

THE HOLY SPIRIT, SOUL OF THE NEW COVENANT

Holy Thursday
Chrism Mass
April 12, 1979

Isaiah 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9
Revelation 1:5-8
Luke 4:16-21

My dear brother priests, dear sisters and brothers.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is the soul of the New Covenant. During Lent we have reflected on the Divine Revelation from this perspective: God is tireless in his love and renews the Covenant with humankind. We come to Holy Thursday and celebrate the promise that had been announced in these ancient Covenants. In this Mass, which is the only Mass that is celebrated in every cathedral and is called the Chrism Mass, we want to render homage to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit who actualizes the New Covenant that had been promised by God.

Today's liturgy uses the holy chrism, which will be consecrated in a few moments, as a sign to represent before the people and the priests the presence of the Holy Spirit who anoints the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, true God and true man: prophet, priest and king of humankind. This same Holy Spirit anoints all those who believe in him and he makes us participants in this divine anointing. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot understand the divinity and effectiveness of Christian redemption.

This morning, the Holy Spirit is the center of our adoration and gratitude. In him we remember the power that motivated Christ to make the supreme sacrifice for us and that unites us with Christ, the Redeemer.

The liturgy this morning highlights three "masterpieces" of this anointing by the Holy Spirit: In the first place, Christ; Secondly, the priestly people --- the faithful people who have been baptized and those who have been chosen from among the people: the ministers of God to this people: the priests. And thirdly, the sacraments through which the Holy Spirit continues to actualize the Covenant that through him gives us life, makes us holy, extends forgiveness to us and consecrates us. We are the People of God --- let us nourish the handing over of our lives to the Lord.

The anointing of Christ

In the first place, the "masterpiece" of the Holy Spirit that we celebrate this morning is the anointing of Christ. When the angel announced to Mary that she would be the Virgin Mother of God who would become man, she asked: *how can this be?* (1). The angel explained to her that this would be the work of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, a human person, body and soul, is formed in Mary's womb and will be born like all other children --- a man, a human person and human nature, but this man is also divine. The Holy Spirit comes upon

this new creature in Mary's womb, this new creature inserted in Mary's womb, that is, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Mary will give birth to this child who is not simply a child, but a God-Child. For this reason Mary is called the Mother of God. Work of the Holy Spirit.

The anointing of Christ is a substantial anointing, an anointing that does not come from the outside but rather is part of his origin and beginning, it is the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. In the first reading that we have just heard, the prophet Isaiah says: *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me* (2). Responding to this prophecy of Isaiah, the Messiah says: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing* (3), in other words Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit is upon him and he is the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit.

The anointing of Christ is a substantial anointing, an anointing that does not come from the outside but rather is part of his origin and beginning, it is the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. He is telling us: I, who appear in your midst like any other man, bear the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the person of God who gives a divine value to all my actions. When I am nailed to the cross, my human arms will be able to save the world from their sins, not because of the blood of this child of Mary but rather because this child of Mary has been anointed as the true Son of God and therefore all that I suffer has a divine value.

Truly Christ, the Messiah, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when the hour of his glorification arrives, the Holy Spirit moves him to great obedience during his passion. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he embraces the cross and dies for the redemption of humankind, but the power of the Holy Spirit raises him up. God raises him up by the power of the same Holy Spirit who anointed him --- death is unable to be victorious over him,

If Christ now passes into heaven, gifting humanity with forgiveness, holiness and consolation, if Christ now guides his Church, then all of this is due to the fact that this Son of the Virgin was anointed by the Holy Spirit and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This shows that this human-divine person, born of woman, has been glorified as God. Saint Paul tells us: *God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth* (4).

Thus, my dear sisters and brothers, we have the Mediator of the New Covenant, the author of this renewed relationship between heaven and earth, the agent of human redemption, the priest who entered heaven and continues to sanctify the world with his eternal, priestly ministry. Hopefully today we might open our eyes of faith and behold the protagonist of this Holy Week, Christ who carries his cross up the mountain and dies and is buried. Christ who will not remain in the tomb but is raised up and triumphs --- Christ, the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit.

The Priestly People

A second work of the Holy Spirit is seen in the fact that the divine dignity of Christ, the anointing through which this son of Mary is made Son of God, this work that could only be accomplished by the power of the Spirit of God, all this divine and holy redemption that is a part of Christ, all of this priestly ministry that Christ exercises as he offers himself as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of the world --- all of this makes us participants in Christ's ministry. In today's reading from the book of Revelation we heard these words of

Saint John: *to him who made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father* (5). We are able to say the same thing today on this Holy Thursday and it is for this reason that we come together here to celebrate the Chrism Mass: to affirm our priesthood, to affirm the fact that we are a priestly people and that through Baptism we have been conformed with Christ, the divine Redeemer.

The Second Vatican Council captures and, we might say, portrays this beautiful scene that is taking place here in the Cathedral that is filled with God's people and presided by his priests when it states: *Christ instituted this new covenant, namely a new covenant in his blood; he called a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God. For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn, not from a corruptible seed, but from an incorruptible one through the word of the living God, not from flesh, but from water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5-6), are finally established as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... who in times past were not a people, but now are the People of God* (6).

My dear sisters and brothers, what a wonderful honor for us, for us as children of the flesh! At one time our parents brought us to the baptismal waters to be incorporated into this chosen race, this priestly people! This is a morning when we should kiss the baptismal font of our parish Church and gratefully embrace our parents, who together with our godparents, brought us to the sacrament of Baptism which made us Christians. This is a morning when we should say to the Lord: *Thank you for making me a participant in your life. Even though I am poor and insignificant in the eyes of the world, yet this participation in the dignity of your eternal priesthood makes me divine and enables me to be a part of this people that renders true worship to you.*

Here we discover the mystery of this difference that separates and, at the same time, unites these two categories of priests that are present here in the Cathedral. Here, around the altar, the priests and you, the Priestly People, have gathered together. The Council continues to speak to us: *Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial and hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ* (7). You are a priestly people, and we are taken from among the people to serve you as priests. Hands were imposed on us and we received a priestly character to represent Christ and to guide the people --- this is the essential difference. It is not a difference that distinguishes us and separates us, but rather it is a mutually complementary distinction.

Here I want to highlight a wonderful gesture of Pope John Paul II: dated Palm Sunday so that it would could be delivered to all the priests on Holy Thursday, the Pope has written a letter that is entitled: *Letter of the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, to all the priests on the occasion of Holy Thursday*. Thanks to God, we have been able to duplicate this letter in our printing office and we are happy to be able to present this letter not only to the priests of the Archdiocese but to all of the priests of the four dioceses in El Salvador. Reflecting the thinking of the Council, the Pope says: *We must consider down to the smallest detail not only the theoretical meaning but also the existential meaning of the mutual "relation" that exists between the hierarchical priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful* (8). The Holy Father highlights the fact that this difference enables us to see the richness of the eternal priesthood of Christ: as the sun multiplies into many rays of light, so too priesthood takes on many diverse forms: the father of a family, the father as a professional and in the world of the laity, and then we have priesthood in a strict sense: hierarchical and ministerial priests.

The Pope analyzes these two words *hierarchical* and *ministerial* and says there is the difference. This difference not only enables us to know the wealth of Christ's priesthood, but it also fills us with love and gratitude so that we can give our priesthood a meaning of service. For if the Lord has chosen us from among people and authorized us to act in his name in the midst of the people, then it is clear that we have been chosen to serve, to sanctify, to teach and to guide this people toward their true goal. When we speak of a hierarchical priesthood we are not speaking about a greater power but a power that is characterized by service. Thus the priest presides and governs, but governs in the sense of service and leading --- serving the people by pointing out the true path.

The Pope reminds us in his letter that our priesthood has a meaning, a charism, one that he calls a pastoral charism (9) which through our special vocation and the special anointing on the day of our ordination, we were configured to Jesus, the Good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep.(10) This places on us an obligation to cultivate a zeal and a diligence for the Kingdom of God, a zeal and a diligence that places on us the obligation to be more generous than the laity (cf. Letter to the priests on Holy Thursday -1979, #5). We speak to you, the laity, about the responsibility of your common baptism but we, with our priesthood, have a more delicate responsibility which, thanks to you, becomes less burdensome when the meaning of this common priesthood is understood as one that helps and collaborates with the ministerial priesthood.

The Holy Father speaks about our commitment to celibacy. Before discussing the pro's and the con's of priestly celibacy and marriage, the Pope invites us to see celibacy as a charism that the individual has accepted after testing himself to see if he had been granted this gift. The Church, having placed celibacy as a condition for ordination, accepts and affirms the free decision of those who present themselves for ordination. Besides the canonical or any other consideration, we are dealing with honoring our word that was given to Jesus Christ. The Pope says: *It is a matter here of keeping one's word to Christ and the Church* (11). When there is love, one does not look for reasons; where there is love, there is self-sacrifice --- self-sacrifice and joy that results from serving and following Christ. When there is love, this charism, that carries with it the heavy burden of renouncing a home and the possibility of passing on the family name, enables us to participate in the Fatherhood of God and to give witness to the world that one has opted with maturity and liberty and one knows how to honor the option that was made. Celibacy is an expression of one's personal dignity.

