



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Reverend Gustavo García-Siller



Homily – Chrism Mass

March 31, 2015

The Church's liturgy – especially the celebration of the Sacraments – uses ordinary things: water and fire, bread and wine, oil and laying on of hands. This evening we gather in faith to bless the holy oils that will be used in the sacramental life of our local church during the coming year. When viewed through the eyes of faith – through God's eyes – we see more than water and fire; we see cleansing of sin and Jesus the Light of the World. In faith, we see more than bread and wine; we see the Body and Blood of the Lord that nourishes us on our pilgrim way. When viewed in faith, we see more than oil and laying on of hands; we see the love of God that consecrates us to himself and brings us healing, wholeness, and joy.

Catechumens are anointed with oil. In baptism and confirmation, all of us are anointed with sacred Chrism. We are anointed with the oil of the sick when we are seriously ill. In the Chrism Mass last year in Rome,

Pope Francis reminded us priests and bishops that at our ordination we are anointed with chrism, “the oil of gladness, and this anointing invites us to accept and appreciate this great gift...the joy of being a priest. . . Priestly joy is a priceless treasure, not only for the priest himself but for the entire faithful people of God, that faithful people from which he is **called** to be anointed and to which he, in turn, is **sent** to anoint.”

Anointing someone, laying hands on the person is a very human gesture but one filled with sacred meaning.

In the Gospel of Mark, which we are reading this year, Jesus approaches Peter’s mother-in-law, grasps her hand, and helps her up, healing her but also expressing a wonderful love for her. Moved with compassion, Jesus stretches out his hand, touches a leper and makes him clean, showing also God’s love for this former outcast. He takes Jairus’ dead daughter by the hand and orders her to rise again – not only a miracle but a gentle gesture of love. He cures a few people in Nazareth by laying his hands on them. Jesus heals a deaf man by putting his finger into the man’s ears and touching his tongue with spittle. In Bethsaida he heals a blind man although it takes laying hands on him twice to effect the miracle. When he encounters a boy with a demon, he takes him by the hand and stands him up – freeing him from demonic possession but with a human

gesture of intimacy. When children are rebuked by his disciples for approaching Jesus, he embraces them, blesses them, and places his hands on them – in the presence of their parents who thereby also experience the depth of God’s love for their families.

Jesus **encounters** people. They are not statistics to be analyzed or problems to be solved, but human beings with names, faces, families, joys and griefs. In each encounter the spotlight is not on himself but on the person whom he meets. He reaches out and physically touches people who approach him and allows people to touch himself. These are simple gestures with profound pastoral implications! Jesus the Galilean was the Good Shepherd coming to seek the lost, to heal the brokenhearted, to announce the good news of God’s kingdom of justice, peace, harmony, love, and compassion. He did this by inclusion, encounter, dialogue, and gentle laying on of hands.

We are living in the age of the New Evangelization. St. Francis of Assisi is famously credited with saying: “Proclaim the gospel always, using words if necessary.” The most effective evangelization is often the example we give by the way we live and act upon our beliefs and values, the way we encounter others, the way we embrace them with God’s love.

Pope Francis boldly proclaims the Lord Jesus and the gospel in both word and deed. He practices what he preaches. His gestures reveal his underlying attitude and pastoral sensitivity, which are consistent with his preaching and teaching. The whole world is paying close attention and learning about the Christian life – through his compassion, his deep faith, his simplicity, his joy, and especially his gestures. He consistently deflects attention away from himself to focus people on the Lord and God’s mercy.

My brother priests, when we lay hands on individuals and anoint them with the holy oils, we do so in faith. Through our gestures and prayers God himself is touching people at their innermost being. God needs our hands – and he also needs our hearts – to embrace all of his children with his compassion and mercy, with healing and forgiveness, with enduring, unconditional love. As we are ever challenged to pastoral conversion, we need to escape the routine of many sacramental celebrations and establish an atmosphere of faith and prayerfulness in our liturgical rituals. This is not easy because every one of us is being stretched to the utmost in faithfully carrying out our ministerial responsibilities day after day, year in and year out.

In his homily at the Chrism Mass last year Pope Francis also pointed out that priestly joy “springs up when the shepherd is in the midst of his

flock. . . Even in those ... moments of listlessness and boredom which at times overcome us in our priestly life...even in those moments God's people are able to 'guard' that joy; they are able to protect you, to embrace you and to help you open your heart to find renewed joy."

At times people express their love for one another simply with their eyes, at other times with a kind word or a handshake, sometimes with a loving embrace – but all of these are sacred gestures – viewed through the eyes of faith -- if their source is a heart filled with God's enduring love for all of us.

My dear sisters and brothers, let us ask God this evening to allow us to see things and people as God sees them. Let us respond in gratitude and commitment to ongoing conversion of mind and heart so that our prayer, our encounters with others, our service of the poor, and our gestures truly reveal God's compassion and love.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe accompany us and embrace us with her maternal love and care.