

Bishop Jaime Soto – Homily for Thursday,
March 25, 2010
Chrism Mass

Tonight the Holy Spirit overshadows us in the same manner as He hovered over the Virgin Mary. The gentle rustle of His mighty wings stirs our hearts to life and revives our drooping spirits. Just as the world was created from the Spirit's brooding over Genesis's dark abyss at the moment of creation so we huddle together with Mary at the moment of redemption and wait the whisper of the Spirit's wind.

The moment of creation was an act of obedience to Word of God and the Winds of His Spirit. Everything stirred into life at the breath of the Word. So too was the moment of redemption. The heart of Mary billowed with the Spirit's breeze. Her consent welcomed the holy into history. The Alpha of all existence now became the Omega of all creation's yearning. Her docility to the word of the angel gave humanity a new genesis. The Spirit stirred the Word into flesh that then grew in the womb of the Lady of Nazareth.

This same Spirit then anointed Jesus for the mission of mercy as the Lord himself recounts to us in the gospel. He was anointed as the Messiah who would save us from sin and lead us with the crook of his shepherd staff to greet His Father in love. His royal, prophetic, priestly anointing also required an act of filial obedience. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds, "Son though He was. He learned obedience by what he suffered." (Heb. 5.8) This is not to say that Jesus was forced to die. The Lord Jesus wept in the garden of Gethsemane yet His heart desired what His heavenly Father wished. His self-emptying to do the will of the Father who sent him defines for us the priesthood of Jesus. Into this dying to self we are all anointed by our common baptism and confirmation. We all share in the priesthood of the body of Christ, whose head has offered himself as a perfect offering for our sake. We are consecrated by His blood (Jn. 17.19). By His wounds we have all been healed (I Peter 2.24).

The ordained priesthood has the privileged duty to serve this sacred destiny, offering ourselves together with Christ for the Church that the Lord Jesus came to serve. This requires of us, my brothers, a docility to His spirit and obedience to His Word. This word “obedience” can often grate against a psychotherapeutic culture that centers on the cravings of the self. Paul reminds us that the Spirit knows what we want and groans with all creation for the true liberation of the God’s children (Rom. 8.15-27). Our priesthood is buoyed by the billows of the Christ’s Spirit. This Spirit calls us to offer ourselves as glad tidings to the lowly, sacrifice ourselves so to heal the brokenhearted, die to ourselves for the liberty of captives. When we approach to kiss the altar of sacrifice be aware of what we are doing and allow the Spirit to conform our lives to the sacrifice of Christ.

The Lord Jesus anointed us as His friends so that we share in His priestly mission, offering ourselves in obedience to the Spirit’s desire. This divine desire yearns for a world where the waging of war gives way to the waging of peace. The Spirit’s winds stir confident hope in hearts wearied and worried by the uncertainty of poverty. The brilliant light of the Spirit brings laughter to children eager to learn and grow in His wisdom. The Spirit’s wings extend a comforting shadow over the homeless. This graceful Spirit steadies our own resolve to protect the unborn and vulnerable against the reckless whims of a graceless age.

Our priesthood draws its strength from the spirit of friendship that Christ extends us. “You are my friends if you do what I command you,” the Lord Jesus said to His dear friends (Jn. 15.14). As He stood up from washing the feet of His companions he lovingly said, “As I have done so you must do.” (Jn. 13.15) Just as in Peter’s case, this spirit can lead us where we do not want to go (Jn. 21.18). Then, like Peter we know there is no place else to go for the Lord Jesus holds for us the words of everlasting life (Jn. 6.68). We serve a desire greater than our own. We are earthen vessels for a gift that is not our own. We speak a Word that has been whispered into our hearts.

Following the ancient sacred rite, I will blow into the vessel of Chrism begging the Spirit to make it holy so that all who are anointed by this blessed balm might be

consecrated in truth and dedicated to imitate the charity of the one who learned obedience from what He suffered. The Holy Spirit who hovered over the abyss and overshadowed the humble maidservant of Nazareth now blows the wind of Pentecost upon this assembly of disciples. Like those moments charged with the Spirit's initiative and creation's assent the Paraclete is eager for our submission to His desire. Under the shadow of His wings we are recreated and redeemed by the Lord Jesus who shares with us His Spirit. Let us join the Spirit's eagerness with our own and know the fondness of the Lord Jesus who again breathes this Spirit of peace upon us.

We rely on the company of Mary and those first disciples gathered around her as we together ask the Spirit to come upon these oils that will charge our ministry with divine mercy. We pray that the chrism of our priesthood might also be an oil of gladness and fragrant joy for those to whom we minister as well as ourselves through Christ, our Saving Lord.

Obedience to Spirit brought our world into being. Docility to His power revealed the Savior's glory to our eyes. Obedience to His wise and wonderful promptings can renew the face of the earth.