



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Holy Thursday, 12 April 2001

1. "*Spiritus Domini super me, eo quod unxerit Dominus me* - The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me" (Is 61: 1).

These verses from the Book of Isaiah have the same theme as the Chrism Mass. Our attention focuses on the *anointing*, since in a little while the oil of catechumens, the oil of the sick and chrism will be blessed.

This morning we are taking part in a special celebration in the sign of the "oil of gladness" (Ps 44: 8). It is a feast of the People of God, who fix their gaze today on the mystery of the anointing, which marks the life of every Christian, from the day of his Baptism.

It is the special feast of all of us, dear and venerable brothers in the priesthood, ordained priests to serve the Christian people. I cordially thank you for gathering in such large numbers: around the altar of the *Confessio* of St Peter. You represent the presbyterate of Rome and, in a certain sense, of the world.

We celebrate the Chrism Mass on the threshold of the Easter Triduum, the centre and culmination of the liturgical year. This evocative rite draws light as it were from the Upper Room, that is, from the mystery of Christ the Priest, who consecrates himself at the Last Supper, anticipating the bloody sacrifice of Golgotha. *The sacred anointing flows from the Eucharistic Table*. The divine Spirit fills the house with his mystical fragrance (cf. Jn 12: 3), that is, he fills the Church and gives priests in particular *a share in the consecration* of Jesus (cf. Opening Prayer).

2. "*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo* - *I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever*"

(Responsorial Psalm).

Deeply renewed by the experience of the Jubilee that has recently ended, we have entered the third millennium with the words of the Psalm in our hearts and on our lips: "I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever". Every baptized person and every Christian community are called to praise and bear witness to God's merciful love *by holiness of life*. "This is the will of God", writes the Apostle Paul, "your sanctification" (1 Thes 4: 3). And the Second Vatican Council explains: "all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 40).

This fundamental truth, which should be given priority in pastoral matters, concerns primarily us Bishops and you, beloved priests. Before our "doing", it calls into question our "being". "You shall be holy", says the Lord, "for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lv 19: 2); but we could add: "*Be holy, so that the people whom God has entrusted to you may be holy*". The holiness of the flock does not of course derive from that of the Pastor, but there is no doubt that it is fostered, encouraged and nourished by it.

In the *Letter* which I addressed to priests as I do every year for Holy Thursday, I said that this "special day of our vocation, calls us to reflect above all 'on who we are', and in particular on our journey to holiness. It is from this source too that our apostolic zeal will flow" (n. 6).

I wanted to accentuate the fact that the priestly vocation is "a mystery of mercy" (*ibid.*, n. 7). Like Peter and Paul, we know we are unworthy of so great a gift. Therefore we do not cease to feel wonder and gratitude before God for the gratuitousness with which he chose us, for the trust he places in us, for the forgiveness he never refuses us (*cf. ibid.*, n. 6).

3. In this spirit, dear brothers, we will shortly renew our *priestly promises*. This is a rite that acquires fullness of value and significance precisely as an expression of the journey of holiness, to which the Lord has called us on the path of the priesthood. It is a journey which each one makes in a very personal way, known only to God, who searches and knows hearts. However in today's liturgy, the Church offers us the consoling opportunity to be united, to sustain one another at the moment when we repeat in unison: "I do".

This fraternal solidarity can only become a concrete commitment to bearing each other's burdens in the ordinary circumstances of life and in the ministry. Indeed if it is true that no one can become holy *in place* of another, it is also true that everyone can and must become holy *with* and *for* others, after Christ's example.

Is not personal holiness nourished by that *spirituality of communion*, which must always precede and accompany charitable initiatives in practice? (*cf. Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 43). To teach this to the faithful, we Pastors are asked to bear a consistent witness to it. In this regard the Chrism

Mass acquires extraordinary eloquence. In fact, of all the celebrations of the liturgical year, it best reveals the bond of communion that exists between Bishops and priests and among priests with one another: it is a sign that the Christian people expect and appreciate with faith and affection.

4. "*Vos autem sacerdotes Domini vocabimini, ministri Dei nostri, dicetur vobis* - you shall be called priests of the Lord, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God" (Is 61: 6).

In this way the prophet Isaiah addresses the Israelites, prophesying the messianic times in which all the members of the People of God would receive the priestly, prophetic and royal dignity through the work of the Holy Spirit. All this was fulfilled in Christ with the New Covenant. Jesus passed on to his disciples the *anointing* received from his Father, that is, the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" which made him Messiah and Lord. He communicates this same Spirit to them; thus his mystery of salvation extends its effectiveness to the ends of the earth.

Today, dear brothers in the priesthood, we gratefully commemorate the sacramental anointing we have received, and at the same time, we renew our commitment to *spread always and everywhere the good fragrance of Christ*. (cf. Prayer after Communion).

May we be supported by the Mother of Christ, the Mother of priests, whom the litanies address with the title of "*Spiritual Vessel*". May Mary obtain for us, fragile clay vessels, to be filled with the divine anointing. May she help us never to forget that the Spirit of the Lord "sent us to proclaim the glad message to the peoples". Docile to the Spirit of Christ, we will be faithful ministers of his Gospel. For ever and ever. Amen!