



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II* Holy Thursday, 17 April 2003

1. *"By your Holy Spirit you anointed your only Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant"*.

These words that we will shortly hear in the *Preface* are *an appropriate catechesis on the Priesthood of Christ*. He is the Supreme Pontiff of future benefits, who desired to perpetuate his Priesthood in the Church through the service of ordained ministers, to whom he entrusted the task of preaching the Gospel and of celebrating the Sacraments of salvation.

This evocative celebration on Holy Thursday morning, which sees Priests gathered around the altar with their Bishop, constitutes in a certain sense an "introduction" to the holy Triduum of Easter.

During it, the Oils and Chrism are blessed which will be used for the anointing of catechumens, for the comfort of the sick and for the conferral of Confirmation and holy Orders.

The Oils and Chrism, closely linked to the Paschal Mystery, effectively contribute to the renewal of the life of the Church through the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit, through these sacramental signs, never ceases to sanctify the Christian people.

2. *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Lk 4: 21). The Gospel passage just proclaimed in our assembly takes us back to the synagogue of Nazareth where Jesus, opening the scroll of Isaiah, began to read: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"* (Lk 4: 18). He applies the Prophet's oracle to himself, concluding: *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled"* (v. 21).

Every time the liturgical assembly gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, *this "today" is actualized*. The mystery of Christ, the single and supreme High Priest of the new and eternal Covenant, is made present and efficacious.

In this light, we understand better the value of our priestly ministry. The Apostle invites us to revive

ceaselessly the gift of God received through the imposition of hands (cf. II Tim 1: 6), sustained by the comforting certainty that the One who has begun this work in us will bring it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 1: 6).

Your Eminences, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, dear Priests, I greet you with affection. Today, with the Holy Chrism Mass, we commemorate this *great truth that directly concerns us*. Christ has called us, in a special way, to share in his Priesthood. Every vocation to the priestly ministry is an *extraordinary gift* of God's love and, at the same time, a *profound mystery* which concerns the inscrutable divine designs and the depths of the human conscience.

3. "*Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord*" (Responsorial Psalm). With hearts filled with gratitude, we will shortly be renewing our priestly promises. This rite takes our minds and hearts back to the unforgettable day on which we made *the commitment to be closely united to Christ*, the model of our priesthood, and to be *faithful stewards of God's mysteries*, not allowing human interest to guide us, but only love for God and our neighbour.

Dear Brothers in the priesthood, have we remained faithful to these promises? Never let the spiritual enthusiasm of priestly Ordination be extinguished within us. And you, beloved faithful, pray for priests so that they may be attentive stewards of the gifts of divine grace, especially of God's mercy in the sacrament of Confession and of the Bread of life in the Eucharist, the living memorial of the death and Resurrection of Christ.

4. "*From generation to generation I will announce his truth*" (Communion Antiphon). Every time the Eucharistic Sacrifice is celebrated in the liturgical assembly, *the "truth" of Christ's death and Resurrection is renewed*. It is what we will do with special emotion this evening as we relive the Last Supper of the Lord. To emphasize the *timeliness of the great commemoration of redemption*, during the Mass *of the Lord's Supper* I will sign the Encyclical entitled: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which I especially wanted to address to you, dear Priests, instead of my usual Letter for Holy Thursday. Accept it as a special gift on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of my Petrine ministry and share it with the souls entrusted to your pastoral care.

May the Virgin Mary, the Woman of the "Eucharist" who carried the incarnate Word in her womb and made herself a ceaseless offering to the Lord, lead us all to an ever deeper understanding of the immense *gift and mystery* which the Priesthood is. May she make us worthy of her Son Jesus, the Eternal High Priest. Amen!

