

Homily for the Mass of Chrism
4/14/11
Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus takes into his hands the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He humbly walks to the front of the synagogue and carefully unrolls the ancient text to the part where the prophet recalled his prophetic mission. In that text, Isaiah presented himself as a minister of consolation and hope to a people who had been weakened, sickened, and lost. Jesus went to these ancient words as he stood before the assembly in the crowded synagogue of Nazareth. He breathed new life into the words. With a voice inspired and emboldened by the Spirit that was upon him, he declared anew, the Lord God has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, to comfort all who mourn, and to give them the oil of gladness.

Jesús tomó las palabras del profeta Isaías para revelar su identidad. No fue solamente una misión profética. Esta misión profética traería la esperanza y consuelo a un pueblo afligido y fatigado. Jesús ahora traerá Su palabra alentadora y Su suave unción consoladora a esta asamblea.

There are two important elements to this reading. One was the message of hope and life that was entrusted to him by the Spirit's anointing he had received as he emerged from the waters of the River Jordan. Second, was the charge to take these glad tidings where there were none. What good was this news if it was not given to the lowly, the brokenhearted, the prisoner, and to those mired in mourning? As the prophet Isaiah told us in another part of his prophetic testimony, "For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, ... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." (Is. 55.10-11) The word of hope was given to save a wounded, weary world.

Jesus took up the sacred, prophetic text of Isaiah into his hands making his own the message of hope and the mission of consolation. He took it up not only as his personal sacred task. He made the mission his own so that those who follow him could share in his saving work. What he has taken to himself, he entrusted to us when he offered himself on the cross. We have

been anointed by the saving blood flowing from His wounded side. By His wounds, we were healed so we in turn could be messengers of His healing grace.

El aliento de Cristo crucificado vivifica los aceites distribuidos alrededor este altar de sacrificio. Estos aceites llevarán al mundo agobiado el espíritu de Jesús. Están destinados a los pobres, los tristes, los marginados y los olvidados.

This gladness glistens in the three oils consecrated around the altar of sacrifice. Their proximity to this holy altar indicates to us the intimacy that links their sacred use to the saving work of Christ's body, broken so that we might be healed, and His blood, pour out so that we might be consoled. The spirit, which the Lord Jesus offered as He breathed his last upon the cross, settles upon these sacred oils arrayed around Christ's altar of sacrifice. They are charged with a holy and happy purpose to bring glad tidings to the lowly, liberty to captives, and hope to those who mourn.

This prophetic and priestly purpose gladdens our heart. As we take the host into our hands and grasp with our hands the cup, we are taking hold of that same prophetic mission enunciated by the mouth of Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth. The Spirit of the crucified Christ comes to us from the cross where the Lord Jesus offered up His last breathe for us. Anointed with the blood of the Lamb and charged by his saving Spirit, we are called to bring these oils of gladness to the weary, the worn, the mournful, and the sinful.

The oil of the Catechumen shines with the mercy that gives hope to those seeking to be freed from power of the evil one and all his temptations. The oil of the sick soothes the aching body and the sin-sick soul. These holy oils can only do their purpose when Christ's followers seek out the lowly, the brokenhearted, the captive, and the mournful. This is the power and purpose of the fragrant chrism. The holy chrism anoints the faithful and consecrates the priest, sealing them with the Spirit's hope and sending them as messengers of gladness into the world. Their lives should carry the fragrance of Christ's love to hearts that are broken, to the bodies that ache, the mournful souls, and those held captive. This is what Christ did. We are true followers of the Lord when we continue to announce the gospel to those who hunger for hope, when we bring the oil of gladness to those who are worn from worries, when we soothe the sorrowful, and when the burning oil of our faith lights the way for those lost in darkness.

Los ministros, ungidos como mensajeros traerán la unción sacramental a los perdidos en un momento de angustia. Así los pobres escucharán la buena nueva. Los encarcelados encontrarán la libertad.

As we gather here this evening, Christ's holy anointing flows from this altar of gladness and joy. What we savor here cannot be bottled up or constrained by our own timidity or reluctance. What the breath of the Spirit has stirred in these vessels must find its way into confessionals, hospital rooms, prison cells, homeless shelters, and even battlefields. Wherever the body anguishes and the soul aches, the disciple of Christ is called to bring spirit's anointing and the soothing balm of peace. The Word's saving purpose is not fulfilled until we do.

Until we go to those who suffer, neither they or we hear the word that saves, feel the touch that heals, sense the anointing that soothes or the fragrance that draws us to Christ. The encounter between the disciple and the one who suffers creates the opportunity to have the saving word fulfilled in our presence. That is joy for hearer as well as the messenger.

Jesús es el primogénito de la nueva creación ungida por Su Espíritu, un espíritu de esperanza y caridad. La nueva génesis comienza en cada instante cuando el fiel discípulo de Jesús traiga a cualquier momento doloroso la unción salvador de Cristo.

My brothers, our sacramental ministry is a two-way street. When we anoint the sick, Christ anoints us with His suffering. When we listen to the lost, homeless woman, the Lord affirms us as His brothers. When we forgive the wayward sinner in confession, Christ calls us to rejoice with him. When we bring the light of mercy into the darkness of a jail cell, the Lord Jesus unchains our heart from fear. Standing in the midst of conflicts -- whether social, familial, parochial, or global -- Jesus gives us the peace only found standing at His side.

I have admired the faithful diligence with which you do this, time and time again. Do not tire of this good work. Do not run from these moments. Do not schedule them out of our busy days. The Chrism placed upon on hands on the day of ordination glistens still with that restless grace looking to saturate the world with the wonderful fragrance of Christ.

Pray for your priests. Ask the Lord to endear them with His friendship so that their ministry might be that sweet oil of gladness and together as God's holy people, we can announce God's favor to the world.