

## **Chrism Mass**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

12 April 2017

Dear brothers in the priesthood; dear Deacons Francesco, Giovanni and Juan, here today to witness the consecration of the sacred chrism that, please God, I will use on the Vigil of Pentecost to anoint your hands as priests; dear permanent deacons, consecrated men and women, and seminarians; dear elect and candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil; and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

### ***Introduction***

It is always a joy to gather as our local Church to celebrate this Chrism Mass. The whole Church is represented here: myself as your Bishop and our priests, both diocesan and religious; the order of deacons; consecrated men and women; and the lay faithful. And we are all united with Jesus, the Anointed One of God, the Christ.

Through our baptismal consecration, we are all his disciples, “anointed with the oil of gladness” (Is 61:3), the one priestly People of God (cf. Is 61:6).

It is a true privilege for me to gather with all of you, but especially on this day to thank the good Lord for having anointed you, dear brothers, as his priests, and to invite you to recommit yourselves to the promises made at your Ordination. These promises remind us that our lives have been swept up in an awesome mystery. Despite our own all

too evident inadequacies and weaknesses – we priests are, most certainly, earthenware vessels that hold the treasure of the Gospel (cf. 2 Cor 4:7) – God, in his mercy, nonetheless marvellously works through us. Time and time again we experience how our own stumbling efforts are turned into something great. We know well that we exercise our ministry dependent on the realm of grace, for we see, like Mary, that the Almighty does great things for us and in us and through us.

Thank you, brothers, for your sacrificial service as shepherds to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care. Thank you for keeping focussed on the Church's evangelizing mission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and of celebrating the Sacraments of salvation, so that others might encounter the mercy and love that a personal relationship with Christ offers.

With particular gratitude to almighty God, I would like to acknowledge this year's jubilarians, those priests who are celebrating special anniversaries of their Ordination this year: heading the list of steadfast servants of the Lord is Monsignor Pedro López Gallo, ordained 65 years ago. I would also like to remember our beloved Bishop David Monroe and Father Tom Nicholson, for their fifty years of faithful service; Abbot John Braganza, and Fathers Mark Bautista, Dennis Flores, Bede Le, and Mako Watanabe, each for twenty-five years of dedicated ministry. These priests continue to live the gift and mystery

of being priests who are selflessly spending their lives in making Jesus known and loved. At their Ordination, the Spirit of the Lord anointed them (cf. Lk 4:18), configuring them to Christ the Eternal High Priest, so that they could be instruments of his saving mission of teaching, guiding and sanctifying God's People. And so they have been, and will be, God willing, for many more years to come.

### ***Sharing the Fruits of the Ad Limina Visit to Rome***

As most of you know, two weeks ago I was in Rome with the Bishops of western and northern Canada on our *ad limina* visit. This visit, which is supposed to take place at five year intervals – but no longer does, because of the growth of the Church – is intended to give concrete and personal expression to the communion of each local or diocesan Church with the See of Peter and its Bishop, the Pope. Aside from visiting the principal offices of the Holy See and celebrating Mass in the four major basilicas, the highpoint of this visit was our 2½ hour meeting with the Holy Father.

In an atmosphere of cordiality and fraternity, he answered questions we had prepared – and others – as well as raising with us some pastoral concerns of his own. A few of these touch upon today's celebration, and, from my notes and recollections, supplemented by texts from other occasions when he has treated the same themes, I would like to share these with you.

## ***1. Synodality***

The Holy Father began by commenting that our visit expressed the synodal dimension of the Church, what we usually refer to as “collegiality.” But he prefers the language of synodality, both because of its common usage in the Eastern and Orthodox Churches and because it expresses that the whole Church is “walking together” to the fullness of God’s Kingdom : the Pope with the Bishop, the Bishop with his presbyterate, and the priest with his people.

For the Church to carry out her evangelizing mission, before it can “go forth” into the world, she must be internally united. In a world increasingly fragmented, the Church at every level, from the community of the parish to the Diocese to its universal dimension, is called to be a sign of unity and communion.

## ***2. Priestly Fraternity***

Closely linked to synodality, the Pope also recalled that as Bishops we are to foster an ever greater fraternity with and among our priests. He reminded us that ministry in the Church is not an individualistic undertaking but a communal endeavour.<sup>1</sup>

Francis frequently talks about “the beauty of fraternity: of being priests together, of following the Lord not alone, not one by one, but

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Francis, Message to French Seminarians (24 October 2014).

together, and also in the great variety of gifts and personalities. Indeed, this is precisely what enriches the presbyterate, this variety of background, of age, of talents. . . . And all lived in communion, in fraternity.”<sup>2</sup>

This is my hope, too, for our presbyterate: that we will ever more intentionally overcome any “pastoral individualism” and replace it by the choice of an ever more intense communion among us. We all need to move beyond any sterile divisions or disagreements and listen together to the voice of the Spirit who is guiding the Church. When Jesus says: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35), he is certainly addressing everyone, but first of all the Twelve, those whom he called to ministry.<sup>3</sup>

