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ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT

Chrism Mass
Holy Thursday
7 April 1977

Isaiah 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9

Revelation 1:5-8

Luke 4:16-21

My dear sisters and brothers.

«Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing» (Luke 4:21). Such was the homily of Christ after reading from the prophet Isaiah, who announced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people. On this Holy Thursday morning I also have the great honor of saying, «Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing». How beautifully it is being fulfilled here in the cathedral sanctuary, where I am surrounded by my auxiliary, Bishop Rivera, and a good representation of the priests who work in the archdiocese! And filling the nave of the church are all the people who have received this outpouring of the Spirit.

We are preparing to celebrate the Easter Triduum. As was explained in the introductory catechesis to today's Mass, the church is offering us this morning something like a synthesis of the paschal mystery that will be developed during these three days: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. All of this is meaningless if we do not remember that this is the work of the Holy Spirit and that this Mass honors the Spirit who anoints Christ, who anoints the priests who preside during Holy Week, and who anoints the people who celebrate their redemption. It is only because the power of God was poured forth on Christ that the world has been saved. If that Spirit of Christ had not been poured forth on Easter on a few ministers who were to bring redemption to the world, and if the world had not received this gift through the sacraments, then the redemptive death and resurrection of the Lord would have been of no use. In other words, this Chrism Mass (as it is designated in the liturgy because of the blessing of the holy oils) is when we remember the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and it is a beautiful summary of the whole Easter event. This Easter of 1977 begins in our history today, and it begins in this solemn way, with all the other Masses suspended in the archdiocese so that we can focus our complete attention on that priest chosen by God, not for his merits but perhaps for his smallness and his limitations, to be the sign of faith and unity in the diocese. May you all feel that through him, the one with whom all the priests share responsibility, the Spirit of God continues to work the paschal redemption in those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Christ, the work of the Spirit

Today's celebration evokes three great works of the Holy Spirit, and you will hear them beautifully synthesized in the preface which will soon be sung. The first work of the Holy Spirit is Christ himself, that is, the second person of the Blessed Trinity who became man by taking on a human body and soul in the virginal womb of Mary who never lost her virginity. This is a work of the Holy Spirit not because of the miracle of the virginal conception, but rather because that virginal womb corresponded to the great mystery of the Word of God who, through the Holy Spirit, anointed the human nature of that man who was born of Mary and who at the same time was also God. Man and God, a work of the Holy Spirit. That is why the angel said to Mary, «The child to be born to you will be the work of the Spirit of God, and this child will save the world from their sins because he has been anointed with the power of God» (Luke 1:35).

That child, born of Mary and anointed by the Holy Spirit, is man and God. When he reached maturity he was hung on a cross so as to sacrifice his body anointed by the Spirit. In this way he redeemed the world and became the High Priest of the new covenant. This Christ who died on the cross and was raised up, who in his glory still bears the scars of his passion, is a man anointed by God, but with a unique anointing. There is no other priesthood but his. The only true priesthood is that of the redeeming Christ; it is the covenant that he reestablishes between God and humankind. There is no longer any other name on earth by which people can be saved except the name of Jesus. This is the master work of the Holy Spirit: the anointing of the humanity of Jesus with the power of God to make him the High Priest of the eternal covenant and the cause of our redemption. But this eternal and unique High Priest does not live in isolation from history.

The people anointed by the Spirit

The second work of the Holy Spirit that we are commemorating today in this Chrism Mass is that this unique priesthood of Christ, who is also king and prophet, transmits to all of those redeemed the ability to be themselves a people of priests, kings, and prophets. That is why today's Mass began with that hymn from the Apocalypse placed on the lips of all of us: «You made us a priestly people, a royal people, and a prophetic people because the anointing of the Spirit who anointed Christ is also ours» (Rev 1:6b).

On the day of our baptism, dear sisters and brothers, when the water and the Spirit cleansed us from original sin, the priest showed the greatness of this moment by anointing our heads with the sacred chrism that we are going to consecrate here. Through this anointing we show that baptism incorporates the child of the flesh into the church, which is the people of God, a priestly people, a people of prophets and kings. This is a blessed time to remember our own baptism. This is the time for the priests and for all of us to renew the commitments which flow from our anointing. I would like to invite you, dear sisters and brothers, to call to mind the chrism that each of you received at the baptismal font of your town or village. There we were born; there the priest came with both the waters of baptism and with the holy chrism brought from the cathedral and consecrated that year to anoint the members of this priestly, royal, prophetic people.

As the people of God, therefore, we have this threefold responsibility and this threefold honor which, thanks be to God, lay people are coming to understand more and more. You are neither religious nor priests of the altar, but you are priests in the world, you are prophets in the world, and you are kings and queens who must work so that the kingdom of Christ reigns in society and in the structures of the world. Like the prophets, you, as a prophetic people anointed by the Spirit who anointed Christ, have to announce the marvelous deeds of God in the world. You have to encourage the good that is done in the world and emphatically denounce the evil that is done in the world. That is what prophets are for: to announce and encourage goodness and to denounce and condemn evil. You, as a people blessed with the powerful anointing of the Spirit, are understanding this more and more so that you should not look only to the bishop or the priests to see what they are doing, but rather you yourselves should feel responsible for this priestly, royal, and prophetic church.

I am very happy, sisters and brothers, to share these reflections with you and to remember our common baptism. There are already many communities in our diocese that are becoming more aware of this meaning of baptism. There are many communities where people are living out this responsibility to be members of the church, members of the people of God anointed with the paschal power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us keep working and becoming more aware that we are not simply spectators of the church's activity. Let us feel that we are church, because indeed we *are* church, because the Spirit of God has anointed us and enabled us to carry out, like Christ, a priestly mission that consecrates the world to God, a prophetic mission that announces God to the world, and a royal mission that makes Christ reign over all that exists on earth.

