April 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (21 April 2011).

Jesus Christ, to his Bride, the Church. To the King, who is Christ, it is said: “Your love is for justice; your hatred for evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above other kings” (v. 8). For the Fathers, the oil of gladness with which Christ was anointed is the Holy Spirit himself, who was poured out upon Jesus Christ. “The Holy Spirit is the gladness that comes from God,” Pope Benedict said two years ago in his homily at the Chrism Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica. “From Jesus this gladness sweeps over us in his Gospel, in the joyful message that God knows us, that he is good and that his goodness is the power above all powers; that we are wanted and loved by him.”<sup>5</sup>

Through Ordination a priest is taken into – indeed, pressed into – God’s service – making present not himself but Christ, who empowers him to act in his very person. Anointing does not endow the priest with earthly power or status. It is not a call to prestige or privilege. Rather, dear brothers, being anointed on the day of Ordination to act *in persona Christi* requires that our way of thinking and acting and living reflect out intimate relationship with Christ. Ministry is about putting our “selves” aside oneself in order to bear witness to the One who has anointed us and sent us on *his* mission of proclaiming the Good News.<sup>6</sup> Priests bring the world to God, to open it up to him in all its tragedy and magnificence.

### ***The Oils and Chrism***

At the heart of this Chrism Mass is the blessing of the holy oils for use in the Sacraments. Priests are men of the Sacraments, “servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries” (1 Cor 4:1). Among the created realities we use in the celebration of the sacraments are water, bread, wine and oil. In the Sacraments the Lord touches his People through the elements of creation. “The unity between Creation and Redemption is made visible. The Sacraments are an expression of the physicality of our faith, which embraces the whole person, body and soul.”<sup>7</sup>

In four sacraments, oil is used as the sign of God’s goodness reaching out to touch us: in Baptism, in Confirmation as the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, in Holy Orders and finally in the Anointing of the Sick, in which oil is offered to us as God’s medicine which assures us of his strength and consolation. Thus oil, in its different forms, accompanies us throughout our lives: beginning with the catechumenate and

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Christ Mass (1 April 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Homily, Chrism Mass (21 April 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Chrism Mass (21 April 2011).

Baptism, and continuing right up to the moment when we prepare to meet our Judge and Saviour.<sup>8</sup>

The most noble of the ecclesial oils is sacred chrism. Baptism and Confirmation initiate us into the People of God when we assume “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), a priestly ministry towards all of mankind. Christians are a priestly people for the world. Called to make the living God visible in the world, they should bear witness to him and lead people towards him, always welcoming home those who have wandered away. As an archdiocesan family we shall make every effort to do just that – welcoming home to the full practice of the sacramental life – during the upcoming Year of Faith declared by the Holy Father to begin this October 11, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. By virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, all of us have been anointed, and the priests present have also been anointed during their Ordination, for this daunting yet sweet task of opening wide the doors of faith.

As a sacramental sacred chrism very aptly symbolizes the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. In the first place, chrism clings to whatever it touches. It can't be washed away like so many other things. In this way, it symbolizes that the work of the Holy Spirit is to be irrevocably, indelibly present, even when we fail to perceive him. Second, sacred chrism, because it is made with balm or perfume to give it a sweet aroma sensibly recalls for us that the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is often anonymous. His is a kind of invisible presence, as Our Lord suggested to Nicodemus when he described the Spirit as like the wind blowing where he will (cf. Jn 3: 8). Through the grace of the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit permeates our lives in order to reshape every dimension of our existence into the image of Christ, to stamp us with the form of Jesus Christ. In the Rite of Ordination for both priests and bishops, the chrism is used to illustrate or make clearer what has been accomplished by the imposition of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit<sup>9</sup>: the power to unite God's people in charity, to preach the Word authoritatively and to celebrate the Sacraments, above all to renew in Christ's name the sacrifice of Redemption and to bring about the healing of Reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins.

### ***Conclusion***

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Christ Mass (1 April 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Archbishop Allen Vigneron, Homily, Chrism Mass (4 April 2010).

Dear brothers: At times we all experience that the demands of our vocation can seem overwhelming. There are always more and more demands, more instructions from 150 Robson, new programs to be implemented, more appeals on time and treasure. At this Chrism Mass, I am happy for the opportunity to be able to say how much the Catholic community appreciates your tireless work for souls and your generous dedication to ministry. These are very challenging times for the Church – and so they will remain. Business as usual is not enough if we are to fulfill the mission entrusted to us at Ordination. We have to go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, give our tunic along with the cloak. Our Chrism Mass gives us an opportunity to reflect on how precious our priesthood is and to rededicate ourselves to our vocation. As always, we look to Christ, the High Priest and Good Shepherd, for strength to live our calling with faithful joy. Like him, we have been anointed “to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18), and to build up his Mystical Body, the Church.

With profound gratitude for our vocation and recognizing in truth all our sins and shortcomings, and with trust in the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us pray that the good Lord will once again hear the earnest plea of his priests gathered in this Cathedral who desire nothing more than to love him more and more and who now will renew the promises they made with such wonder and generosity on their day of Ordination.

J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver