



Homily - Chrism Mass

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Thursday, 31 March 2015

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-3, 8-9; Revelation 1:5-8; Luke 4:16-21

As we gather here in the Cathedral this evening for the Chrism Mass, during which the Oils of Catechumens and of the Sick will be blessed, the Oil of Chrism will be consecrated, and the priests will renew their priestly promises, we are immersed in what we might call the priestly identity in our Catholic tradition. The Oil of Chrism, in fact, is used in our sacraments to highlight this priestly dimension of our faith. At our baptism, we were anointed on the crown of our head with Chrism and the celebrant prayed that, just as Jesus Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so we might live always as members of His body, sharing everlasting life. At our confirmation, we were anointed again with Chrism as the celebrant prayed that we might be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit – and why? So that we might be witnesses to Christ in our lives. Those of us who are ordained priests were anointed with Chrism on the palms of our hands as the bishop prayed that the Lord Jesus, who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, would guard and preserve us so that we might sanctify God's people and offer sacrifice to Him. And bishops, on the day of their consecration, were anointed on the head with Chrism while the ordaining bishop prayed that God, who had made them sharers in the High Priesthood of Christ, might pour upon them the oil of mystical anointing and make them fruitful with an abundance of spiritual blessings.

This long liturgical tradition, which reaches right back to the early centuries of our faith, highlights for us what is an often forgotten but, in fact, vitally important teaching of our Church – that all of us, by virtue of our baptism, are members of a priestly people, sharers in the priestly identity of Christ. On a night like tonight, when the whole Church, laity, religious and ordained ministers, gathers together around the bishop, it is good for us to reflect for a moment on what it means to be a priestly people. That we do so in Holy Week, when our eyes are very firmly fixed on Jesus as He enters into the mystery of His passion and death, is particularly important for it is in the suffering and dying Jesus that we see more clearly than anywhere else what being priestly, in the Christian tradition, really means. As we will recall in a particular way this coming Thursday evening, and, indeed, as we recall every time we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus at the Last Supper took bread, broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, “*Take this all of you and eat of it for this is my body given up for you – do this in memory of me*”. We will recall, too, that



He also took the chalice and handed it to the disciples, saying, *“Take this all of you and drink from it for this is the chalice of my blood... which will be poured out for you – do this in memory of me”*. Jesus was looking forwards - to His death on the cross – when His body would indeed be broken and His blood would indeed be poured out, for us. There is a sense, too, in which He was also looking back, or inviting us to look back, for He was, in fact, describing what His life had been about from its very beginnings. Every page of the Gospel puts before us the image of Jesus as a man whose whole life was given as a gift for the life of others. In His preaching, His teaching, His ministry of healing and forgiving, what else was He doing but pouring Himself out for the sake of others? His constant availability to those who needed Him, His unfailing tenderness and patience with those who were suffering and, at times, very demanding, His refusal to give up on His disciples even when they so consistently failed to understand Him – all of this was the living out of a life of constant self-sacrifice. It was a priestly life, a sacrificial life, which culminated in a priestly death. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us every day of His life, and fully and finally on the day of His death – and now He asks us, and empowers us, to do the same. We are a priestly people, both because we seek to live our lives in imitation of Him, and also, and very importantly, because we know we cannot live this way unless we are deeply united to Him. We need His courage when ours fails. We need His perseverance when we want to give up. We need His compassion and readiness to forgive when we wish we could turn away from those in need and turn our backs on those who have hurt us. To be a priestly people, we need to be at one with Christ, our priest. We need Him to be alive in us.

This is why, in the preface for the Mass of Ordination of Priests, we are reminded that *“Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people He has made His own, but with a brother’s kindness He also chooses men to become sharers in His sacred ministry”*. The ordained priesthood of bishops and priests is the Lord’s gift to His Church. Through them, Jesus continues to be present to all of us. Through them, He enables us through the preaching of the Word, through the celebration of the sacraments and through the daily presence of the priests in our midst as a sign of the presence of the Good Shepherd among us, to live out our belonging to the priestly people of God with fidelity. Only Christ, through the power of His Spirit, can empower us to live this Christ-like, priestly life. Through the gift of the ordained ministry of bishops and priests, and the servant ministry of deacons, the Lord Jesus continues to be present to us and with us, calling us into a deeper communion of love with Him and, especially through the Eucharist, bringing that deeper union to life within us.

All of us, therefore, because of the common baptism we share, are united as brothers and sisters. All of us are called to be Christ to each other so that, together, we can be Christ to a sometimes lost and doubting world. But we cannot do it on our own. The ministry of bishops and priests, who are the living and effective signs of the Good Shepherd among His people, reminds us that we must look not to ourselves only but to the Lord Himself who alone can equip us and strengthen us for this great task. And this equipping and strengthening is the vocation entrusted by the Lord to the ordained ministry.



It is right, then, that, as a community of faith, we pray in a special way for our bishops and priests. This is why the Church includes the invitation to pray for our bishops and priests in tonight's liturgy. May our response to this invitation tonight be a symbol of our renewed commitment to pray for our bishops and priests, not just tonight but always.