The priesthood, a work of the Spirit

Finally, what we are mainly celebrating this morning is the third work of the Holy Spirit, namely, that God has chosen from this priestly, royal, and prophetic people certain members and has given them a special mission, and here we are as priests. I am happy and filled with joy to have arrived in the archdiocese at a time when the priests have gathered so faithfully around the bishop. On this Holy Thursday we are able to behold this priesthood united with the bishop as a fruit of the Holy Spirit's work and uniting power.

My beloved priests, what was the meaning of our priestly anointing? This morning it is wonderful to remember the different altars at which the bishop imposed his hands on each of us and gave us the power to celebrate the Holy Mass for the living and deceased. At that time, like God breathing the Holy Spirit into us, he said, «Receive the power to forgive sins in the name of God». In this way our sacred ability and power were constituted by an indelible character with which we priests are marked. This is stated in the preface of this Chrism Mass: «God, you call priests to lead your holy people in love, nourish them by your word, and strengthen them through the sacraments». What a magnificent synthesis of our mission in the world: leading, nourishing, and strengthening God's people!

The priesthood was established to unite, not divide. We therefore rejoice when the church grows as those who listen to her word come together to create this community of faith and hope and love. And the closer the communities grow through

love and faith, the more the priest's heart is filled with satisfaction, for his is a ministry of fostering union in the world. That is why I felt an immense joy, just nine days ago,¹ when I told the Holy Father that I was presenting him with a priesthood united with the bishop and working for the unity of the people of God. The Holy Father certainly considered this a most precious gift, as I do. Indeed, the unity of the priests is a precious gift which impels each priest to work for the unity of his own parish and not to make it his individual little church, according to worldly ambitions or personal interests. Rather, the priest ministers in union with the bishop and with a holy obedience to the one who is responsible for the whole diocese. In the same way, the bishop does not organize the diocese according to his impulses but rather works in communion with the pope to form the great community, the universal church. We celebrate this ministry of unity today as we come together here in this concelebration. We have here priests from all the parishes, at least those who were able and wanted to come, while those who were unable to come are represented by those who are here.

My dear sisters and brothers, in this gathering of love and hope and faith, the priest shares the word of God with the people. And it must be the word of God, for the word that saves is not the word of human beings but the word of God. Therefore the priest must be careful to maintain himself in perfect harmony with what God wants and with what God asks. As the bishops said a few days ago,² the present time is a time for conversion. As priests we must be converted to the true word of God so that this word does not become a simply human word through either excess or defect. Ours must be a conversion to what God wants and to what God says. The Council said that this word has a religious mission (GS 11), and that it therefore also has a human mission. It seeks after God, but because it is a human word, it seeks to resolve and help people with the great problems that they confront on earth. As the pope said, evangelization must have an intimate relationship with human promotion and liberation (EN 30,31). Here, then, we priests are called to a conversion in which we ask ourselves earnestly what God wants to say through our preaching. May our preaching be an authentic evangelization and also contribute concretely to what God wants to do in the world. To separate evangelization and promotion is to forget the great commandment of love, which means loving our neighbor, being concerned about the needs of others in their concrete situations, and helping them as the good Samaritan helped the wounded man on the road (Luke 10:29-37).

My sisters and brothers, this is the word that enlightens the unity of the priests. It is a divine word but also human; it comes from God, but it also has human roots and needs to be applied to the concrete realities of the world. If our words are spiritualized and unrelated to earthly concerns, then they are not the word of God. Neither are they the word of God if they are excessively materialized and forgetful of God. As Paul VI said, this nourishment from the divine word grows and culminates when it is discovered in the sacramental signs and in the great sign of encounter with God which is the church (EN 47). Therefore, the priest's role is to share the sacraments, which are a place of encounter with the Lord and the precious fruits of a conscience converted to God.

¹ Archbishop Romero was received by Pope Paul VI in the general audience of 30 March 1977. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (April 1977).

² «Message of the El Salvador Bishops Conference on the Situation in the Country» in *Orientación* (20 March 1977).

Nourished with the Eucharist, which renews the redemptive sacrifice, and with the other sacraments symbolized in the vessels containing the holy oils that we are going to bless and consecrate today, the priest serves God, knowing that there is no better way for him to use his life than by being a sign of the presence of the redemptive love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, this is a great day for us as priests; this is our priestly morning, just as this afternoon we will celebrate Christ's inauguration of the Eucharist that was entrusted to that first group of priests. Today we celebrate the realization of Christ's great plan to find a group of men who would not only announce his redemption with their words, but also make it real through the Holy Mass, through the sacraments they administer, and through the grace that they carry to the hearts of the faithful.

My dear sisters and brothers, in the light of this threefold work of the Holy Spirit, we become aware of the meaning of our Chrism Mass, and we come to know the meaning of Christ's death on the cross. We also realize that the resurrection is the coming of the Spirit, because the coming of the Holy Spirit did not occur at Pentecost but at Easter; it occurred on the evening of the resurrection when Christ breathed upon the apostles and said, «Receive the Holy Spirit» (John 20:22). When we celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Easter, this is simply a public manifestation of the church that already existed silently, but anointed by the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate, therefore, this Chrism Mass and these symbols of chrism and the oil of the sick and the catechumens, let us affirm the anointing High Priest, Christ Jesus, and to give us also, together with Christ, some earthly priests who serve the of the Holy Spirit, who descended from God's life to give us an eternal people by leading them to God. My dear sisters and brothers, as a people consecrated in baptism, let us celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving to the Lord and to the Holy Spirit, who desired to anoint us as a priestly people, a prophetic people, and a kingly people. Let it be so.