

# **Chrism Mass**

**Cathedral of the Holy Trinity**

**March 13, 2008**

**by The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt**

I have loved you with an everlasting love,  
I have called you and you are mine;  
I have loved you with an everlasting love,  
I have called you and you are mine.

Seek the face of the Lord and long for him:  
He will bring you his light and his peace.

It is such a joy for me to be with you here tonight. I wish to thank Monsignor Grams, our Diocesan Administrator, for inviting me to celebrate this Chrism Mass with you and for you. When he called to ask, he immediately reminded me that only a bishop can consecrate the Sacred Chrism. Therefore, I am grateful that Divine Providence has given me the proper pedigree to render this service to a local Church that is and will always be close to my heart.

For seven years it has been my distinct privilege to preside at this solemn liturgy in which our eyes have turned toward Jesus, our great High Priest, whom the author of our sacred reading describes as:

“The faithful witness, the first born from the dead, the ruler of all the kings of the earth, and the one to whom all glory and power belong forever and ever!”

It is his face we seek, since he is the one who has called us into communion with Him and His Father by the power of His Holy Spirit. He has likewise sanctified that communion by his very self-immolation on the Cross, loving the Church into existence as his Bride.

As the prophet Isaiah reminds us tonight:

“You yourselves shall be named priests of the Lord, ministers of our God you shall be called.” (Isaiah 61:6)

And the author of the Book of Revelation points out appropriately that this call is not just for our own benefit, but rather it is a call of “service,” bringing all men and women into a unity of faith, hope and love.

It is his face we seek, since He is in fact the “Anointed” one mentioned in the Book of Isaiah and depicted by St. Luke as speaking in his home synagogue at Nazareth. Yes, Jesus is the Messiah in whose name we bless

and consecrate the oils that will be used this next year in the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick. While we have no candidates for priestly ordination this year, that fact alone gives us cause to pray and fast all the more ardently that the Lord might send more dedicated priestly laborers into his vineyard. And who knows, in God's goodness, perhaps the Chrism which we consecrate tonight may be used to ordain the fourth bishop of the Diocese of New Ulm, empowering him for his future Episcopal service.

Focusing as we do on the sacramental ministries of these oils, it is ever so appropriate to witness the renewal of priestly vows within this liturgical context, giving thanks for the tireless service of our diocesan priests as well as offering them the support of our humble prayers. My dear brother priests, allow me to add my own heartfelt gratitude for the unique call that is yours to serve in Persona Christi Capitis. You do so, not lording it over your brothers and sisters, but quite the opposite, you seek rather to sustain and strengthen them in the practice of their faith. These have not been easy years to be a priest, because of the shameful behavior on the part of some of our brother priests. Yet, you have borne the heat of the day and I applaud your willingness to more and more identify yourselves with the Cross of our great High Priest.

I am not unmindful that it was the Priests' Council who first suggested that we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the Diocese with the same preached Mission for each of our Area Faith Communities and parishes. I have been so pleased with the reports that I have received, even from afar, of the graces that have resulted from these Missions and the dedicated labors of the Redemptorist Fathers to reintroduce our people to the basic elements of Christian Spirituality. I also know that these Missions would never have had the impact they have without the personal, dedicated involvement of our Priests, Pastoral Administrators, Deacons and staff members, both on the diocesan and parish levels. And so I thank you one and all!

In closing the great Jubilee Year in January 2001, the late, beloved Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter, Novo Millennio Ineunte, that the most pressing challenge facing us in this millennium was that of making the Church "the home and school of communion." We are brought into this communion when, at Baptism, we are inserted into the very life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And by the very fact that we are in communion with God, we are per se brought into communion with one another. Thus this communion or Koinonia is not only internal, invisible and sacramental, but it is also external and institutional, a reality that reflects the very incarnational nature of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution, Lumen Gentium, reminds us in chapter two that:

“[God] has . . . willed to make men [and women] holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge and serve him in holiness.”

In other words, the gift of God's salvation comes to us corporately, not as individualists. As St. Paul stressed over and over again, we are the Body, the Body of Christ. As members of that Body, each of us has a role to play. Often those roles will differ according to purpose or task, but the healthy exercise of that Body requires the cooperation and functioning of all its parts.

