



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

CHRISM MASS HOMILY

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

March 26, 2012

Good evening everyone. I welcome all of you this evening to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help for this Holy Chrism Mass. I am deeply grateful for your presence – the presence of our priests manifesting their communion with their Bishop; the presence of the deacons and their wives, and to the many men and women religious who serve our Church in the Diocese of Rapid City. I also acknowledge the presence and the ministry of the many lay women and men present here tonight and the parishes you represent. You are essential in bringing a vitality and vibrancy to your parishes; though all of our vocations are distinctive, we are all one, united in the One Body of Christ. Thank you for your generosity and service to the Church.

After a day of Theological Reflection it is good for us to be here in prayer and communion with the Lord Jesus.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me 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.” [Is 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9]

These words we have just heard in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah and then repeated in the Gospel. Jesus uses the words of the prophet Isaiah to speak of His own ministry: *“The spirit of the Lord is upon me.”* And Jesus said, *“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”* [Luke 4:21]

Yes, tonight these words are fulfilled in our hearing – Jesus present to us and with us here in this holy temple, His Holy Spirit sharing this intimate communion of love with the Father with each of us. How are these words fulfilled? – In the sacramental life of the Church. Every sacramental moment is a personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because they are intimate personal encounters with Jesus, the sacraments of the Church *“bring glad tidings to the poor. They proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; they let the oppressed go free, and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”*

So tonight, this same Spirit of Jesus will be called down upon these oils to make them Holy – these oils that we use in the sacraments, these personal encounters with Jesus. The Oil of the Infirm is a remedy whereby Jesus sets us free for the healing of body, mind and soul, and delivers us from every affliction.

The Oil of Catechumens is used whereby Jesus prepares a person for Baptism and strengthens him or her to accept the challenges of Christian living, of discipleship, bringing him or her to a deeper understanding of the Gospel; gifts desperately needed in our Church and world today.

We will ask the Lord to fill the Sacred Chrism Oil “*with the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ,*” for it is from him that it takes its name. It is through this Sacred Chrism where people encounter Christ in Baptism and in Confirmation. It is through this Sacred Chrism where men encounter Christ in the anointing of their hands as a priest and their head as a bishop in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Through the grace conferred in these sacraments, Jesus Himself is at work transforming each individual for a greater capacity for holiness. Through these Sacraments, Jesus is calling and inviting us to share in His divine life. All of us are called to love and desire, to cherish and nourish this presence of Christ for He longs for each of us to share in His promise of salvation.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, because he has anointed us...”

Tonight is a reminder, I believe, that all of us, ordained and lay people alike, are living temples, sanctified and renewed through the sacramental life of the Church, Jesus Himself, and called and sent into the world to transform it by our lives. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon all of us, because He has anointed us and strengthened us to carry forth the work of His Church.

Though we all share in this work through our common baptism, it is a ministry shared by the priest in a special and particular way, through his ordination, that I now want to focus on.

The Chrism Mass is always an opportunity for priests and bishops to think about their own ordination or consecration. My ordination as a priest almost 18 years ago and my consecration as a bishop only 8 short months ago, both fresh in my mind, bring me to my knees in gratitude, not because I am worthy, not because I have earned it (it would be quite to opposite) but because Jesus is worthy and He has called me to this life, not for myself, but for all of you. In the words of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of priests, “*A priest is not a priest for himself. He does not give absolution to himself. He does not administer the sacraments to himself. He does not exist for himself: he exists for you.*”

My brother priests and sons, our lives as priests do exist for the people whom we have been called to serve. The priest, as you know, because of his consecration in the sacrament of Holy Orders, is configured to Christ, to act in the person of Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, a church for which Christ gave up His life. “*There is no greater love, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friend.*” [John 15:13]

In Mark’s Gospel when James and John approached Jesus and demanded to be seated next to Him in heaven, Jesus asks one of the most interesting, provocative and challenging questions in the Gospels: “*Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*” [Mark 10:38] Remember that when this happened, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, to the cross, to torture and death, to give His life in nonviolent, suffering love because there is “*no greater love.*”

We know that suffering in our culture is avoided at all costs. Our society medicates itself through materialism, consumerism, drugs, alcohol, sex, the internet, and a host of many other ways. The example of the suffering Christ is beyond so many and too difficult for most.

The cultural remedies to suffering are a great temptation for all of us, even priests. But for the disciple of Jesus, this is the only true way to follow Him. That is to be united with Him at the cross.

For the priest, at the heart of our life and ministry, is to seek nothing other than Christ, and “this Christ Crucified.” The priest is called to mediate this love, “*this cup*”, to those whom we serve. As the Eternal Father reveals himself in Jesus, a priest must have his eyes trained to discover ever new, the “glory of the Father’s love” – Jesus, this mediator between God and the human race – so

that His love can be mediated through us. It is Him alone we must seek, contemplating human things through His eyes and through His heart. Through an ardent love for Him, you and I will only then be able to lead others to the heart of Jesus so that they too might be transformed by love.

The Father's desire for us as priests, as bishop, is that we come to be more conformed to His Son, that we live as His Son lived, that we "drink deeply of His cup." This begins and ends in a deeply committed life of prayer.

Prayer is the very foundation of our priesthood, and it is the Eucharist, the greatest prayer of the Church, that nurtures us and reminds us daily of who we are called to be, offering ourselves as Christ offered Himself to the Father and for His Church. And, with that, it means growing in intimacy with the Father through Jesus. In the daily living out our priesthood, we must be men of prayer. It is impossible to share with others what we have not first received ourselves. Intimate prayer with the Lord is the sure guardian of all virtues, in particular chastity and charity. It is the guarantee for effective pastoral work.

And it is important for me as your bishop and for the life of this Diocese that you and I are committed to this life of contemplative prayer, the daily Holy Hour. Jesus will be hidden in the life of a priest or bishop who does not pray, or take prayer seriously. Without a committed daily prayer life, we will not "*drink of the cup that he drinks.*"

What the world most desperately needs today are bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay men, women and children who know deeply of Christ's love and teach others the steps to falling in love with Christ. It would change everything in their life and in ways that we cannot possibly imagine.

My brother priests, "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon you, because he has anointed you to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent you 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.*" [Is 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9] In other words, you have been sent to be the living presence of Jesus in the Diocese of Rapid City, wherever you find yourself. Know that as you administer the sacraments of the Church, you are enabling others to encounter the Risen Jesus in a personal and intimate way. Through your ministry, this passage of Isaiah is fulfilled each and every day, not because of who you are, or what you are, but because of who you act in the person of – "*in persona Christi decapitus.*" This is why the priesthood is such a great gift, never to be taken lightly or for granted.

My deepest prayer for you, my brothers and sons, as you renew your priestly commitment in a few minutes, is that each day you will be led deeper into the heart of Jesus, so that you may always be able to "*drink deeply of His cup.*" And I pray that Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mary, the Mother of priests, may lead you to her Son and help you always find strength, hope and courage in Him.

My dear brothers....and all of you who minister in the Church present here and throughout the Diocese of Rapid City, please know that you and your ministry are a great blessing to the Church, and deeply appreciated and loved by your bishop! God bless you all.