Finally the Pope says: *you who have put your hand to the plough, do not turn back* (12), *generously continue to follow the furrow and work with the Lord*. There are those, however, who do look back and repent of their generous offering to the Lord. They feel they are in crisis and doubt their vocation and identity. The Pope invites us to then reflect on our vocation from this perspective that has deeply moved me: *think of the places where people anxiously await a priest, and where for many years, feeling the lack of such a priest, they do not cease to hope for his presence. And sometimes it happens --- I imagine that the Pope, during his travels in Poland and when he met with the people, witnessed the scenes that he describes --- they meet in an abandoned shrine, and place on the altar a stole which they still keep, and recite all the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy; and then, at the moment that corresponds to the transubstantiation a deep silence comes down upon them, a silence sometimes broken by a sob... so ardently do they desire to hear the words that only the lips of a priest can efficaciously utter* (13). Only a priest can speak the words: *This is my Body* and give to the People of God the Body that nourishes. When there is no priest: the people can recite all the prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy, but at the moment to pray the words of institution, there is silence --- no one can say anything because a priest is not present.

They greatly desire the Eucharist which they participate in only by virtue of the ministerial priesthood! They also long to hear the divine words of forgiveness which only the priest can say: *I absolve you of your sins*. They feel profoundly the absence of a priest. There are many places like this in the world. *In consequence, you who are doubtful of the meaning of your vocation or of the value of your service think of the[se] places* (14).

I tell you that the reflections contained in this letter strengthen my desire to continue to serve the Lord. I beg the holy People of God to reflect on these scenes --- how many towns and villages remain quiet before the words that they are unable to utter because only a priest can pronounce these words! We must mediate on this so that God might give our beloved priests perseverance, holiness and fervor and also that vocations might come forth from our homes to fill these vacancies.

The Sacraments

Finally my sisters and brothers, this homage to the Holy Spirit is represented in the amphorae that will soon be brought to the altar. These oils, chrism, the oil of the sick and the oil of the catechumens, are like the fonts of the sacramental life or the rivers that the prophet saw flowing through the Sanctuary of the Temple. (15) Here in the Cathedral, within the context of the liturgy and in the presence of the whole Diocese, these oils will be consecrated. From here they will be brought by the priests to their parishes and like rivers of grace and holiness they will be used to administer the seven sacraments that give life to the People of God. Baptism, rebirth as the children of God; Confirmation, special power of the Spirit of God; Eucharist, union of our lives with the sacrifice of Christ; Penance, reconciles us with God and the Church; Anointing of the Sick, that joins the weakness and the suffering of people to the redemptive passion of Christ and makes the sick person a suffering member who has been redeemed by the crucified Christ; Holy Orders, that enables a child of the People of God to shepherd the Church of the Lord in the name of Christ; Matrimony, a sign and a participation in the fruitful love that unites the couple to Christ through the Church and becomes a reflection of the Christian home.

How beautiful is the reality of the Holy Spirit giving life through these seven rivers of the city of God: the seven sacraments. We have come to the Cathedral this morning to reaffirm our dignity as priests and a priestly people and a People of God that has been sanctified by God. My dear sisters and brothers, during this Chrism Liturgy of Holy Thursday that we have the privilege of celebrating here in the Cathedral and that is not celebrated in any other Church in the Diocese, let us express the unity of our faith and of our Christian life. The Spirit of God is the soul of the New Covenant and so we reaffirm our respect and our obedience to the Holy Spirit who touches the heart of each Christian, inviting each one to be a living and worthy member of this priestly people in which God has expectations.

Let us live as Christians in a way that honors the dignity that Christ has conferred on us together with his love. As Jesus handed himself over to death on the cross, he then shared with us his priestly dignity that is conferred on all the baptized and results in the common priesthood of the faithful. He has also shared his priestly dignity with all of us, the priests of the Archdiocese, privileged by the Lord to serve the People of God, gathered together by Mother Church this morning to reaffirm in the presence of the bishop (who recognizes the need for the collaboration for the priests and the priestly people) and all the people of God our commitment to the priesthood of Christ who instituted our priesthood.

Marginal References (1) Lk 1,34-35; (2) Is 61,1; (3) Lk 4,21; (4) Ph 2,9-10; (5) Rv 16; (6) LG 9; (7) LG 10; (8) NI 4; (9) NI 5; (10) Jn 10,11; (11) NI 5; (12) Lk 9,62; (13) NI 10; (14) NI 10; (15) Ez 47,1-12.