As you know, I took as my episcopal motto: “Ut Omnes Unum Sint” from Jesus' heartfelt prayer at the Last Supper:

“I ask . . . that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me . . .”

Our unity as Church, as the Body of Christ, is not just meant to make us feel good about belonging to the same, like-minded social club. Rather our unity is meant for the world's attention and indeed its salvation.

But we are told by researchers that there is a growing dichotomy in this American society between those who claim to be spiritual, without being religious or being able to have a relationship with God without any affiliation with His Church.

Just last month, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in a survey of 35,000 Americans age 18 and over, found that while Catholicism is still the largest single denomination in the country, it has lost 10% of its members who were raised Catholic. The Center for Applied Research for the Apostolate (CARA) has corrected that figure to 6%. In any event, this means that at least one in four people raised Catholic is now a former Catholic. And of those who have left our Church, less than half become Protestants, while the rest remain unaffiliated.

These are sobering facts that we should all seriously ponder. They point to a growing pattern of alienation, even isolationism, in the religious experience of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Perhaps the answer lies in the promotion of the “spirituality of communion” proposed by Pope John Paul II at the beginning of this millennium. He pointed out that this is a spirituality that:

- 1) Contemplates the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, shining on the faces of our brothers and sisters;
- 2) Thinks of our brothers and sisters in faith as “those who are a part of me” within our unity as the Mystical Body;
- 3) Sees what is positive in others, welcomes it and prizes it as a gift from God . . . and as a gift for me;
- 4) Bears each others’ burdens, rejecting competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.

It seems to me that such a spirituality of communion, successfully adopted and put into practice, is the basis for a new evangelization, reaching out to call the unchurched and the unpracticing alike into a richer experience of God’s love.

***BEGIN SPANISH . . .***

Estimados hermanos y hermanas, la liturgia Sagrada de esta noche tiene un futuro decisivo de orientación cuando se bendiga y consagre los aceites que serán utilizados sacramentalmente en las parroquias el próximo año. Porque el ministerio de nuestros sacerdotes es tan relacionado al propósito de estos aceites, esta noche es enteramente apropiado presenciar la renovación de sus votos y ofrecerles el apoyo de nuestras oraciones.

Por consiguiente, nos reunimos en una comunión o Koinonia de creyentes, como pueblo de Dios, al mismo tiempo Santo y pecador. Mientras nos llaman a la fe como individuos, somos hasta más llamados a ser una comunidad como el Cuerpo de Cristo, juntos nos encaminamos hacia Dios. La Iglesia necesita a cada uno de nosotros y debemos luchar contra cualquier idea que no seamos necesitados. Estemos unidos en la familia de la Iglesia. Trabajemos juntos para compartir la misericordia de Cristo, paz, justicia y amor con nuestro prójimo.

**... END SPANISH**

My dear brothers and sisters, we have had our share of challenges these past six and a half years, but we have always faced up to them and taken them on together. I speak here of our Plan for Parishes and the creation of

our Area Faith Communities. I speak of our Diocesan Ministries Appeal and the potential for taking on new works of service that it has offered us. I speak of our Operation Andrew and Myriam Dinners and our raising a greater consciousness for priestly and religious vocations. I speak of our adult faith formation programs, the development of parish and AFC social concerns committees, our attention to family centered religious education programs, and a more professional approach to evaluating our elementary and high school religion programs in our parishes and Catholic schools. And I also speak of the first comprehensive history of this Diocese, written in time for our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

And again, I want you to know how blessed I feel to have been a part of all this, to have shared in your or rather “our” spiritual communion as this local Church, together laboring as we have for the mission of Christ, supporting and sustaining one another in the Body of Christ. Quite frankly, I did not want to see that relationship end, but I do believe that God speaks in and through his Church. That voice has now called me to another vineyard with new and even bigger challenges. I ask you to pray for me and I promise to continue my prayer for you. Let us ask the Lord to keep us faithful in His service as we journey to the Kingdom together.

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