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Bishop of Rapid City**

Chrism Mass Homily
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral

April 7, 2014

“Jesus Christ has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father. To him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen” [Entrance Antiphon for Chrism Mass]

Yes, “to him be glory and power forever and ever!”

Good evening everyone. What a true blessing to be gathered here tonight in the name of the Lord Jesus, gathered as the Body of Christ in communion with your bishop and your priests. I welcome all of you, all the priests who have gathered, as well as all of you, who through your baptism, share in the common priesthood of the Faithful. How good it is for us to be here!

Your presence here this evening is the visible sign of Christ’s Body, the Church alive in the Diocese of Rapid City. Thank you for your presence and for your generosity in service to the Church and to your parish communities.

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, and experience the profound love of our Redeemer. These gifts which will be blessed are given by Christ – the Oil of the Catechumen, the Oil of the Sick, and the Sacred Chrism Oil, which represents Christ himself. Used by our priests, they strengthen the faithful so that we all might be strengthened and united with Jesus in our role as disciples.

Tonight, we also celebrate the priesthood, this tremendous gift to which the Lord has called us. So this Mass is a special sign of the unity of our priesthood. It testifies that we – bishop and priests – share a common ministry to teach, to govern and to sanctify the people of God. These three actions of the Christ Risen, who continues His work on earth through us, are central to our priestly ministry and most importantly, they emanate from the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Your vocation and my vocation, in fact, every priestly vocation, flows from His cross and leads back to His cross. The whole life of Jesus was oriented to the cross. The ultimate fruit of His life was culminated there. His cross is pure gift to us.

If we serve *in persona Christi*, [in the person of Christ], this means that we are not just mere ambassadors of the Gospel, or mere deliverers of a message, but we are ministers in Jesus Christ from His cross. The people of God look to us as an *alter Christus*, and they have a right to, because that is who we are... our true identity. Therefore we have an obligation to live in such a way. We have been ordained as such.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon [us], because He has anointed [us]; He has sent [us] 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, each in our own particular way, according to our own personal vocation, called into a life of discipleship, always with His cross in mind.

For the priest, this anointing has made him an *alter Christus*. And this must be lived from His cross. In whatever way the Lord has asked us to share in it and bear it with Him, we must look at our people entrusted to us with the same gaze of love as He. Because our people are in Christ's embrace, they must be in our embrace.

In my chapel, I have a bronze statue that I received for my ordination as a bishop, which depicts a bishop holding onto the cross of the Crucified Christ. It is a powerful image of where I am called to live my life as a bishop. Our lives lived at the cross is what leads to our holiness. Our life of holiness is not only surrendered at the cross, but like Jesus, the fruit of our lives and ministry is culminated there as well. The life of priestly ministry entails loving from the cross in one unfolding act of self-oblation coming through a personal and deep intimacy with Him.

In reality, we only know a glimmer of the Lord's love for us. But He deeply desires to be the focus of our life and ministry – because *“it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you, to go and bear fruit that will last – because without me you can do nothing.”*

Our daily Holy Hour and the celebration of the Eucharist must be the most important elements of our day. I am certain that if my daily focus is not there, I will suffer, my ministry will suffer, and the people I am called to serve will suffer because I cannot offer to anyone what I myself have not received from Christ. Remember, Jesus says, *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”*

This is precisely why the Eucharist will always stand at the center of our ministry and at the center of the life of the Church. It is also why our own personal prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is such an important part of the ministry of a priest. This is where we bring, not just our own burdens, [God knows that there are many in the life of a priest], but we bring the burdens of the people we serve as well. Just as Christ brought the burdens of humanity to the cross, so we too from the cross bring the burdens of those entrusted to our care.

We cannot lead others to holiness if each of us is not seeking after the Lord ourselves. Our holiness derives from, not from what we do, but from that daily, intimate encounter with Jesus at the cross both in our Holy Hour and at altar of the cross in the Eucharist.

Brothers, your parishioners deserve your holiness. I believe that they can overlook our faults and failings if they know that we are praying and seeking after the Lord because our seeking after Jesus will translate into holiness, and goodness, and a true servant mentality. It is my hope that your people are praying for your holiness.

And this is why our ministry can never be reduced to mere administrative duties, as many as there are. Through your ordination, you were configured to Christ the Head, and that demands a lifestyle that manifests a “being with Him,” at the cross, that place where true life, true love and true victory prevails. [John Paul II, *Pastores Gregis*, n.11]

Now more than ever, the situations of our times are very challenging. In spite of the presence of certain signs of hope, as you know, we are fighting against a growing secularization of our world that neglects contemplation and the presence of God, and many people are losing sight of the

Kingdom of God. But we cannot lose hope. Throughout the history of the Church, priests have always had a major Gospel challenge for the society his time. Today is no different.

And perhaps it is also ourselves that we have to fight against. Doesn't it seem like in our ministry that there is always one more thing to do? Do you have that sense? Is that your experience... that it never ends? As priests and bishop, we have all have had that experience – perhaps more frequently than we would like to admit.

But if we pray and minister from the cross of Jesus, then this “just one more thing to do” notion will be transformed into “what a wonderful opportunity to love and care for another soul with whom to share the Lord’s love and mercy” mindset. This is the attitude that emanates from praying and ministering from the cross of Jesus Christ because this was always what was in Christ’s heart.

The secret of true generosity is found in our love for God, lived without limits as a constant response to the love manifested by Christ Crucified. Our patron, St. John Vianney, always claimed that “the priesthood is the love **for** the heart of Jesus.”

Because of Christ, he sought to fully conform himself to the radical demands that Jesus proposed to His disciples whom He sent out on mission: prayer, poverty, humility, self-renunciation and voluntary penance. It is precisely what Pope Francis has been preaching by his own example. And, like Christ himself, John Vianney felt a love for his sheep that led him to extreme pastoral dedication and self-sacrifice. He cried out, “*Oh my God, grant me the conversion of my parish: I will accept whatever suffering you wish for the rest of my life!*” **It was his love for souls.**

We priests must be men who have fallen in love with God and love those whom God loves. We must be men who learn to sacrifice ourselves with and through Jesus for the evangelization of the World. “There is no greater love!”

We must be able to see that in our own struggles God is teaching us to love, that He is drawing out of our depths the resources He himself has given us, so that we will love Him and His people from there. When we surrender to the God who loves us so much, we become more fully ourselves. And along the way, our lives manifest God’s love to others, and countless souls are brought to Christ. Such was the life of St. John Vianney.

Perhaps as we renew our priestly promises tonight, we might pray through his intercession for that dynamism of our pastoral zeal, in the heart of Jesus and in His love for us and the people we serve. If we do not draw from the same wellspring, our ministry risks bearing little fruit! Sometimes it may seem like people don't respond, but in the eyes of Jesus, for us, it is not about the fruit, but our fidelity to Him. That wellspring is and will always be the cross of Jesus Christ. Let us never be afraid to live there.

Be assured of my ongoing prayers for you and the people you serve. It is joy and a privilege to serve with each of you. You have my respect and admiration for what you do in your ministry all across the Diocese.

Also, many thanks to all who minister in the Church, here and across the Diocese; thank you for your sacrifices and your ministry. Be assured of my prayers and my love for each of you as well.

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