



The Holy See

CHRISMAL MASS *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II* Holy Thursday, 28 March 2002

1. *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me"* (Is 61,1).

The words of the prophet Isaiah are the dominant motif of the Chrism Mass, that on Holy Thursday morning in every diocese sees the entire presbyterate gathered round the bishop. In the course of this solemn rite, that takes place at the beginning of the Paschal Triduum, the oils are blessed that will bring the balm of divine grace to the Christian people.

"The Lord has anointed me". These words recall above all the messianic mission of Jesus, who was consecrated by virtue of the Holy Spirit and became the eternal High Priest of the New Covenant, established in his blood. All the Old Testament figures of the priesthood are fulfilled in him, the one, definitive mediator between God and men.

2. *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4,21). This is how in the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus comments on Isaiah's prophetic proclamation. He affirms that he is the One whom the Spirit of the Lord has anointed, the One whom the Father has sent to bring to men and women freedom from sin and to bring glad tidings to the poor and the afflicted. It is he who has come to proclaim the time of grace and mercy. The Apostle, in his Letter to the Colossians, notes that Christ *"is the first-born of all creation"*, and *"the first-born of the dead"* (1,15.18). By accepting the call of the Father that he assume our human condition, he brings with him the spirit of the new life and gives salvation to all who believe in him.

3. *"The eyes of all ... were fixed on him"* (Lk 4,20).

Like the people in the Synagogue of Nazareth, we too keep our gaze fixed on the Redeemer, who *"has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father"* (Apoc 1,6). If all the baptized share in his royal and prophetic priesthood *"to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God"* (I Pt 2,5), priests are called to share his sacrifice in a special way. They are called to live it in service to the common priesthood of the faithful. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is the sacrament by which the mission entrusted by the Master to his Apostles continues to be carried on in the Church until the end of

time: it is the sacrament of the apostolic ministry that includes the degrees of the episcopate, the priesthood and the diaconate.

Dear brothers, today we renew our personal consciousness of the distinctive ministry that has been conferred upon us. In the Eucharist, the divine Teacher has entrusted to us the celebration of his own sacrifice: calling us in a closer way to follow him. For this reason, in today's celebration, together we confirm our fidelity and our love for him, and confiding in the power of his grace, we renew the promises we made on the day of our Ordination.

By using the sacrament of penance priests will make more visible the joy and mercy of Christ
4. How great is this day for us! On Holy Thursday Jesus made us ministers of his sacramental presence among men. He put his pardon and mercy in our hands and gave us the gift of his priesthood forever.

Tu es sacerdos in eternum! (You are a priest forever). This challenging call echoes in our hearts making us conscious of how our own life is indissolubly united with his. Forever!

While we give thanks for this mysterious gift, we cannot not confess our infidelities. As you know I send a Letter to priests every year; this year in the Letter I recalled that: "all of us - conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace - are called to embrace the "*Mysterium Crucis*' (mystery of the Cross) and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness" (n. 11). Dear Brothers, let us not forget the value and importance in our lives of the Sacrament of Penance. It is intimately linked with the Eucharist and makes us dispensers of the divine mercy. If we make use of this source of forgiveness and reconciliation, we will be able to be true ministers of Christ and spread around us his peace and love.

5. "*For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord* " (Responsorial Psalm, liturgy of the Chrism Mass).

Gathered round the altar on the tomb of the Apostle Peter, as we give thanks for the gift of our ministerial priesthood, let us pray for those who have been precious instruments of the divine call in our regard.

First, let us think of our parents, who by giving us life and asking for us the grace of Baptism, incorporated us into the People of salvation and with their faith, taught us to be ready and attentive to the voice of the Lord. After them, let us remember those who guided us in the discernment of our vocation with their witness and their wise advice. And what can be said of all the lay faithful who accompanied us on our way to the priesthood and continue to be close to us in our pastoral ministry? May the Lord reward them all.

Let us pray for all priests: especially those who must work in the midst of difficulties or who suffer

persecution, with a special thought for those who with their blood have paid for their fidelity to Christ.

Let us pray for those of our confreres who did not abide by the commitments they assumed with priestly ordination, or who are passing through a period of difficulty or crisis. In choosing us for so sublime a mission, Christ will not let us lack the grace and joy of following him, on Tabor and on the Way of the Cross.

May Mary, Mother of the Eternal High Priest, accompany and sustain us whom the Lord did not call "servants" but "friends". To Jesus, our Master and Brother, be glory and power for ever and ever (cf. Apoc 1,6)! Amen.

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