



The Chrism Mass

Each year the Chrism Mass beautifully expresses Christ's gift of priesthood to his Church. As high priest of the flock he is appointed to shepherd, the Bishop gathers with his priests in the Cathedral to renew their priestly promises and to bless the Holy Oils they will use in conferring the sacraments after Easter.

The Pope celebrates the Chrism Mass in Rome on the morning of Holy Thursday, the day the priesthood was instituted at the Last Supper. We have the Chrism Mass a week earlier here (March 26th this year) because most priests are too busy during Holy Week to make the long journey to the Cathedral in Baker City.

After the homily, the Bishop asks the priests if they are "resolved to renew" the promises they made on the day of their ordination, when they publicly pledged

- to be faithful to the sacred duties of the priesthood,
- to be "faithful stewards of the mysteries of God," and
- to "discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching."

It is always moving to hear the priests respond with one voice: "*I am.*"

The Holy Oils remind us of the crucial significance of anointing in the life of the Church founded by Christ, whose very name in Greek means, "The Anointed One." From the beginning the Church recognized that the

Old Testament practice of anointing priests, prophets, and kings with consecratory oil prefigured The Christ who was to come.

Over the Oil of Catechumens the Bishop prays, "Lord God, protector of all who believe in you, . . . bring [all who are anointed with this Oil in preparation for their Baptism] to a deeper understanding of the Gospel [and] help them to accept the challenge of Christian living." Anointed catechumens receive power from on high to face the challenge of Satan and renounce sin both before and after they are reborn and washed clean. (In the ancient world wrestlers were often anointed with olive oil to be able to slip out of the grip of their opponent.)

As he blesses the Oil of the Sick, the Bishop prays the "God of all consolation" to "send the power of your Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this . . . soothing ointment" that it may bring healing of body, soul, and spirit to those who suffer serious illness. With the anointing of the sick comes pardon of sin and grace to bear affliction with the patience of Christ.

Sacred Chrism is a sign that Christians—dying, buried, and rising with Christ in Baptism—partake of His kingly and prophetic priesthood and that they share at Confirmation, as He did at the Jordan River, in the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

To consecrate the Holy Chrism the Bishop first pours perfume into the oil and stirs it thoroughly. He then breathes over the vessel as the Breath of God, the Holy Spirit, settled upon the Apostles the night of the Resurrection.

"And so, Father," the Bishop prays, "make this Chrism a sign of life and salvation

for those who are . . . anointed [to be] temples of your glory, radiant with the goodness of life that has its source in you. . . . Let the splendor of holiness shine on the world from every place and thing signed with this oil.”

As the Mass ends, what lingers is the beautiful fragrance of the freshly blessed Chrism. When the women came to the tomb on Easter morn to anoint the body of Jesus with precious ointments, no odor of corruption did they detect. He had risen. The sweet smell of Resurrection passed into the sacraments of the Church, so that Christians might fill the world with the fragrance of indestructible life.