

**Chrism Mass  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
March 22, 2016**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for the annual celebration of the Chrism Mass for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Clergy, religious, and laity from throughout the diocese are all gathered here, offering a rich expression of the unity and diversity which characterizes this local Church.

Our liturgy this evening has several elements which distinguish it from other Masses. We have the blessing of the oils of the sick and catechumens, the consecration of the Sacred Chrism, and the renewal of the promises of our priests. With all of these elements, one might wonder how it is that this liturgy has come to be called the Chrism Mass. I would like to suggest that it is the Sacred Chrism that serves to unite all of these various elements together into one rich expression of faith.

A helpful image to demonstrate this unity is that of a triangle. The triangle, as you know, starts with a point at the top and slopes downward

diagonally, occupying a greater amount of space as it goes down. In the case of the Sacred Chrism, it too starts with a single point, as it is my role as the bishop of the diocese to do the prayer of consecration over the oil. You will notice, however, that the priests who are here in the sanctuary also assist me in this prayer, signifying the relationship that they have with me in collaborating with me in carrying out the priestly ministry entrusted to me as the shepherd of this local church, a collaboration which begins on the day of their ordination through the laying on of the bishop's hands and the anointing with this same Sacred Chrism.

The Sacred Chrism consecrated tonight will then be used in parishes throughout our diocese, particularly as the priests and deacons administer the Sacrament of Baptism. Here we see the connection with the Oil of Catechumens, as it is used in preparation for the reception of Baptism. Immediately after they are washed clean in the waters of Baptism, the newly baptized are consecrated with the Sacred Chrism as a sign of their entrance into the Body of Christ which is the Church. As they are being anointed with the Sacred Chrism, the priest or deacon says, "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints with the chrism of

salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of His body, sharing everlasting life. Amen.” We see, then, how the Sacred Chrism “flows” down from the top, spreading out and uniting us together in this bond of God’s grace.

This image of the triangle has traditionally been used when describing the Church. In particular, the image works well in describing the role of authority in the Church as it comes down from God through the shepherds of the Church, to the priests, and then down to the lay faithful. After the Second Vatican Council, however, some people scoffed at the triangle as an image for the Church, claiming that it focused too much on the hierarchy without fully appreciating the Council’s insightful teaching on the Church as the People of God, a concept which seems to suggest more unity and equality throughout the Body of Christ.

Instead of doing away with a hierarchical, top-down view of the Church, the Council’s teaching actually serves to support this image. It might help, however, to see it from a slightly different perspective by inverting the triangle to where the point is at the bottom, opening as it goes upward. This view shows that our authority as members of the clergy is ordered toward our serving you to assist you in your growth in holiness.

In other words, the consecration that we receive in the Sacrament of Holy Orders is meant to support you in the consecration that you receive in Baptism and Confirmation, thus highlighting the unity that exists among us. This unity begins with Baptism and is sealed in the Sacrament of Confirmation, as the bishop anoints the forehead of the candidate with the Sacred Chrism, saying, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Seeing the Church from this perspective helps us to better understand the role of the ministerial priesthood as it relates to the rest of the faithful. When the priests renew their priestly promises after this homily, we need not see it as something exclusive, by which we set ourselves apart from the rest of the faithful, but rather as a pledge of to serve the faithful. While it is true that our role as ministerial priests is indeed essentially different and unique from the laity's role as members of the common priesthood of the faithful, this difference is always at the service of unity, never division.

I will then ask each of you to pray for your priests, that they may be "faithful as ministers of Christ, the High Priest, so that they may lead you to Him, who is the source of salvation."<sup>1</sup> Your prayerful response will

attest to the fact that you see your priests in this way, as men consecrated to be of service to you and your journey toward eternal life.

To my brother priests, I want to encourage you to be renewed in this understanding of our relationship to the people of God, that we are men of service, “following Christ the Head and Shepherd, not seeking any gain, but moved only by zeal for souls.”<sup>2</sup> It is our great privilege to be a part of the foundation of this triangle which supports our people in their pursuit of holiness and lives of virtue.

Letting our hearts be moved by our encounter with the people whom we serve can be an exhausting task, and so the image of the inverted triangle should resonate with us. We sometimes feel the weight of all that our people experience coming down upon us. But we must not let ourselves be discouraged. Rather, we are called to see that this load that we help our people to carry is always ordered toward their growth in holiness. We must also never forget that as priests, this offering of ourselves in this role of service is *our* unique path to holiness, for it is the path that the Lord has chosen for us to get to Heaven.

As we continue our journey through Holy Week, our attention is fixed on Jesus, our eternal high priest. We see how He willingly bears the

Cross for our sins and we are all reminded, clergy and laity alike, that we never bear the burden of this life alone, but that Christ Himself is there to help us, allowing us to carry only that portion which He knows that we can handle.

The fact that we are never alone, even in our sicknesses and infirmities, is manifested clearly in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. As the priest anoints the forehead of the sick person, he says, "Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit," and then anointing the sick person's hands, he says, "May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up."

Let us continue to pray for one another and support one another in the various roles entrusted to us through the consecration that we have received in our particular state in life. May our reception of the Eucharist this evening strengthen our unity and banish every form of division that hinders us from being the People of God, called to journey together on this path of discipleship and stewardship as we work to build up the Kingdom of God in this diocese and throughout the world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Missal, The Chrism Mass, no. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*