

ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT

Chrism Mass
Holy Thursday
April 7, 1977

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

My dear sisters and brothers.

Jesus, after reading from the prophet Isaiah where it was announced that the Spirit would be poured forth upon the people said: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing* (a). On this Holy Thursday morning I have the great honor of repeating these same words to you: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing*. How beautifully is this passage being fulfilled! Here in the cathedral's presbytery, 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 the people who have received this outpouring of the Spirit. We are preparing to celebrate the Easter Triduum. The introductory catechesis to today's celebration is 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 would be meaningless unless we remember that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. This Mass is a way of honoring the Spirit who anointed Christ, and who also anointed the priests who will preside over the ceremonies of Holy Week and who anointed the people who now celebrate their redemption. If the power of God had not been poured forth upon Christ, the world would not have been saved. If, on that first Easter, the Spirit of God had not been poured forth on some ministers who would in turn bring Christ's salvation to the world, a world that would receive this gift through the celebration of the sacraments, then there would be no sense to Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection. In other words, this celebration of the Chrism Mass (as it is designated in the liturgy because of the blessing of the holy oils), in which we remember the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is a beautiful summary of the whole Easter event. Today we begin the celebration of Easter 1977 in our history. It begins in this very solemn way, with all the other Masses suspended in the Archdiocese so that we can focus our attention on the priest, chosen by God, not because of his own worth but perhaps because of his limitations and unworthiness, chosen to be a sign of faith and unity in the Diocese and chosen to feel that through the other people with whom he shares his responsibilities, this same Spirit of God continues that Paschal redemption in those people who believe in Jesus Christ.

Christ, the Work of the Spirit

Today's celebration reminds us of three great works of the Holy Spirit and we will listen to the account of the Spirit's work when we sing the Preface in a few minutes. This Preface is a beautiful summary of the action of the Holy Spirit. The first work of the Spirit is Christ himself, that is, the second person of the Blessed Trinity 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 more because Mary carried within her womb 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. Thus the angel spoke 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* (b). The child, born of Mary and anointed by the Holy Spirit, was both man and God. When he reached maturity he was raised up on a cross to sacrifice his body that was anointed by the Spirit. Through this action he redeemed the world and became the High Priest of the New Covenant.

This Christ, who died on the cross and was raised to new life, and who in his glory bears the scars of his passion, was a man anointed by God, but anointed in a unique way. There would be no other priesthood but his. The only priesthood is that of the redeeming Christ and the priesthood of the covenant that Jesus re-established between God and humankind. The only name on earth that saves humankind is the name of Jesus. This is the masterpiece of the Holy Spirit, having anointed the humanity of Jesus with the power of God so that he might become the High Priest of the eternal Covenant and so that he might become 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 remember in this Chrism Mass is that this unique priesthood of Christ, who is also king and prophet, is transmitted to the people who have been redeemed and also enables them to be a priestly, royal and prophetic people. The reading from the book of Revelation is a beautiful hymn that is placed on our lips: You have become a priestly people, a royal people and a prophetic people because the anointing of the Spirit who anointed Christ is also yours (c).

My dear sisters and brothers, on the day of our baptism, when the water and the Spirit cleansed us from original sin, the priest showed the importance of this moment by anointing our head with chrism. Through this anointing the priest consecrated all the children and all the baptized of the Diocese because this anointing is a visible representation of the fact that this child of the flesh was incorporated into the Church, into the People of God, into this priestly, royal and prophetic people.

This is a blessed time to remember our baptism. This is the time for the priests and for all of us to renew the commitments which flow from our anointing. My beloved sisters and brothers, during this Chrism Mass I invite you 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 the waters of baptism and the holy chrism that he brought from the cathedral and that was consecrated that year to anoint the members of the town or village as a priestly, royal and prophetic people. Thus, as the People of God, we have this threefold responsibility and this threefold honor which, thanks be to God, the laity are understanding more and more. You are neither religious nor priests of the altar but you are priests in the world, prophets in the world, and royalty who ought to work so that the Kingdom of God reigns in society, in its structures and in the world. You have to proclaim, like the prophets, like that prophetic people anointed by the Spirit that anointed Jesus, yes you 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. You, as a people, are understanding this more and more, for you are aware that by the powerful anointing of the Spirit you do not have to look to your bishop or to the priests to see what they are doing, but rather you, yourself, are responsible for this priestly, royal and prophetic church.

My dear sisters and brothers, I am very happy to share these reflections with you and remember our common baptism. There are many communities in the Diocese that are becoming more aware of this meaning of Baptism, many communities where they are living out their responsibility as members of the Church, members of this People of God who have been anointed with the Easter power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us continue to work and realize that we are not simply spectators of the Church's activity. Let us feel that we are Church, for indeed, we are the Church. We are the Church because the Spirit of God has anointed us and enabled us to carry on, 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 God dominant above all other things that exist in the world.

The priesthood, a work of the Spirit

Finally and primarily, this morning we celebrate this third work of the Holy Spirit. From this priestly, royal and prophetic people, certain individuals have been chosen and given a special mission, and here we are. I am happy and filled with joy to have arrived in the Archdiocese at a time when the priests have gathered around their bishop in such an intimate way. On this Holy Thursday, we are able to present to God and the people a priesthood united with the bishop and we know that this is the fruit of much work and of our union with the Holy Spirit.

