

**Homily for the Chrism Mass**  
**By Archbishop Patrick C. Pinder, S.T.D.**  
**St. Francis Xavier Cathedral**  
**April 1, 2009**

Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-3, 6, 8-9  
[Psalm 89:21-22, 25, 27]  
Revelation 1:5-8  
Gospel Luke 4:16-21

Beloved, as is customary in our Archdiocese, we gather the Wednesday before Holy Week to celebrate the Chrism Mass. The normal time for celebrating this mass is the morning of Holy Thursday. For pastoral reasons, however, we celebrate the Chrism Mass the Wednesday prior to Holy Week. Tonight, we gather to bless the oils used in the sacramental life of the Church.

The Oil of Chrism takes its name from Christ. This oil is used primarily in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination. A fragrance is added to it at consecration. The aroma symbolizes the Holy Spirit, which envelops those anointed with Chrism.

The Oil of the Sick is used to convey the healing power of the Lord, the prayer and maternal care of the Church for those who are low in body and spirit. It expresses our hope and trust in the healing power of Christ.

The Oil of Catechumens is used to anoint those on the way to Baptism. Its purpose is best expressed in the blessing, which states:

“Lord God, give wisdom and strength to all who are anointed with this oil in preparation for Baptism. Bring them to a deeper understanding of the Gospel. Help them to accept the challenge of Christian living and lead them to the joy of new birth in the family of your Church.”

At this mass we not only bless oils used in the sacramental life of the Church, but as priests, deacons and religious we renew our commitment to ministry in the vineyard of the Lord.

We heard in the Gospel of Luke how Jesus on entering the synagogue of Nazareth announced his presence by quoting from the Prophet Isaiah.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” he said, “because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus identifies the Prophecy of Isaiah as a summary of his own mission. He is God’s humble servant who will bring to reality the longing and hope of those who have little cause to be hopeful. In Jesus, the Word Incarnate, the promises of God are fulfilled. “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21)

“Today” is an important word in Luke’s Gospel. “Today” is a timeline that stretches in Luke’s Gospel from the song of the angels at Jesus’ birth down to his last forgiving moments on the Cross. In Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles “today” is never allowed to become “yesterday” or to slip again into a vague “someday.” It is always a present reality. The word is used with the sense that the Scripture has been fulfilled and continues to be fulfilled. The time of God is today and the ministries of Jesus and of his Church according to Luke-Acts demonstrate that “today” continues.

“Today” is a powerful reminder of Christ’s presence among us to forgive, to transform to liberate and to save us. But it also highlights that the ministry and mission of Christ continues today in this place and in this people. It is the Church

that is and must always be committed to doing, in the power of the Spirit of Jesus, what he did in the days of his flesh. We must be a sign today that God is fulfilling his promises.

My brother priest and deacons, “today” has a special significance for us. The Gospel challenges us to embrace, with renewed vigor and apostolic zeal, the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ that we committed ourselves to the day we were ordained. What Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth is true of each of us. We have been anointed. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us. We are sent to preach the Good News to all who are in any way impoverished, open the eyes of so many who are blind to the presence of God, set at liberty hearts enslaved by the forces of sin.

Jesus announced the time of God’s favor. He proclaimed the reign of God as the fulfillment of God’s hope, desire and intention for the world. As priests and deacons of Christ we share in his ministry and mission. The mission with which we have been entrusted is one that calls us to be proclaimers of that very same good news. In fact, it is Christ who proclaims it through us. When so much darkness hangs over our world we must be bearers of good news and heralds of hope. The Christian approach to life is always a hopeful optimistic approach. This hope and optimism is based not on some fantasy, but paradoxically, in the Cross of Jesus Christ in which we are called to share.

My brothers, being men of hope demands that we cultivate a strong spiritual life, a deep personal relationship with the Lord. Our fidelity to prayer, Eucharist, Sacrament of Reconciliation, ongoing study, devotions, spiritual direction and *lectio divina*, are directed to fostering this interior hope within us. It means uniting ourselves more fully to the one who is the source of our hope. Only in this way can we take Christ and his Gospel to men and women.

In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus announced that in him, the promises of God find fulfillment: “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” We must bear witness to the world that humanity’s fulfillment and greatness is to be found in Christ and not apart from him! **“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5b). We must proclaim the bold message that to reject God is to exchange light for darkness, love and generosity for hatred and greed, tranquility and peace for violence and war, hope for despair, life for death!

The message we must proclaim is that despite human progress and ingenuity our world will be empty in spirit, mean in its ambition, improperly formed in its conscience, if it is not under the aegis of faith in God.

Preaching Christ as the one in whom humanity finds fulfillment demands that we live a life close to God. Again, this is why our faithful and devout celebration of the Eucharist is so important. Christ must be our source of fulfillment! I recall some words of Pope Benedict addressed to priests: “The world needs God – not just any god but the God of Jesus Christ, the God who made himself flesh and blood, who loved us to the point of dying for us, who rose and created within himself room for [humanity]. This God must live in us and we in him. This is our priestly call: only in this way can our action as priests bear fruit” (Chrism Mass 2006).

Paul VI, of happy memory wrote, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi n. 41*). My dear brothers, if we are to preach Christ as the fulfillment of humanity, then Christ must be the fulfillment of our lives.

My sisters and brothers, as members of the faithful, you also share in Christ’s mission and ministry. When the Church insisted that your mission is to penetrate

and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the gospel (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) it is highlighting your role in the mission of Christ. Baptized into Christ, your God-given duty is to proclaim the Good News, that is, Christ. You have been anointed to bear witness to the power, beauty, the truth and the love of God in your sphere of life. In your life as religious sisters, in your marriage and families, in your school and workplaces, in all that you do and are, you are Christ's witnesses. This witness calls for extraordinary courage in a society not always open to Christ and his message.

As your bishop, priests, deacons and religious sisters we stand before you at this Mass to renew our dedication to Christ as his priests and deacons of the new covenant. We will renew our commitment to unite ourselves more closely to Christ and to strive to become more like him through sacrifice. We will affirm our promises to preach the Gospel and explain the faith, to celebrate the liturgy faithfully and reverently, to model our lives on the mystery of the Lord's cross. Beloved, pray for us! And join us in this great adventure we call discipleship.