

# Chrism Mass

## Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We gather this evening to bless the oils, which will be used during the coming year in the celebration of the sacraments of the Church. I cannot express adequately my joy at presiding for the first time at this unique gathering in which priests and people from practically all our parishes join with me, your archbishop, in the celebration of the Eucharist at the dawn of the most solemn week of the Church's year.

I welcome each and everyone here; beginning with our principal concelebrants, Archbishop emeritus, John Myers, the auxiliary bishops of this diocese, as well as our Priests, Deacons, Religious men and women and lay leaders from the parishes our archdiocese. I recognize gratefully those involved in specialized ministries in hospitals, prisons, universities, colleges and schools. I greet the seminarians of the Archdiocese of Newark. I welcome all of you and thank you most for your commitment to building up the Church in northern New Jersey and beyond.

The oils we will bless and consecrate will be used to celebrate the sacraments, and parishes are the places where the sacraments are most commonly celebrated. A parish is not established simply by a canonical decree or by a calendar of social events, but by the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments. Parishes are communities of the missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, nourished by the word of God and by the saving power of Jesus, who is the sole High priest. All the baptized share in that priesthood. Each of us was anointed with the oil of catechumens and with the chrism of salvation on the day of our common Christian initiation.

In the sacraments, we celebrate the redemption that has been won for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus, who humbled himself so that we could share in his riches. Each of the oils, which we bless this evening, is a symbol of how the Lord himself continues to act in and through his Church. These oils represent the holiness of the Church, a holiness which springs from the perennial presence in the Church of the saving work of Jesus.

In a special way at this Chrism Mass, we celebrate the consecration which comes with the priestly ordination. Priestly ordination is not the conferring of an academic degree or professional certification. It is a consecration and a configuration with Christ the High Priest, as well as a call to emulate the holiness of Christ. It is not an anointing and a consecration for personal privilege, but for service. Priests are anointed to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ and the freedom that the Good News brings with it.

That is why those of us who are ordained priests are called in this Eucharist to renew the commitments we made at the time of our ordination. These promises are rooted in the hopes and aspirations that first drew us towards priestly ministry. We must never lose that sense of idealism and dedication.

Many things have changed in the Church and in society since each of us was ordained. For those my age and older, the social status of a priest has changed enormously. Many of the functions which a priest used to exercise in the Church have now been rightly assumed by lay men and women. Many of the traditional social supports for the priest have been weakened or disappeared.

This evening I would like to pay a special tribute to our older priests who have experienced rapid and profound changes throughout their lives, yet still remain fresh, continually renewed and indeed personally happy in their commitment and understanding of ministry. Their personal dedication has never diminished. It is shown in prayer, in reflection on the word of God and in the celebration of the sacraments as well as a deep attention to the needs of those entrusted to their pastoral care. These veterans show those of us who are younger how holiness is not about outward practices or social recognition, but embedded in the heart and shared in genuine love and gratitude for having being called to be a minister of the saving power of Jesus Christ.

I would like also to speak to priests whose ministry has been difficult, or who now experience anxieties, even failure. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that you are abandoned or somehow unique in your suffering. All of us are sinners; all of us have our weaknesses; all of us have failed. All of us live in the half-light of our own interior lives and in the greyness of the challenges of the world in which we are called to witness to Jesus as best as we can, while always seeking greater authenticity.

The Lord has chosen each of us knowing our weaknesses and knowing that when we recognize our weakness, we may allow his strength to work through us. The priest is a minister, not the Lone Ranger. We can all take a lesson from Pope Francis who has consistently described himself as a “sinner” – perhaps the most significant element of his self-understanding as a man and as a Pope.

Recognizing our sinfulness is not some sort of morbid introspection or wallowing in guilt. Recognizing our sinfulness obliges us to a life of continuing conversion aimed at developing an ever more intimate relationship with the Lord and an ever more generous response to his people. Those of you who have come this evening as representatives of your individual parishes are daily witnesses to the goodness, the generosity and sincerity of your priests. Even after just a few months, I can see that we have great priests in the Archdiocese of Newark!

Jesus knows us and he loves us as we are. God never created anyone whom he did not love and that love is never obliterated by our infidelity and sinfulness. Pope Francis describes

the Church as a “field hospital” on the battlefield of life, a place where immediate healing and restoration of wounded humanity should be the first mark of every encounter with the Church of Jesus Christ. A heightened awareness of how every encounter with the Church of Jesus ought to be an encounter with God who loves us, should also lead us to a necessary and more profound understanding of the horrendous sense of betrayal felt by those who are wounded by ministers of the Church of Jesus Christ.

This Chrism Mass is a special moment when we renew our commitment to ministry. The Lord will give us the strength if we recognize our weakness and place our trust in him. This is not simply to sit back and leave everything passively to the Lord. Renewal can be painful because it means moving out of the comfort zones that each of us create for ourselves.

By our common baptism, all of us in the great cathedral have been anointed to bring glad tidings to the poor, the Good News that is Jesus Christ. This proclamation will announce liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind. It will let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. Because all of us have been anointed in baptism and confirmation – and some of us in Holy Orders – we are meant to be a healing balm that is poured out on a society that has been wounded by shrill intolerance, carefully nurtured hatred, cynical indifference and widespread fear. Together we will bear witness to Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, be honor and glory in the Church, now and forever, AMEN!