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Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Homily for Chrism Mass

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception - Kansas City, Missouri
April 2, 2009

Dear Bishop Boland,
Dear Brother Priests
Dear Deacons, esteemed Religious, and seminarians,
Dear friends in Christ all,

This evening we are gathered around Jesus Christ – the *Christos* – the Anointed One. Sent by the Eternal Father to be the fulfillment of the promise of mercy, He is the long-awaited Savior. He is anointed, marked out, saturated in the love of the Father and the Spirit.

He is Messiah, painted with perfumed Chrism as supreme High Priest. He is full of life and health, holiness, and renewal.

He is the focus of our Hope in the Church – the foundation upon whom we dare to do what we do – to bless and consecrate the oils to be used in His name and by His power:

Calling men and women to Baptism;

Comforting, forgiving and healing the sick;

Consecrating churches and altars;

Sealing the Baptized and Confirmed in their ecclesial initiation.

Please God, we will use this Holy Chrism in the coming year to ordain Christian Malewski and Duc Nguyen, and Brother Pachomius Meade, to the priesthood.

I am happy to be here with my brother priests, ready to renew our priestly dedication before Jesus Christ in the presence of the Church. The priests and I have spent the day reflecting together, and now we gather to renew our priestly promises.

Our celebration of the Chrism Mass today is in anticipation of Holy Week. The Church makes provision for us to celebrate before Holy Thursday expressly so that many priests can gather

with the bishop. Our thoughts are already on Holy Thursday, and the image of Jesus Christ gathered with His apostles, washing their feet, and giving them His Body and Blood as food and drink: commending to them – to us - this wondrous mandate to offer the unending Sacrifice in His commemoration. We who share His priestly anointing must imitate His self-sacrificing service and love.

A fitting model for our reflection this year is the image of St. Paul, faithful herald of the Gospel and apostle to the nations. The Year of St. Paul, and also the deliberations of the Holy Father in the recent World Synod of Bishops focused on the Word of God, provide us an opportunity to reflect on our priestly role as Ministers of the Word.

At the time of my episcopal ordination five years ago – at the moment when the Prayer of Consecration was being fulfilled – the open Book of the Gospels was held extended over my head.

I have reflected, at times, how this was a sign of empowerment, but also of tremendous challenge – almost as a Sword of Damocles suspended over me! I was entrusted with the mandate of living and spreading the Word of God: The Word of Truth, the Word of Life. Under solemn obligation I was bound to Jesus Christ, the living and undying Word of God.

Recall now your own priestly ordination when the bishop – in turn – questioned you on your resolve to “exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith.” This was a continuation of your ordination as Deacons when you were first handed the Book of the Gospel, to be its herald.

You and I, my brothers, and together with our deacons, are Ministers of the Word. Properly speaking the Word is entrusted to me – not because Robert Finn is holy – but because the Office of Bishop obliges me to “teach and lead and sanctify” and this cannot happen apart from the Word.

Now let us go a step further. This Word of God is living and active. It is a two edged sword – it cuts. The Word of God will judge the world. He, Jesus, Word of God, will judge the world. And the Church hands this Gospel to you and me.

In this very place, the Book of the Gospel was placed, literally, on my head. They pressed it

onto my shoulders. You saw it. I cannot deny that, with freedom, I accepted this burden. Therefore, under the impulse of the Word of Truth and Life, you and I cannot be passive. This Gospel is the fuel for the fire that is meant to overtake the world. Can we put it aside – or allow the flame to die away? Just as we took the great Book into our hands as deacons, and spoke the words of affirmation and promise as priests, we must likewise take it into our hearts. Our hearts must be ignited with a more pure and passionate love for the necessary work of transformation in Jesus Christ.

The great missionary Paul is the Apostle of the Word. With the example of his courage, his love for the Churches, and his determination to “go out” to bring a message of salvation to the nations, we must be faithful and fearless in igniting the world.

There are those who might wish us to be silent. But St. Paul says, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel, for an obligation has been imposed on me!” (1 Cor 9:16).

Some may wish to fashion a lesser moral code or set of teachings, St. Paul reminds us that “even if we or an angel should preach to you a gospel other than the one you have received, a curse be upon them.”(Gal 1:8) Too harsh? We wince? Paul goes on, “Am I courting the favor of human beings? If I were seeking to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.” (Gal 1:10)

At times we may be urged to be less forward and not so urgent in our desire to bring our families, or our schools, or even ourselves into a deeper commitment to the faith. But our spiritual **coach**, St. Paul, urges us to action: “Brothers, Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win.” (1 Cor 9:24) Toward the end of his life, he could say, “I have competed well; I have run the race; I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim 4:7)

Paul taught the young St. Timothy to proclaim the Word with persistence: whether “convenient or inconvenient.” He warned him against those who, with insatiable curiosity, are diverted by myths and a misplaced sense of tolerance. Rather, St. Paul urges him, as a guardian of sound doctrine, “to put up with hardship and perform the work of an evangelist.” (1 Tim 4:2-5)

Dear brother priests, the faithful ministry of the Word – the Word borne both of Sacred Scripture and the authentic Tradition of the Church – is our first and exciting mandate as priests. In

a few moments you will join me in renewing your fidelity to all the works and promises of our priesthood. Let us do so with all our heart.

Now, dear lay faithful, have I neglected you in this call to the priests and deacons? Oh no! It is you to whom the proximate work of renewal is given.

If I receive the pledge of your pastors, it is precisely so that they, in turn, will strengthen you with a Word to encourage you. You must make it alive in your families, your workplace, in all the crossroads of everyday society. In this way, alone, will the culture of death be toppled, and remade into a pulsating image of the civilization of life and love.

Ready yourself even now, so that at Easter you will stand eagerly to renew the promises of your Baptism. Meet Christ in prayer. Practice with integrity the sacramental life of the Church and live perfectly the moral law which safeguards the life and dignity of the human person. Affirm the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as the authentic steward of the deposit of faith.

Don't be offended if you are asked to profess your commitment to the Faith. Rather, make this renewal with all your heart. Be faithful! Be fearless! Ask St. Paul to help you to live your participation in the apostolic work of the Church. Jesus Christ cannot be known without you. I say it again: Jesus Christ cannot be known without you. With the help of our priests, I know you too will be fit servants of the Word of God.

In what we do today, and in the days of Holy Week when we walk the path of passionate love with Jesus, may the Church in our Diocese be energized and sanctified. This Anointed One – *Christos* – around whom we gather this evening, has called us to announce His truth. May He confirm us now with the Seal of His Holy Spirit.

St. Joseph, protect this local Church.

Mary, Mother of priests and Mother of the Church, accompany us with your prayers.