

## The Chrism Mass

**Homily by Bishop Paul J. Bradley, Bishop of Kalamazoo**

April 11, 2017 6:00 p.m.      St. Augustine Cathedral

Praised be Jesus Christ! ..... We gather together in our Cathedral Church, representatives of the entire Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo---priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful---to continue one of the most ancient traditions in the Church.

Since the first generations of the early Church, the whole Church comes together each year, joining with the Bishop, to bless, consecrate and distribute the Holy Oils to all the Parishes that will be used in the celebration of the sacraments for this coming year.

This Chrism Mass is a Joyful event that takes place in the midst of this Holy Week which celebrates everything about our faith that is sacred, focusing on Jesus' suffering, death and burial, and leading us to the glorious celebration of Easter, the central Mystery of our Christian faith. It's a celebration that, I think it's fair to say, we all look forward to each year as one of the highlights of this Holy Week.

I welcome all of you here to the Cathedral, the Mother Church of our Diocese, for this Mass which is very much like a family reunion. We come from every one of our 59 parishes, within the 28 Collaboratives, in each of the nine counties of our Diocese to share in this special Chrism Mass. In particular I'm very pleased to welcome our Bishop Emeritus, Bishop Murray-----and I warmly welcome all our priests and deacons---my closest collaborators---those who share in my ministry as Bishop of the Diocese and those ordained to provide sacramental and pastoral care to you, God's holy people. In a very special way, I welcome those who have been designated as the official representatives of your parishes---those who will receive the Blessed Oils and take them back to your parish to be entrusted to your pastor at the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Thank you for being here. To all gathered here this evening, members of our Diocesan Family of Faith---Welcome!

God's holy Word, which we have just heard proclaimed, not only reminds us what Jesus' mission is, but what our mission is as well as members of Jesus' Church.

In the Gospel passage we just listened to, St. Luke shows us Jesus at the very beginning of his public ministry, going to his hometown of Nazareth (when He too probably had a “family reunion” of some sort), and immediately heading for the synagogue, which St. Luke tells us was his custom on the Sabbath, where He volunteered to do the scripture reading. He purposely chose to read a portion of the First Reading we heard this evening from the Prophet Isaiah, in which Isaiah prophecies about the Messiah---the One Whom the Lord had anointed---the “Christos”---the One upon Whom the Spirit of the Lord rested, and Whom the Spirit sent on “mission”. When Jesus finished the Reading, all He said was: “*Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*”

It probably took a minute or two for it to sink in to those present what Jesus was really saying---that Isaiah’s Prophecy was no longer a future hope---but rather, what Isaiah had *foretold was now fulfilled* in Jesus! Jesus is the One Who had been anointed by the Spirit and sent on this Mission to bring the Good News of God’s love to all the world---the One sent to heal the spiritually blind and to free those unjustly bound---the One sent by God to reconcile the human race, divided and deluded by sin since the Original Sin, and to restore the relationship between God and humanity. And of course, we know that after Jesus accomplished His mission in this world through the great Act of Redemption which we will be celebrating in just two days during the Sacred Triduum, Jesus entrusted that same mission to the Church which He established.

It is now the Church which, through the Gift of that same Spirit of the Lord, continues the mission of “*bringing glad tidings to the poor....,proclaiming liberty to captives...., recovery of sight to the blind...., and letting the oppressed go free.*” As followers of Jesus, the “Christ”---the “Anointed One”, and as members of Jesus’ Church, we too are “anointed” by the Spirit of the Lord to share in that same mission.

When we are baptized, confirmed, ordained, anointed at times of sickness---we receive the same Spirit of the Lord that Isaiah foretold, that was fulfilled in Jesus----the divine Spirit of God Who is dynamic---active---life-giving----and mission-driven. These Holy Oils----the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism---accompany all of us on our life’s spiritual journey and fortify us so that we can be faithful as we live our faith, practice our faith, and give witness to our faith as we live our lives in the world.

We are seeing a growing sense of intolerance to the practice of faith in our world that is becoming increasingly secular, which results in more and more opportunities for us to stand up

for our faith. We are also seeing increased signs of violence to formal religions. It was just this past Sunday when suicide bombers heavily damaged two Coptic Churches in Egypt, killing 40 Christians during their Palm Sunday Mass and injuring dozens more. We join with Pope Francis in praying that the God of Love will convert the hearts of those fostering hatred, evil and violence. We pray for peace and an end to all violence and terrorism.

