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Auxiliary Bishop of Denver

Homily/Addresses

Chrism Mass Homily: “Renewing our commitment to priestly service”

Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Denver, CO, Tuesday, April 7, 2009

Archbishop Chaput, my brother priests, dear deacons, consecrated men and women, beloved seminarians and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in anticipation of Holy Thursday, we come together this morning in this beautiful Cathedral Basilica dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary, to celebrate the annual Mass of Chrism in the Archdiocese of Denver. And we are gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ, the Christos, "the anointed one", the one who proclaims in today's gospel, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me." This "anointed one" has come, in the words of Isaiah the prophet in our first reading, "to give them the oil of gladness in place of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit."

I want to thank the archbishop for inviting me to preach at this Chrism Mass, my first Chrism Mass in the archdiocese of Denver, where, as is the tradition here and throughout the Catholic world, we priests, in a few moments, will renew our commitment of priestly service to you, God's holy people, and rededicate ourselves to Jesus Christ, the one High Priest, as priests of his new covenant, in the presence of our local chief shepherd and pastor of this archdiocese.

Archbishop Chaput, in union with his priests, will also bless and consecrate the holy oils: the Sacred Chrism, the Oil of Catechumens, and the Oil of the Sick - holy oils which will be used in the celebration of the sacraments throughout the Archdiocese of Denver in the coming year:

Calling souls to new life in Baptism;
Comforting, forgiving, and healing those who are burdened by serious illness or who are preparing for serious surgery;
Consecrating new churches and altars;
Sealing the baptized in the Holy Spirit and full ecclesial initiation in Confirmation;
And, please God, ordaining four young men to the Holy Priesthood next month.

Through the blessing of these oils we, as a Church, are bound together in unity in the mystery of the sacraments and share in the fruits of the oil of gladness and joy, which Christ himself desired when, through the Holy Spirit, he instituted the Sacraments. In a unique and mysterious way, our archbishop and chief shepherd of this local Church, is morally present in each sacrament throughout the year, as these oils are taken back to all the parishes in the Archdiocese of Denver.

Our celebration of the Chrism Mass today is in anticipation of the Sacred Triduum, the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which will begin on Holy Thursday evening with the Mass of the Lord's Supper and conclude with the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening. The Church makes provision for us to celebrate the Chrism Mass before Holy Thursday, expressly so that many of our priests who have to travel long distances from the snowy mountains in the west to the eastern plains, can be here this morning with representatives from their parishes to celebrate this Mass of Chrism.

The Chrism Mass is one of the few times during the year when the whole Church is gathered together in one place to celebrate our unity in the mystical body of Christ on earth. In this Mass of Chrism, the priests of this local Church gather around our Archbishop to manifest our unity in the one high priesthood of Jesus Christ. And gathered with us are all of you, Christ's beloved faithful, united with Him in the common priesthood of all the baptized.

I would like to recognize in a particular way all of our priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries.

saries of ordination this year, as well as Archbishop Chaput, who today, celebrates the 12th anniversary of his installation as the seventh bishop and fourth archbishop of the Archdiocese of Denver.

The Chrism Mass is always a special Mass for priests because we are asked by the Church in a formal and public way to renew our promises of priestly service and rededicate ourselves anew, in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. We are given the opportunity to recall, in a very personal way, the day of our ordination and to renew in our hearts and in our minds this mysterious and awesome vocation to which we have so undeservedly been called.

I recall very well last year's Chrism Mass back in my home diocese of Wichita, which is also celebrated each year on Tuesday morning of Holy Week.

I remember renewing those priestly promises to renew rededicate myself to Christ and to His Church, to unite myself more closely to Christ by joyfully sacrificing my own pleasure and ambition, to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and the other liturgical services with sincere devotion and reverence, solely for the well-being of the people and for the salvation of souls.

I returned from the Chrism Mass to my parish after the luncheon to make the final preparations to celebrate the Sacred Triduum. I remember that I was getting ready to head out to the high school to hear confessions in the afternoon and my secretary stopped me as I was going out the door to tell me that there was an Italian priest on the line who wanted to speak with me. Thinking that it was probably one of my friends in Rome, I almost told her to take a message and that I would call him back. Well, it turned out to be the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, D.C. calling to tell me that the Holy Father had named me the new auxiliary bishop of Denver.

The rest of Holy Week and Easter took on a whole new meaning for me, and, of course, I couldn't talk to anyone about this for another three weeks until the public announcement was made. The Nuncio did, however, permit me to call Archbishop Chaput, which I did the next day, which was Wednesday of Holy Week and it was the first time we spoke.

It's hard to imagine now that all of that took place just a year ago, but God's mysteries and His providence are a marvel to behold. In the renewal of our promises today we priests commit ourselves to the Church, the Bride of Christ on earth, to serve Her wherever we are called.

As priests, we are Alter Christus, "other Christs," and you, the people of God, whom we serve, are our beloved bride. And Christ calls us to be holy priests, by resolving ourselves to be united "more closely to Christ and to try to become more like him" in every way.

And you, dear faithful of Christ, you deserve to be served by holy priests, priests who are willing to lay down their lives for their beloved bride, the Church. And in the short time I have been in Denver, I can tell you with all sincerity, that you do have good and holy priests to serve you, priests who love the Lord and his Church very much and who love you very much; priests who are men of prayer and men of the Holy Eucharist. Priests who celebrate the sacraments with reverence and devotion, priests who preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in season and out of season, with conviction and fervor, and are loyal to the full deposit of our Catholic faith, and who bring the message of hope and reconciliation and mercy, not only through their words and through their preaching, but, more importantly, by their very lives - these are your priests and these are the priests who are ready to recommit themselves to their vocations as ministers of the Gospel.

It is fitting that in this Jubilee year dedicated to St. Paul, the Apostle to the Nations, and in light of the recently concluded World Synod of Bishops in Rome on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" that we rededicate ourselves anew today, to be heralds of the Gospel and servants of the Word.

And looking forward to this next year which our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has designated to be a special "Year of the Priest" beginning June 19 in honor of the 150th anniversary of the death of St. John Marie Vianney, patron saint of parish priests and patron saint of our archdiocesan seminary, that we might renew our zeal for holiness after the model of the Cure of Ars.

As many of you know, I have been away from the archdiocese for the past six weeks studying Spanish in beautiful sunny Guadalajara. I thank God and the archbishop for this wonderful opportunity and I pray that I might better serve our Spanish speaking people. But, as you know, when one goes away, you risk being assigned extra duties in your absence. And the archbishop has assigned me to help organize events for the upcoming special "Year of the Priest" so I am open to any ideas that you, my brother priests, might want to offer so that we can better celebrate this year of grace.

But in order for us to be truly holy priests we need your prayers, my dear faithful in Christ. In a few moments the archbishop will invite you to pray for your priests; to ask the Lord to "to bless them with the fullness of his love, to help them be faithful ministers of Christ the High Priest, so that they will be able to lead you to Him, the fountain of your salvation." We, as priests, depend upon your prayers, your support and your encouragement, and we thank you for this.

And, finally, we are invited to pray for our archbishop that he might lead us and teach us as he fulfills the office of apostle and so "be a genuine sign of Christ's loving presence among us."

In conclusion, we call upon Mary, Mother of priests and Mother of the Church, that as we renew our priestly commitment and as we make these final preparations to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of her son, Jesus Christ, that she will lead us by the hand to Calvary, and that she might give us a share of her faith and her trust, that through His Passion, Death and Resurrection we might make all things new in our hearts, in our parishes and in our world.

Praised be Jesus Christ. ...both now and forever.