

## CHRISM MASS 2018



The oils that are blessed today will be used in the celebration of the sacraments throughout the Diocese for the next twelve months: In particular today I want to mention the Holy Chrism which is used for anointing: for anointing the newly baptised; those to be confirmed; and those to be ordained priests. What does it mean to be anointed? The dictionary says that to be anointed is to be smeared with oil. Yes, we are smeared with oil, but for we Catholics to be anointed means so much more.

The Readings in today's Mass speak of three anointings, or rather of three of God's anointed ones, for to be anointed means to be *anointed by God*. Isaiah speaks of God's suffering servant; the psalm speaks of King David; and in the Gospel Jesus speaks of Himself, *the* anointed one of God, chosen by God and sent on a mission.

All these three anointed ones have something in common. They are all anointed *for* something or rather *for someone*. The anointing they receive is meant in turn to bring God's anointing to his people whose servants they are; they are anointed for the poor, for prisoners, for the downtrodden. All we anointed are chosen by God and sent on mission.



I am joined today by the priests of the Diocese who like me recall the day of their ordination as they renew their priestly promises. They have been anointed by God to bring God's grace, freedom and favour to the oppressed, particularly to those who are oppressed by the enemy, the evil one.

They do this in the celebration of the sacraments. I think particularly of baptism in which we are freed from Satan's kingdom of darkness and brought into God's kingdom of light and love; of reconciliation where our sins are forgiven and we experience the joy of God's mercy; of the anointing of the sick bringing God's comfort to the afflicted; and of the Mass which recalls and makes present God's sacrificial and saving love for us.

And outside the sacraments too, the priest is anointed to bring God's grace and favour to those they serve in their preaching and teaching, and through their tender humanity which the priest is called every day to be more and more a reflection of Jesus' tender and sacred humanity. As we go about our pastoral responsibilities we priests need to remember that when a person is touched by our humanity they are touched by God and receive *His* anointing of gladness through us as his living instruments.

A few years ago Pope Francis gave two images to reinforce that a priest's anointing by God is intended to be an anointing not just for himself but for all God's people. The first was taken from Psalm 133 which speaks of God's anointing of Aaron the priest as precious oil upon the head, running down upon his beard and onto the collar of his robes.

Pope Francis said that the image of the spreading oil is an image of the priestly anointing which, through Christ, reaches out to others, spreading even to the ends of the world. When a priest puts on his sacred robes he should recall that he carries God's favour to all those he serves.



The second image Pope Francis gave referred back to the robes that the Jewish High Priest wore in the Old Testament, robes that were more complicated and ornate than the ones we wear today. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the people he served, were engraved into the shoulder straps and the breastplate of his robes. This symbolised the fact that the priest carried the people entrusted to his care on his shoulders and bore their names in his heart.



When we put on our robes for Mass it is right that they be beautiful as befits the sacred liturgy. But it is not about trappings and fine fabrics to help the priest feel important. It's about the glory of God resplendent in his people and in the celebration of the sacraments. When we put on our chasubles for Mass we should be aware that we willingly take upon ourselves the joys and the hopes, the grief and the sorrows of the people entrusted to our spiritual care; we hold their names and faces in our heart as we present them to God.

Some years ago as a Parish Priest I came to notice that many people began their conversations with me by saying "Father, I know you're busy, but can I have a few moments, ... Father, can I tell you about my problem, ... Father, can I tell you what's worrying me, ... Father, can I ask you for prayers, ... Father, can you hear my confession, ... Father, can I talk to you? It made me sad that I was going about my day in such a way that my people thought I might not have time for them.

Yes, I was busy - and I still am! But aren't we all busy? And no matter how busy we might be, are our tasks ever really as important as the person who needs and pleads my help, especially if it's somebody whom God has entrusted to me?

People call their priest "Father". This is a beautiful thing that I hope we will never lose for the priest truly is called to *be* a Father, not just a functionary. He has received anointing from God, he is not just an employee of God; he has received Divine Unction, he is not just there to fulfil a function.

All of God's anointed, and especially the priests, have been anointed with the fragrant oil of gladness, not for ourselves but *for* others. In order to truly experience our own anointing and enjoy its sweet aroma we need to go out to those to whom the Lord sends us, to bind the hearts that are broken and set the hearts that are captive free.

