



Chrism Mass

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Tuesday 4 April 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

In 1969, on February 14, Pope Paul VI issued a *motu proprio* establishing the universal norms or regulations for the celebration of the Liturgy in the Church. One of those norms establishes that “on Thursday of Holy Week, in the morning, the Bishop concelebrates Mass with his presbyterate and blesses the holy oils and consecrates the chrism” (31). In this way the pope wants us to associate the Chrism Mass with the Paschal Triduum which begins on Holy Thursday night, recognising that it nevertheless is separate from the Triduum. This is because in the tradition of the Church there is really only one Easter liturgy: it commences with the celebration of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on the Thursday night of Holy Week and concludes with the celebration of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night and the subsequent Masses on Easter Sunday.

We, of course, are gathering not on Holy Thursday morning but on the Tuesday evening of Holy Week. This is the long-standing practice here in Australia, permitted by the Holy See, which has been adopted to make it easier for the whole People of God to gather for this unique celebration.

Every celebration of the Mass is a celebration of the Church, irrespective of how many or how few people are actually in attendance. But because we are flesh and blood human beings, we need opportunities to experience in a concrete way what we know to be true through our faith, as it comes to us through the teaching and practice of the Church. The Chrism Mass, in the Church’s long tradition, is that special occasion when the priests and their bishops reaffirm their communion with each other, and recommit themselves, in the presence of God’s priestly people, to their mission to be at the heart of the Christian community. This presence in and for the community is one of humble service, given to the Church by God. As brothers in the ordained ministry we, together with the deacons, are called to be enablers, the ones who help to make possible, the priestly vocation of all God’s people.

It is because of this vocation of service and communion which we all share that the Church wants us to see the Chrism Mass in the light of the Easter Triduum, the solemn celebration of the Lord’s passion, death and resurrection. Saint John’s gospel reminds us of Jesus’ words – *I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself (Jn 12:32)*. In this way the figure of Jesus lifted up - giving his life for us on the cross - is placed firmly before our eyes. So, too, is the meaning and purpose of this lifting up. The gospel tells us that Jesus died in order “*to gather into one the scattered children of God*” (Jn 11:52). Drawing people to the Lord and gathering them into a communion of



faith, love and service: this is a good description of the vocation of those who serve the Church as ordained ministers. And, of course, drawing people to God and forming a community of faith and are not two separate tasks or goals to be pursued independently of each other. There will be no true communion with the Lord, no drawing near to him, if we separate ourselves from the Church which is his body. And any communion or unity with each other that we are trying to foster, but which does not have the Lord at its heart, will inevitably begin to fray and fall apart. We are being formed into a communion of faith and love so that together we can allow ourselves to be drawn to the Lord as he wishes, in order then to be sent out.

This is why tonight's Mass is so important: it reminds us that we belong to each other, that we are mutually responsible for each other, and that we share in a common vocation. It is only together that we are the Church. It is only when, conscious of all the difficulties and tensions which we know very well are real, we still commit ourselves, as Jesus would put it, *to loving one another as he has loved us (cf Jn 13:34)*, that we can hope to be on the road of fidelity to his will.

And what is his will for us? It is, as Pope Francis so constantly reminds us, to turn our eyes outwards beyond on our own concerns to the needs of others – to become, in other words, a missionary people. When Jesus, in this evening's gospel, makes the words of the prophet Isaiah his own, he is not speaking only of his own vocation, but of the vocation of all those who would claim him as their master. It is good to remember that, when the Risen Jesus appeared to his disciples, he told them that *he was sending them just as the Father had sent him (cf Jn 20:21)*. And why did the Father send Jesus? To bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to give new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. For each of us the urgent task of our faith is to recognise, in our own concrete situations, who is poor and in need of good news; who is held captive by forces both within them and beyond them; who needs help to see more clearly and to understand more fully; who is downtrodden and needs a helping hand to stand up; who desperately needs to know of God's love and God's favour.

This is the vocation which all of us in the Cathedral tonight have been given. Those of us, then, who are ordained might, together with Saint Augustine, say to all our brothers and sister in the faith, *with you I am a Christian*. And then, because of our vocation to help everyone respond as fully as possible to God's call we can also say, again with Saint Augustine, *“for you I am a bishop, or a priest or a deacon”*.

We are all equally disciples of the Lord Jesus, called by him, graced by him through the sacraments, and loved by him with a love that never fails. It is the privilege and the heavy responsibility of those of us who are ordained to put ourselves, humbly and generously, at the service of this great vocation which we have all received.



And so, on this night in a special way, I invite us all, without exception, to make our own a prayer which is used in our Ordination liturgies: *may God, who has begun the good work in us, bring it to fulfilment.*