



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II** *Vatican Basilica*

Holy Thursday, 8 April 2004

1. "*The supreme High Priest of the new and eternal covenant*". This is how Jesus appears to us in a most special way at today's holy Chrism Mass which reveals the deep bond that exists between the Eucharist and the ministerial Priesthood. Christ is the High Priest of that New Covenant, already prefigured by the Prophet of the Babylonian exile (cf. Is 61: 1-3). In him the ancient prophecy is fulfilled, as he himself proclaims in the Synagogue of Nazareth at the very beginning of his public life (cf. Lk 4: 21). The promised Messiah, the "Anointed One of the Lord", was to bring to completion on the Cross the definitive liberation of men and women from the ancient slavery of the Evil One. And by rising on the third day, he was to usher in the life that no longer recognizes death.

2. "*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*" (Lk 4: 21). The "today" of the Gospel is renewed in a very special way during this *Chrism Mass* which is a true prelude to the Easter Triduum. If the Mass of the *Lord's Supper* accentuates the mystery of the Eucharist and the presentation of the new commandment of love, this Mass that we are celebrating, known as the "Chrism Mass", gives prominence to the gift of the ministerial priesthood.

I wanted to stress this close unity that exists between the Eucharist and the Priesthood in my *Letter to Priests*, which I addressed to them precisely for Holy Thursday. The Eucharist and the Priesthood are "two sacraments... born together and their destiny is indissolubly linked until the end of the world" (n. 3).

3. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, I greet you all with affection and I thank you for coming in such large numbers and for your devout participation. In a little while we will renew our priestly promises, thanking God for the gift of our Priesthood. We will also reassert our firm determination always to be a more and more faithful image of Christ, the High Priest. He, the Good Shepherd, calls us to follow his example and day after day to offer our life for the salvation of the flock he has entrusted to our care.

How is it not possible to think back, full of emotion, to the enthusiasm of the first "I am" that we spoke on the day of our priestly Ordination? We replied to the one who asked, "Are you resolved" to work for his Kingdom: "I am". We must repeat it every day, in the knowledge that we are sent to serve the community of the saved in a special capacity *in persona Christi*.

The "gift and mystery" that we have received is truly extraordinary. Our daily experience teaches us that it should be preserved through a steadfast attachment to Christ, fostered by constant prayer. The Christian people want to see us first and foremost as "men of prayer". What we say and the way we act must enable those who meet us to experience God's faithful and merciful love.

4. Dear Brothers and Sisters, today's Chrism Mass sees the Christian people in every diocese gathered around their Bishop and the entire presbyterate. It is a solemn, intensely meaningful celebration during which the sacred Chrism and the oils of the sick and of the catechumens are blessed. This rite invites us to contemplate Christ, who put on our human frailty and made himself the instrument of universal salvation. In his image, every believer, filled with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is "consecrated" to become an offering pleasing to God.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ the High Priest, who closely cooperated in the work of the redemption, help us priests portray ever more faithfully in our lives and in our ecclesial service the image of her Son Jesus. May she make all Christians more and more aware of the vocation to which each one is called, so that the Church, nourished by the Word and made holy by the sacraments, may continue carrying out to the full her mission in the world.

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