This Chrism Mass is also the beautiful moment in the Church year when we celebrate the Gift of Priesthood, when all our priests----or at least as many who can possibly do so---gather together with me to celebrate and deepen both the paternal as well as fraternal bonds among us. Since the ministry of every priest flows from the ministry of the Bishop, this Mass is the occasion for us to renew our commitment to be united in our efforts in furthering the mission of the Church, and for the priests to renew their commitment to be my primary collaborators as we work together to bring Jesus to our People----as we sanctify, teach and shepherd the People of God entrusted into our care.

In just a few moments, I will ask all the Priests to renew their Priestly Promises, and I will ask all the Faithful here present to pray for our priests and for me. Before I do that, I'd like to briefly address the *Priests*, and then all our *Faithful*.

*My brothers*, I know that each of us holds our calling to be a Priest of Jesus Christ as a treasure for which we are ever grateful to God. The privilege that is ours to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and thereby to bring Jesus really Present to our people, the privilege of celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and being the agent of Jesus' Mercy and forgiveness for sins, the very idea of standing in the Person of Christ---that we are an "alter Christus" for our people---is mind-boggling. We are humbled and at the same time truly joyful in such a calling.

But we also can feel the stresses and strains that can be a part of that calling. This has been a challenging year in many ways, both in regard to several of our own brothers who have had public difficulties, but also because this has been a year of change and transition. We have implemented the Diocesan Pastoral Plan, and have arranged our 59 Parishes into 28 Collaboratives. In particular there have been new challenges for you, my brothers, as many of you have moved into new assignments, getting to know new parish communities, trying to find your new "normals". I take this occasion this evening to thank you for the ways you have embraced this time of change and for your cooperation in this transition. Change is never easy, but as we all know, we need to do whatever is necessary to make sure that we can continue the mission of the Church in providing pastoral and sacramental care for our People. As we

discussed in the recent deanery meetings over these last two weeks, we need to make sure that as we experience the new demands in our lives, that we be sure to stay firmly rooted in our love for Jesus; we need to remain spiritually strong in our relationship with Jesus if we are going to be effective and joyful priests for our people.

The two promises that I will be asking you to renew in just a few moments focus on those two basic questions: your love for Jesus, and your commitment to bring Jesus to your people. We have been anointed with the Sacred Chrism that conforms us to Christ the Head, and we are inspired by the Spirit of the Lord to be His holy priests. Together, Bishop and Priests united in our mission to sanctify, teach and be good and holy shepherds for our people, we will continue to advance the mission of the Church here in our Diocese, and I look forward to continuing that mission with you.

*And to you, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:* This has also been a challenging year of transitions for all of our parishes, and most of our people. As I mentioned to the priests, change is never easy. We are making every effort to keep all 59 of our parishes open, strong and healthy. But with fewer priests, it is clear that adjustments need to be made, and we need to be open to modifications in schedules. We pray for patience and understanding; we pray for increased lay leadership within our parishes; we pray that we can all find ways to give our gifts and talents for the building up of the Body of Christ.

In just a few moments, I will be asking you to pray for our priests, and for me. In addition to that, I also ask you to pray for more Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life. In addition to prayers, I ask you to please encourage your sons and daughters, grandchildren and family members, to listen in their hearts for God's calling to follow Jesus as a priest, or as a religious sister or brother. I'm certain that God is calling young men to be priests; let us all pray that we can encourage more vocations and that many of our young men will respond.

Thank you for your prayers for us. But I also want to thank you for the wonderful example you are as faithful followers of Jesus, doing all that you can to walk in His footsteps as disciples in this world where that is more and more difficult to do.

*Finally, to all of us, Priests and People:* May we echo the beautiful words we heard in this evening's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation: "Yes. *Amen.*" Let us place our trust in "*the Alpha and the Omega...the One Who is and who was and who is to come.*"

May the Sacred Chrism we consecrate this evening and the Holy Oils we bless and distribute, keep us ever mindful of the dignity that is ours as members of the Body of Christ---anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, and entrusted with a mission to proclaim the Good News of Salvation to all the world.

May that same Spirit of the Lord, prophesied by Isaiah and fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ, bless us, guide us, inspire us, and encourage us---Priests and People---as the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and keep us united in our Love for Jesus and our Unity with one another.

God bless you now and always.

Bishop Paul J. Bradley