My beloved priests, what was the meaning of that priestly anointing? This morning it is wonderful to remember the distinct altars where the bishop imposed his hands over us and gave us the power to celebrate the Holy Mass for the living and deceased; to remember when the bishop imposed his hands and, like God, breathed the Holy Spirit upon us saying: "Receive the power to forgive sins in the name of God." (Rite of Ordination, Instruction to the Candidates). In this way our ability and our sacred power were constituted by an indelible character that we, as priests, have received. This is stated very clearly in the Preface of today's Mass: *He [Christ] appoints them to renew in*

his name the sacrifice of our redemption as they set before your family his paschal meal. He calls them to lead your holy people in love, nourish them by your word, and strengthen them through the sacraments. Father, they are to give their lives in your service for the salvation of your people as they strive to grow in likeness of Christ and honor you by their courageous witness of faith and love. That a beautiful summary of our mission in the world: to consecrate the people.

The priesthood was established to unite and not divide and thus rejoices when the Church grows because people have listened to her Word and thus begin to create this community of faith and hope and love. The communities, in as much as they grow in intimate love and faith, in turn fill the heart of the priest with great satisfaction, for his is a ministry of union and of establishing unity in the world. For this reason I felt an immense joy when nine days ago¹ I was able to tell the Holy Father that here in the Archdiocese, the priests were united and working for the unity of the People of God. The Holy Father ought to consider this a most precious gift as I do. Indeed the unity of the priests is just that, a precious gift. For each priest who works to unify the people of the parish is not making his own individual church, according to his desires or according to the whims of the world or based on his own personal criteria. Rather that priest is working in union with the Bishop and with a holy obedience to the one who is responsible for the Diocese. In the same way the bishop does not organize the diocese as he wants but rather works in communion with the Pope and in this way creates this great community: the universal Church.

We celebrate this ministry of unity today as the priests (those who were able to come and wanted to come) from all the parishes gather here for this concelebration. 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 with the people the Word of God. The priest, therefore, must be the Word of God. The Word that saves is not the word of a human being 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. A few days ago, the bishops said² that now was the time for conversion. As priests we must convert ourselves to the true Word of God so that this Word does not become the word of a human being through excess or defect. This must be a conversion to what God wants and to what God says. The Second Vatican Council said that this Word has a religious mission (d) but that it also has a human mission. Because it is a religious Word it looks for God and yet 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, we must be involved in a process of evangelization that has an intimate relationship with human promotion and liberation (e)). Here then the priests are called to a conversion in which they ask themselves *what does God want to say in this preaching?* May our preaching be an authentic evangelization and promotion of that which God wants to do in the world. To separate these realities is to forget the great commandment of love: love the neighbor and be concerned about the needs of others, their concrete situation; help them like the Good Samaritan helped the wounded man on the road (f).

My sisters and brothers, it is this Word that enlightens the unity of the priests. This is both a divine and human Word because it comes from God but also has human roots and is applicable to the concrete realities of the world. If we strip the Word of its humanness and forget the realities of the world, then we do not proclaim the Word of God. The same is true if we incarnate the Word in the world to such a degree that we put aside God. As Paul VI said, this nourishment from the divine word grows and culminates when it is discovered in the great sign of an encounter with God in the Church and in the celebration of the sacraments (g). Indeed, the priest is present to share the sacraments and thus provide an opportunity for conversion to God and for meeting the Lord.

After we are nourished with the Eucharist, thus renewing the redemptive sacrifice, and after being nourished with the other sacraments that are symbolized in the vessels that contain the holy oils that are going to be blessed and consecrated today, the priest is called to serve God and knows that his life can best be utilized 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 morning is for priests and this afternoon we will celebrate Christ's inauguration of the Eucharist that was then entrusted to that group of priests. Today we celebrate the realization of Christ's great plan to form a group of men who not only would announce his redemption with their words, but would also make that redemption actual through the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments that they administer as well as by the grace that fills the hearts of the faithful.

My dear sisters and brothers, in light of this threefold work of the Holy Spirit, we become aware of the meaning of our Chrism Mass and we also know the meaning of Christ's death on the Cross. His resurrection is the coming of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not come on Pentecost but on Easter. It occurred when Christ breathed upon the Apostles on the evening of the resurrection: *Receive the Holy Spirit* (h). Yes we celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Easter, but this celebration is a public manifestation of that Church that existed "in silence", that Church anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Let us celebrate, then, this Chrism Mass and in these symbols of chrism and the oil of the sick and the catechumens, let us affirm Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit, Jesus who was sent by God to stand before us an eternal high priest. Together with Christ, this same Spirit has given us other earthly priests who serve the people by leading them to God. My dear sisters and brothers, let us celebrate as a people consecrated in Baptism. Let us offer a Mass of thanksgiving to the Lord and the Holy Spirit who have anointed us as a priestly people, a prophetic people and a kingly people. Amen.

¹ Archbishop Romero was received by Pope Paul VI in the general audience of 30 March 1977. See *Osservatore Romano*, 3 April 1977.

² See "Message of the El Salvador Bishop's Conference on the situation in the country, *Orientación*, 20 March 1977.