



**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City**

Chrism Mass Homily
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral

March 18, 2013

Good evening everyone. How good it is for us to be here! So I welcome all of you from the many parts of the diocese this evening to join in this great celebration. Your presence is important and it manifests very clearly the Body of Christ gathered together in communion with your bishop. What a great joy! I acknowledge and appreciate the many gifts which you share to ensure vitality and vibrancy in the parishes to which you belong. Thank you for your generosity and service to the Church.

These words we have just heard in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah and then repeated in a similar way in the Gospel: *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners, and to announce a year of favor from the Lord,.....”* [Is 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9]

Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is upon all of us – given to each of us in Baptism, strengthened again in Confirmation, and renewed each time we gather to receive the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. Like Jesus, because each of us has been anointed, we have been sent into the world to *“to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord,”* [Luke 4:18-19] each in our own particular way, according to our own personal vocation and state in the Body of Christ – so that this scripture passage will continue to be fulfilled through our life of discipleship. We are all a part of the New Evangelization.

Central to this Chrism Mass this evening is the blessing of the holy oils. These holy oils are a living sign of Christ’s saving power and healing presence in His Church. They serve as an expression of the Church’s unity and point to Christ, the true “shepherd and guardian” of our souls, as St. Peter calls him [1Pet. 2:25]. And they express three essential dimensions of the Christian life.

Through them, Christ continues to be at work in His Church – Beginning with the Catechumenate and Baptism, whereby the Oil of the Catechumen prepares a person for Baptism and strengthens them to accept the great challenges of discipleship;

The Oil of the Sick, whereby Jesus sets us free from the chains of our infirmity and brings healing to our body, mind and soul, and delivers us from every affliction;

and the Sacred Chrism, which is filled *“with the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ,”* for it is from Him that it takes its name. It is through the Sacred Chrism that people encounter Christ in Baptism and Confirmation and are given the Holy Spirit. It is through this Sacred Chrism that these priests gathered tonight encountered Christ in the anointing of their hands as a priest and where I encountered Him as oil was poured over my head at my Ordination as a bishop.

Through the use of these oils in the sacraments, Jesus Himself is at work offering sacramental grace to each individual, transforming them for a greater capacity for holiness and faithful discipleship.

Yes, “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, because he has anointed us...*” We pray that the Spirit given us through these anointings truly comes alive in us.

So tonight, we are reminded once again of the gifts Christ gives us in these holy oils. They strengthen us so that we might be able to participate with Jesus in the Paschal Mystery, his suffering, death, and resurrection, and experience the profound love of our Redeemer.

Also, an important aspect to this sacred liturgy tonight is the gathering of the presbyterate of our diocese, your priests, your pastors. Though all of us gathered here share in the Lord’s mission through our common Baptism, through his Ordination the ordained priest shares in it in a special and particular way. I want to take a few moments to talk to them this evening.

My Brothers, the Chrism Mass is always a wonderful opportunity for us to gather to reflect upon our own Ordination. The gift of my own Ordination, both as a priest and as a bishop, never ceases to amaze me; it never ceases to lead me to deep gratitude for such a tremendous gift, a gift to be received anew each and every day. And at the same time, it also humbles me. How profound is God’s love!

What a gift for us to be united with Jesus Christ, both at the cross and at His altar of sacrifice. It is there where we find the greatest source for priestly grace. The effectiveness of our day, the value of our ministry, comes purely and entirely from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ made present on this altar. We must go daily to this altar as poor, hungry, weak, sinful men to offer ourselves, to give thanks, to take nourishment, and to be strengthened for what Jesus Christ asks us to do. It is then, only after we have been strengthened, can we go forth and strengthen others.

It is from this altar where we grow in confidence in God and His love for us. It is from this altar whereby we received courage and strength to boldly proclaim His Word with love and humility, despite any fear and hesitation, making Christ’s love come alive for others.

My brothers, we must always be in awe of our priesthood and ministry. Through it we gain holy insight into the mystery of Christ and His deep love for us, not because of who we are, but because who He is. Like St. Paul, we discover that with God everything is grace, coming forth from the inscrutable riches of Christ himself.

Archbishop Peter Sartain, current Archbishop of Seattle, in a letter to his priests wrote:

“We priests of the Word must ourselves be so captivated by the mystery of faith that our delight in the mystery shines with infectious joy in all we do. The delight is evidenced in wonder, awe, enthusiasm, and love. It is seasoned with the humble acknowledgment that we are sinners, works in progress. It is fed and grows in silent contemplation, prayer, and adoration. It is wonder that literally never ceases.”

Our encounter at the altar with Jesus leads us to seek after His will for us so as to find it, and to accept it, especially in the events of the day regardless of how challenging or mundane they may be.

While on retreat in January, my spiritual director gave me a book to read at my leisure. I found it captivating. It was a called *He Leadeth Me* by Fr. Walter Ciszek, SJ. If you haven't read it, I would recommend it. It is a true story about the 23 years Fr. Ciszek spent in Soviet prisons and Siberian labor camps after being arrested and unjustly convicted of being a Vatican spy during World War II. It is a story about his experience of God and God's will for him in the midst of everyday living among the squalor in these labor camps. "How could he survive?" many thought. By daily Mass, committed prayer, and the fact that each day, to each person in any circumstance, one moment at a time, Fr. Ciszek handed himself over to God to be used as God wished. He saw the circumstances of each day as God's will for him. He wrote:

"What He wanted was for me to accept these situations as from His hands, to let go of the reins and place myself entirely at his disposal. He was asking of me an act of total trust, allowing for no interference or reckless striving on my part, no reservations, no exceptions, no areas where I could set conditions or seem to hesitate. He was asking a complete gift of self, nothing held back. It demanded absolute faith: faith in God's existence, in His providence, in His concern for the minutest detail, in His power to sustain me, and in His love protecting me. It meant losing the last hidden doubt, the ultimate fear that God will not be there to bear you up." [He Leadeth Me; pg. 77]

In other words, a complete gift of self! At the heart of priesthood is "*complete gift of self, nothing held back.*" This is precisely what Jesus has done for all of us – offered his *complete gift of self, nothing held back.* Our answer to do the will of God in every moment requires the complete surrender of our own desires. This is the greatest challenge. But the good news is that we are never alone. Jesus desires to love us intimately each day, wanting to minister to us. Each day Jesus rises and takes off His outer garments, takes a towel and ties it around His waist, kneels at our feet, and asks us to let Him wash our feet. [John 13:4-18] He desires to serve us before He sends us off to serve others. But this takes great humility and surrender. The ministry to which we are called is never, or should never, be done in isolation, as if it is up to us. As we allow Jesus to wash our feet, we more clearly come to understand the mystery of the Eucharist, the heart of priestly ministry.

As we enter into this most holy time of the year, my brothers, my deepest prayer for you is that each day, as we allow Jesus to wash our feet, we will discover more and more that the power of the priesthood rests not in what we do for Christ, but in our participation in the Lord's self-emptying, self-offering on the altar of the cross. It is there that our priesthood begins, finds its meaning, and leads our lives to completion.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mary, the Mother of priests, lead you to the glory of the Cross and help you always find strength, hope and courage in her Son.

My brothers.....and all of you who minister in the Church present here and throughout the Diocese of Rapid City, many thanks for all that you do, for all of your sacrifices for the Church in western South Dakota. Be assured of my prayers and my love for each of you. May God bless you today and always.