



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS IN ST PETER'S BASILICA

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Holy Thursday, 20 April 2000 1. "To him who ... made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Rv 1: 5-6). We listen to these words from the *Book of Revelation* at today's solemn *Chrism Mass* which precedes the *Sacred Easter Triduum*. Before celebrating the central mysteries of salvation, every diocesan community is gathered this morning around its Bishop for the blessing of the holy oils, which are the instrument of salvation in various sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick. These signs of divine grace draw their effectiveness from the paschal mystery, from the Death and Resurrection of Christ. This is why the Church celebrates this rite on the threshold of the Sacred Triduum, on the day when, by a supreme priestly act, the Son of God made man offered himself to the Father to redeem all humanity.² "He has made us a kingdom of priests". We understand this expression at two levels. The first, as the Second Vatican Council also recalls, refers *to all the baptized* who "are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all their works as Christian people they may offer spiritual sacrifices" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 10). Every Christian is a priest. What is meant here is the priesthood called the "common" priesthood, which commits the baptized to living the sacrifice to God through participation in the Eucharist and the sacraments, the witness of a holy life, self-denial and active charity (cf. *ibid.*). At another level, the affirmation that God "has made us a kingdom of priests" refers to *priests ordained as ministers*, called, that is, to form and govern the priestly people and to offer in their name the Eucharistic sacrifice to God in the person of Christ (cf. *ibid.*). Thus the "chrism" Mass solemnly commemorates the one priesthood of Christ and expresses the priestly vocation of the Church, in particular, that of the Bishop and priests united with him. We will shortly be reminded of this by the *Preface*: Christ "gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people he has made his own. From these, with a brother's love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands to renew in his name the sacrifice of our redemption".³ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.... He has sent me..." (*Lk* 4: 18). Dear priests, these words concern us directly. By priestly ordination we have been called to share in Christ's own mission and today we renew our common priestly commitments together. With deep emotion let us remember the gift we have received from Christ, who has called us to a special participation in his Priesthood. With the blessing of the oils and, in particular, of holy chrism, let us give thanks for the sacramental anointing which has become our portion of the inheritance (cf. *Ps* 15: 5). It is a sign of inner strength which the Holy Spirit bestows on every human being, called by God to fulfil specific tasks in the service of his kingdom. "*Ave sanctum oleum: oleum catechumenorum, oleum infirmorum, oleum ad sanctum chrisma*". As we give thanks in the name of all who will receive these holy signs, let us pray at the same time that the supernatural power which acts through them will not cease to work also in our lives; that the Holy Spirit, resting on each of us, may find in all the necessary willingness to fulfil the mission for which we were

"anointed" on the day of our ordination.⁴ "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of eternal glory". You came among us to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (cf. *Lk* 4: 19). As I recalled in the *Letter to Priests* for today's celebration, Christ's priesthood is intimately linked to the mystery of the Incarnation, whose 2,000th anniversary we are celebrating this Jubilee Year. "It is integral to his identity as the Son incarnate, as God-made-man" (n. 7). This is why this evocative liturgy of Holy Thursday, in a certain way, is almost a connatural Jubilee celebration for us, although the Jubilee of Priests this Holy Year is scheduled for 18 May next. Christ's earthly life, his "passage" through history, from the moment he was conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb to his ascension to the right hand of the Father, is one priestly and sacrificial event. And it is totally within the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lk* 1: 35; 3: 22). Today we have a special encounter with Christ, the High and Eternal Priest, and in spirit we pass through this Holy Door which opens to every human being the fullness of his saving love. Just as Christ was docile to the action of the Spirit in his human condition as an obedient servant, so the baptized person and, in a particular way, the ordained minister must feel committed to fulfilling his own priestly consecration in humble and faithful service to God and to the brethren. Let us begin the *Easter Triduum*, the culmination of the liturgical year and of the Great Jubilee, with these sentiments. Let us prepare to make the intense Easter pilgrimage in the footsteps of Jesus who suffers, dies and rises. Sustained by Mary's faith, *let us follow Christ, Priest and Victim*, "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (*Rv* 1: 5-6). Let us follow him and together proclaim: "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of eternal glory". You, Christ, are the same yesterday, today and for ever. Amen!

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