### ***3. Fostering the Vocation and Mission of the Laity***

A further dimension of synodality touched upon by Pope Francis at our meeting and developed more elsewhere was the need for us who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders to be more attentive to the vocation and mission of the lay faithful in the Church. Here we can recall the Second Vatican Council’s hearty encouragement to priests “to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of the dignity of the laity

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, Meeting with Diocesan Priests, Cassano all’Jonio (21 June 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis, Meeting with Diocesan Priests, Cassano all’Jonio (21 June 2014).

and of the special role they have to play in the Church's mission. . . . They [Priests] should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and acknowledge their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able together with them to discern the signs of the times."<sup>4</sup>

In the Archdiocese of Vancouver we are blessed with a Catholic laity of enormous cultural diversity, who place their wide-ranging gifts at the service of the Church and of society at large. They look to their pastors to offer them encouragement and direction. But, if they are to fulfil their mission, they need a sound formation in the faith and depend upon us – their pastors – to open to them the riches of the Word of God and Sacred Tradition as handed down in the Church's teaching.

The challenge that Pope Francis puts to us unrelentingly is that of becoming missionary disciples: each one of us personally, and also together as parish communities that bring the Good News to the very people that Jesus himself searched out and proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth: "the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed" (cf. Lk 4:18): all those whom the Holy Father frequently refers to as those on the world's margins or periphery.

For us to be missionary disciples means going out to our own

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<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9.

people – the majority of baptized Catholics who do not come to us – and finding them. This is where we must turn our attention in our pastoral parish councils, organizations, associations, movements, in our teaching and preaching and above all in our prayer.

#### ***4. Closeness to Our People***

At numerous points in our conversation, the Pope exhorted us never to forget the importance of “vicinanza,” of being close to people – an idea that he repeats at every turn. To be close to people is his pastoral theology in a nutshell. “One cannot evangelize without closeness”<sup>5</sup> is how he puts it. We are to be “Emmaus priests” who journey with our people on the path to that beatifying encounter with “the God is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:4).

At various points, the Pope repeated to us pretty much what he said last December to a group of seminarians. I’ll quote from that address since it’s more to the point than my scattered notes:

You cannot be a priest with detachment from the people.  
Closeness to the people. And the one who gave us the  
greatest example of closeness to the people was the Lord,  
isn’t that true? With his condescension [*synkatabasis*] he

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, Address to Rectors and Students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome (12 May 2014).

became close, close to the point of taking on our flesh. . . .

A priest who is detached from the people is not capable of giving Jesus' message. He is not capable of giving Jesus' caresses to the people.<sup>6</sup>

### ***5. Closeness to the Lord in Prayer***

Before reciting the Angelus together, the Holy Father ended our meeting with an exhortation to prayer, reminding us that prayer is at the heart of our ministry, and that we must pray more. With his typical realistic sense, Francis accepts that at times it's not easy because we have so many things to do, so many people to see and pastoral matters to address. Elsewhere he admits that, when we pray, we can feel a certain discomfort, because Jesus' gaze is sometimes a little unsettling. It can even cause us distress. But, he says, "this is good for us!" In the silence of prayer Jesus shows us whether we are working well, like faithful labourers in the Vineyard, or whether we may have become more like employees of an NGO; whether we are open and generous "channels" through which his love and grace flow in abundance, or whether we focus on ourselves, and thus hinder others' encounter with

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, Address to the Pontifical Regional Seminary Pius XI of Apulia (10 December 2016).

the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

The Pope reminded me of the words of Benedict XVI on the importance of prayer in the priest's life. I cite them in full for you:

The Evangelists tell us that the Lord frequently withdrew - for entire nights - "to the mountains", to pray alone. We too need these "mountains": they are inner peaks that we must scale, the mountain of prayer. Only in this way does the friendship [with the Lord] develop. Only in this way can we carry out our priestly service, only in this way can we take Christ and his Gospel to men and women. Activism by itself can even be heroic, but in the end external action is fruitless and loses its effectiveness unless it is born from deep inner communion with Christ. The time we spend on this is truly a time of pastoral activity, authentic pastoral activity.

The priest must above all be a man of prayer.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The faithful of our Archdiocese love their priests who accompany them from the baptismal font through life to their final resting place. They pray for us and support us in countless ways; they forgive our

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Francis, Meeting with Diocesan Priests, Cassano all'Jonio (21 June 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Benedict, Homily at the Chrism Mass (13 April 2006).

weaknesses and even the sins for which we must tonight confess our sorrow. Let us entreat the Blessed Virgin Mary on this day for the gift to be able to say “yes” again with the fervour of our Ordination day: “Here am I! Here I am for you, Lord, and for your people; send me” (cf. Is 6:8). Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
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