



The Holy See

HOLY CHRISM MASS

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
READ BY CARDINAL DOMENICO CALCAGNO***

*St Peter's Basilica
Holy Thursday, 17 April 2025*

[Multimedia]

*Dear bishops and priests,
Dear brothers and sisters!*

“The Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (*Rev 1:8*), is Jesus himself. That same Jesus whom Luke presents to us in the synagogue of Nazareth, among those who have known him since he was a child, and are now amazed at him. Revelation — “apocalypse” — takes place within the limits of time and space: it has flesh as its fulcrum, which sustains our hope. The flesh of Jesus is our flesh. The final book of the Bible speaks of this hope. It does so in an extraordinary way, by dispelling all apocalyptic fears in the light of a crucified love. In Jesus, the book of history is opened, and can be read.

We priests have our own history. On Holy Thursday, when we renew the promises made at our ordination, we confess that we can read that history only in the light of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, “who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood” (*Rev 1:5*) opens the scroll of our own lives and teaches us to find the passages that reveal its meaning and mission. If only we let him teach us, our ministry becomes one of hope, because in each of our stories God opens a jubilee: a time and an oasis of grace. Let us ask: Am I learning how to read the story of my life? Or am I afraid to do so?

An entire people finds refreshment when the jubilee begins in our lives: not only once every

twenty-five years — we hope! — but in the daily closeness of priests to their people, where the prophecies of justice and peace are fulfilled. Jesus has “made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father” (*Rev 1:6*): such is the people of God. This kingdom of priests is not the same as a clergy. The “we” that Jesus shapes is a people whose boundaries we cannot see, where walls and barriers come tumbling down. The one who tells us, “See, I am making all things new” (*Rev 21:5*), has torn the veil of the Temple and has prepared for humanity a garden city, the new Jerusalem whose gates are always open (cf. *Rev 21:25*). That is how Jesus “reads”, and teaches us to read, the ministerial priesthood: as pure service to the priestly people, who will soon inhabit a city that has no need of a temple.

For us priests, the Jubilee year thus represents a specific summons to a new beginning on our path of conversion. As pilgrims of hope, we are called to leave clericalism behind and to become heralds of hope. Naturally, if Jesus is the Alpha and Omega of our lives, we too may encounter the dissent he experienced in Nazareth. The shepherd who loves his people does not seek consensus and approval at any cost. Yet the fidelity of love changes hearts. The poor are the first to see this, but slowly it unsettles and attracts others too. “Look! Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account, all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen” (*Rev 1:7*).

We are gathered here, dear brothers, to make our own and to repeat that “Amen.” It is the confession of faith of the entire people of God: “Yes, it is so, solid as a rock!” The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, which we are about to relive, are the soil that solidly sustains the Church and, within her, our priestly ministry. And what kind of soil is this? What kind of *humus* allows us not only to survive, but also to flourish? To understand this, we need to return to Nazareth, as Saint Charles de Foucauld so astutely realized.

“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read” (*Lk 4:16*). Here we see at least two “customs” of Jesus: that of frequenting the synagogue and that of reading. Our lives are sustained by good habits. They may become routine, but they reveal where our heart is. Jesus’ heart was in love with the word of God: at the age of twelve that was already clear, and now, as an adult, the Scriptures are his home. That is the same soil, the vital *humus*, that we find, once we become his disciples. “And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place” (*Lk 4:17*). Jesus knew what he was looking for. The synagogue ritual allowed for this: after the reading of the Torah, each rabbi could read prophetic words to apply the message to the lives of those who were listening. Yet there is more here: Jesus chose to read the page of his own life. That is what Luke wants to tell us: from among the many prophecies, Jesus chooses the one he is to fulfil.

Dear priests, each of us has a word to fulfil. Each of us has a long-standing relationship with the word of God. We put it at the service of others only when the Bible remains our first home. Within it, each of us has some pages that touch us more than others. That is beautiful and important! We

also help others to find the pages that touch their lives: such as newlyweds, when they choose the readings for their wedding; or those who are grieving and seek passages to entrust a dear one who has died to the mercy of God and the prayers of the community. There is a page for a vocation, normally at the beginning of each of our journeys. Whenever we read this page, God still calls us, if only we cherish it and do not allow our love to grow cold.

For each of us, the page that Jesus chose has a particular meaning. We follow him, and for that reason, his mission has to do directly with us. "He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down" (*Lk 4:17-20*).

The eyes of all are now fixed on Jesus. He has just proclaimed a jubilee. He did so, not as someone speaking about others but about himself. He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", as someone who knows the Spirit of which he speaks. Indeed, he adds: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This is divine: the word becomes reality. The facts now speak; the words are fulfilled. Something new and powerful is happening. "See, I am making all things new." There is no grace, there is no Messiah, if the promises remain promises, if they do not become reality here below. Everything is now changed.

We now invoke this same Spirit upon our priesthood. We have received that Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, and he continues to be the silent protagonist of our service. The people feel his breath when our words become a reality in our lives. The poor before all others, children, adolescents, women, but also any who have been hurt in their experience of the Church: all these have a "feel" for the presence of the Holy Spirit; they can distinguish him from worldly spirits, they recognize him in the convergence of what we say and what we do. We can become a prophecy fulfilled, and this is something beautiful! The sacred chrism that we consecrate today seals this mystery of transformation at work in the different stages of Christian life. Take care, then, never to grow discouraged, for it is all God's work. So believe! Believe that God did not make a mistake with me! God never makes mistakes. Let us always remember the words spoken at our ordination: "May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfilment." He does.

It is God's work, not ours: to bring good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed. If Jesus once found this passage in the scroll, today he continues

to read it in the life story of each one of us. First and foremost, because until our last day, he continues to tell us good news, to free us from prisons, to open our eyes and to lift the burdens from our shoulders. Yet also, because by calling us to share in his mission and sacramentally giving us a share in his life, he sets others free through us, often without our even knowing it. Our priesthood becomes a jubilee ministry, like his, accomplished without fanfare but through a devotion that is unobtrusive, yet radical and gratuitous. It is that of the Kingdom of God, the one recounted in the parables, effective and discreet like yeast, silent like seed. How often have the little ones recognized it in us? And are we able to say thank you?

Only God knows how abundant the harvest will be. We labourers experience the toil and the joy of the harvest. We live after Christ, in the messianic age. Despair has no place, but rather the restitution and forgiveness of debts; the redistribution of responsibilities and resources. This is what God's people expect. They want to share in this and, by virtue of Baptism, they are a great priestly people. The oils that we consecrate in this solemn celebration are for their consolation and messianic joy.

The field is the world. Our common home, so wounded, and human fraternity, so often denied yet indelible, call us to take sides. God's harvest is for everyone: a flourishing field that produces a hundred times more than was sown. May the joy of the Kingdom, which repays all our efforts, spur us on in our mission. Every farmer knows seasons when nothing seems to grow. There are also times like these in our lives. It is God who gives the growth and who anoints his servants with the oil of gladness.

Dear members of the faithful, people of hope, pray today for the joy of priests. May all of you experience the liberation promised by the Scriptures and nourished by the sacraments. Many fears can dwell within us and terrible injustices surround us, but a new world has already been born. God so loved the world that he gave us his Son, Jesus. He pours balm upon our wounds and wipes away our tears. "Look! He is coming with the clouds" (*Rev 1:7*). His is the Kingdom and the glory forever and ever. Amen.