



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Thursday, 27 March 1997

1. *Iesu, Pontifex quem Pater unxit Spiritu Sancto et virtute — miserere nobis.*

These words of the Litany of Christ the Priest and Victim come to mind as we celebrate the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday. During this liturgy, which is distinguished by its uniqueness and intensity, we bless the sacred chrism, together with the oil of the catechumens and that of the sick. These oils will then serve for conferring the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick.

The readings of today's liturgy *speak of the anointing, a visible sign of the invisible gift of the Holy Spirit*. In the reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we read: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Is 61:1-2).

The Lord Jesus was to refer to these words of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, at the beginning of his messianic mission. On that day, as the Gospel passage has reminded us, Jesus stood up to read. He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Opening it he found the passage where the words cited above were written. Jesus read those words. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and said: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (cf. Lk 4:16-21).

2. We must transpose this "today" of Nazareth to *Holy Thursday*, which we are now celebrating. On this day, with Holy Mass in *Cena Domini*, the Church begins the *Triduum Sacrum*, the three holy days that make Christ's paschal mystery present.

Holy Thursday is the day of the institution of the Eucharist and, together with it, the sacrament of the priesthood. These seem to indicate the words of Revelation, re-echoed in the second reading in a special way: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever" (Rv 1:5-6). This doxology is addressed to Christ, "priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek" (cf. Heb 5:6). Melchizedek was king and priest of the Most High God. He did not offer living beings in sacrifice, but bread and wine. In the Upper Room Christ instituted the Eucharist in which, under the appearances of bread and wine, he made the sacrifice of his death on the Cross present until the end of time.

The Church continuously renews in an unbloody manner the bloody sacrifice of her Lord, the immolation of his Body and his Blood. Looking with the eyes of faith, all those who participate in the Eucharist know that they are taking part mystically in the sacrifice of the Cross which culminated in the piercing of Christ's side by a Roman soldier. St John, re-echoing the prophet Zechariah, writes in his Gospel: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37); and in Revelation: "every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Rv 1:7).

3. Dear brother priests, Holy Thursday is a special day for our priesthood. It is the feast of its institution. For this reason all the Bishops, in their respective Dioceses dispersed throughout the world, will concelebrate the Eucharistic liturgy with the priests of their communities. The Bishop of Rome also does it. With our souls full of gratitude, let us renew together the promises we made on the day of our ordination, when we received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that the grace of that anointing will never leave us and that it will comfort us. Indeed, may it accompany us every day of our ministry so that, faithful to Christ who has called us, we may serve the Christian people with apostolic zeal and reach the end of our days vigilant and active.

"Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again".

Christ, you are "the Alpha and the Omega ... who is and who was and who is to come" (Rv 1:8).

"Amen!".