

My brother bishops, fellow priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and People of God in the Body of Christ, The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! Because he has anointed us to bring glad tidings! This anointing is something we celebrate today in a very special way through the renewal of our priestly commitment and the blessing and consecration of the holy oils. The Oil of the Sick to heal us. The Oil of Catechumens to claim us for Christ and protect us from evil. The Sacred Chrism which consecrates us in the Holy Spirit to share in Christ Jesus' own ministry as priest, prophet, and king!

Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic time, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, noted to the priests of Rome that this whole experience was unexpected and very disconcerting. Yet he called upon them to move beyond their self-preoccupations and fears, and to pour themselves out for the People of God! I am so proud of you, my fellow priests and People of God, for I have seen so many of you sacrifice your own safety or comfort to be there for others! I have seen you contend with the isolation and loneliness of this time with courage, renewing the hope of your people! I have witnessed you being faithful in the face of great trial! None of us has done this perfectly, but the very fact that we are still here is a testament to our desire to serve the Lord! Now, let us be the oil that is poured out to heal, protect, and consecrate God's People, as the Spirit renews the face of the earth!

On Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, which we have just celebrated two days ago, we proclaimed something special that is found only in the Gospel of St. Mark. We heard about the woman who comes to Jesus with the alabaster jar containing genuine aromatic spikenard. The woman breaks the alabaster jar and pours out the whole contents upon Jesus, anointing him. She is criticized for this extravagance, for the both

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the jar and the spikenard are very precious. Some say it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. But in this moment Jesus does not mind this seeming extravagance, and he notes that we may always serve the poor (I might add that we always should!)

The scripture notes that this gesture is a preparation for Christ's burial. But there is more for us in this story if we can open ourselves to the symbolism of the Christian life presented here. The alabaster jar, itself something precious, is broken open, and the aromatic oil, also something rare and precious, is poured out upon the Lord. The woman does this without hesitation, even in the face of criticism, and now the aroma of the oil pervades the place where they are. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, if you will, whose sweet aroma hovers over and imbues this marvelous sacrificial act. It is the Holy **Spirit** who presides over all these events in the Passion of Our Lord.

This whole past year has been a sort of passion for us all. So many people have suffered from illness, deaths of family members, loss of jobs, isolation, loss of education, and the feeling of having lost a whole year of life. We cannot deny that this time of pandemic has been painful and difficult. And, although we see signs that this pandemic may be lifting, and we hope and pray it does, we have been called to be like the jar – allowing ourselves to be broken open and to pour out all that we have for Christ! We are like that precious aromatic oil – announcing the presence of the Holy Spirit who will renew the face of the earth! Brothers and friends, Jesus allowed his own body to **be** broken for the salvation of us all, and He has poured the Holy Spirit upon us as a sweet aroma to heal, protect, and consecrate us into His own mission!

The Holy Spirit begets a living Church that proclaims her Lord; a Church that awakens in her consciousness the presence of women and

the call to work in collaboration; a Church that flourishes because it has lived suffering with faith and hope, and knows that in Jesus it becomes a saving cross; a Church in which its priests are signs of hope because they have learned to love in suffering; a Church where the poor play the leading roles of history, where they find their place, where they realize that when they are in love with their Lord, he then gives life, color and flavor to the community among which they are pilgrims; a Church that is committed to the Lord because she knows she is loved by him, desired by him, sent by him; a Church with a missionary appeal, "Jesus, Savior of all people, save them!", because they know their love summons them to the mission; a Church that emerges as a new people, the People of God, the living Body of Christ; a Church convinced of the love of Christ in which its members are ready to give Christ, to live from him, through him and in him; a Church that finds her way of life in the Word, where the horizon is him, him, him; a Church that acknowledges the misery in her members and places her trust in Him who knows how to turn misery into a way of salvation and goodness for its members; a Church that enjoys knowing herself to be saved and redeemed; a Church that lives the joy of the Risen One, bearing the marks of the Cross on her skin. The crucified one lives in her heart and from him she receives the hope of life. A Church anointed with oils that perfume the life of its members, giving off their aroma and penetrating reality around them, leading them to the apostolic work of the one who came not to be served but to serve.

Mary, Mother of Christ, our Mother, Woman of hope: help us to know that we have been anointed and to be witnesses of the one who loved us to the end. ~~Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic time, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, noted to the priests of Rome that this whole experience was unexpected and very disconcerting. Yet he called upon~~

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