



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Chrism Mass April 15, 2014

During this holiest of weeks we focus our attention on the saving events that culminated Jesus' life: his passion, death, and resurrection. Is it not striking, therefore, that the readings for this Chrism Mass take us back to the **beginning** of his public ministry, back to his home town, Nazareth? In its synagogue he adopts the program of an earlier prophet: to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

As we have walked with Jesus from Nazareth to Jerusalem, we have seen the many ways in which he carries out his mission – always showing great compassion toward people. He embraces little children, frees lepers from their disease, teaches his listeners about God's love, enables people to see events and persons as God sees them – with the eyes of faith. Along the way to Golgotha Jesus prepares his disciples to carry on his mission after his death, resurrection, and ascension. He promises to give them all they need to continue his creative and saving work in the world – and especially the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We gather here this evening to remember Jesus' mission and, as his disciples, to recommit ourselves to it. As we do so, we bless the oils that will be used in the Church's ministry during the coming year. In particular, we bless chrism, the oil used in the sacramental celebrations of baptism, confirmation, and ordinations of priests and bishops. In each of these sacraments, the chrism symbolizes both a moment and a life of **consecration**. From then on we exist for the Lord and his work. We are set apart to offer praise to God and to bring compassion to others.

During the past year Pope Francis has often spoken about the need to develop a culture of encounter and dialogue. True encounter involves going outside of ourselves – our preoccupation with ourselves – to reach out in love and compassion to all whom we encounter. Moving beyond individualism and indifference we are drawn to serve others in our different capacities – as bishops or laypersons, as priests or consecrated religious, as permanent deacons or parents. Each of us has a responsibility for the Church's mission and ministry – taking God's word into every dimension of human life, embracing everyone with God's love, serving those in most need of our generous assistance. Through baptism we are all members of Christ's body; together we are a **priestly people**.

But this evening I wish to speak to the priests because the Chrism Mass highlights in a special way the **ministerial** priesthood. It is very appropriate, however, that lay people hear what I have to say to their priests because these dedicated men need and deserve the support and love of the people they serve.

My dear brothers in Christ, two weeks ago Pope Francis reflected on the priesthood during his General Audience in St. Peter's Square. As usual, he had three main points:

- Those who are ordained are placed at the head of the community of faith, but this for Jesus means placing one's authority at the **service** of the community as Jesus himself showed and taught. A bishop or a priest who is not at the service of his community fails to perform his duty, he errs.
- Another characteristic that also derives from this sacramental union with Christ is a **passionate love** for the Church. Through Holy Orders the minister dedicates himself entirely to his community and loves it with all his heart. It is his family.
 - Third, as Paul reminded Timothy, we are to **rekindle the gift** that is within us. We do this through prayer, through listening to the Word of God, through the daily celebration of the Eucharist, and through regularly going to confession. We are to remember that we did not become priests on our own initiative: The Lord calls us to become priests.

My brothers, you know both the agonies and the ecstasies of priestly life and ministry. Often you find yourself in the middle – trying to hold the parish or institution together, striving to make everyone feel valued and respected. You are often physically tired and drained emotionally because of the many individual, family, and community problems you must deal with. There is more work to do, and fewer (younger) priests to do it.

Unfortunately, sometimes we bishops may become very preoccupied with crises or problems, and we may seem to take for granted or unwittingly neglect the vast majority of our priests who function well, generously, faithfully – but who also need and miss our direct, personal support and encouragement.

My brothers, I want to assure you in the presence of your people that I do **not** take you for granted. I respect and love you more deeply than you will ever know. If during the past year I have offended any of you, caused you pain in any way, or not listened to you attentively and effectively, I ask for forgiveness. Such offense or pain was surely not intended, and I am working on my capacity to listen more carefully in dialogue.

At last year's Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis pointed out that

The chrism oil is not intended just to make us fragrant, much less to be kept in a jar, for there it would become rancid...and the heart bitter. A good priest can be recognized by the way his people are anointed...When our people are anointed with the oil of gladness, it is obvious; for example, when they leave Mass looking as if they have heard good news [not as if leaving a funeral!]

People thank us because they feel that we have prayed over the realities of their everyday lives, their troubles, their joys, their burdens and their hopes. And when they feel that the fragrance of the Anointed One, of Christ, has come to them through us, they feel encouraged to entrust to us everything they want to bring before the Lord.

My brothers, each day I pray for you, as I know you do for me. Let us continue to love and support one another even as we deepen our faith in and love for the Lord, whose priesthood we share, and for the people we serve. Now let us renew our priestly commitment to continue the Lord's mission and ministry -- to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind -- here in the Archdiocese of San Antonio.