

This beautiful gathering, celebrated in Holy Week each year, gathers members of the Body of Christ from every deanery, parish and mission and sees the presbyterate united in prayer with their bishop and their people. Together we have the opportunity to reflect on our Messianic ministry and our privileged responsibility of anointing the Body of Christ with the sign of God's nearness, God's healing, God's casting out evil, God's favor, God's joy- all conveyed by these sacred oils.

We gather as the body of The Anointed One to bless and consecrate the very oils used to anoint the Body of Christ. As a community that experiences and is affected by suffering in and around us, we bless the Oil of the Sick, that it might bring comfort and healing to bodies, to minds and spirits who are afflicted. We bless the Oil of Catechumens, meant to strengthen those preparing for baptism who will face the struggle against all that is contrary to God and God's will. The anointing of catechumens, either as infants or as older persons, is likened to the oiling of wrestlers, that they might be made slippery and so able to escape the grasp of the enemy. Together, the priests of the diocese join me in consecrating, setting apart and making holy, the perfumed oil distinguished by sight and smell, the Chrism, used to create priests, prophets and kings at baptism and to seal those same priests, prophets and kings with the Holy Spirit at confirmation. The Chrism is used to anoint the hands of those set apart for priestly ministry, who will continue the acts of anointing and making the Risen Christ present in the Sacraments. The same Chrism consecrates altars which transforms them like the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone, the primary symbol of Christ himself in our house of worship. Even the walls of our churches are consecrated as are the living stones of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Recalling that the very name "Christ" means the Anointed One, or in the expression closer to Hebrew, the "Messiah" it is fitting that the Word proclaimed at this mass reminds us of the essence of that mission that Jesus the Christ received from the Father. Not fulfilling the role of an earthly monarch, nor of a priest who offers multiple and repeated sacrifices, but as One required to prophesy with the living Word of God and share in an eternal priesthood and to become the one perfect sacrifice offered once and for all. In the Word proclaimed we hear for whom the Christ is anointed and for whom the prophetic words are to be spoken. The *dabar*, the living word, formed by the mouth of the Christ himself, fulfills the ancient prophecy of Isaiah and must be fulfilled in prophecy today- in words and far more importantly, in life-giving deeds.

Luke's dramatic scene in the synagogue at Nazareth, and the text of Isaiah's prophetic vision, provided Jesus of Nazareth with the description of the very role he incarnates. In turn, the commission of the Risen Lord, to all the baptized and in a special way to those who share in ordained ministry, makes it clear that Jesus' ministry is our ministry and the privileged recipients of that ministry are those to whom we are specifically sent. Can we point to the Good News that we *have* proclaimed and *do* proclaim to the poor? Not if we do not see, hear, smell and touch the poor and allow ourselves to be seen, heard, touched and smelled by them. Can we describe in any convincing way the Year of Favor from the Lord to the suffering and those held bound? What captives have we set free of late? In a society so bound by enslavement to consumption, to alcohol and drugs, to pleasure and self-fulfillment there is plenty of liberation to be done and plenty of captives to be set free. Have we? When and how?

Do our liturgies and our outreach services really enact an exchange of a diadem for their ashes? How do we pour out the oil of gladness entrusted to us?

As we celebrate our identity in Christ today- both the priesthood of the baptized and the ordained ministers, together the Body of Christ, we must perform an important examination of conscience. Are we who we say we are? Does anyone notice and do we give them a reason to notice? The only way we can share in the ministry of the Anointed One is if we heal the broken hearted and set captives free. If we are not about that work of God it doesn't matter how many gallons of olive oil we bring home today.

Finally, let us remember that in the sacramental economy, the Creator pronounced all of Creation good. The good things of creation themselves become vessels of grace, our unmerited gifts from God in the sacraments. Oil is nearly as basic as water, wine and bread in our sacramental life. Oil was used early in human history as a salve for wounds, as essential for the preparation and consumption of food, and for setting apart that which is offered to the Creator, the giver of all.

As we call on God's Spirit, which hovered over the waters of creation, was breathed upon the beauty of the earth and into the crown of God's creation, let us give thanks for "the fruit-bearing trees, among which olive trees would arise as providers of this most rich oil, so that their fruit might serve for sacred Chrism" as our prayer of consecration states. And let us commit ourselves to greater care for all of creation which manifests God's love for us, God's healing embrace and God's invitation to consecration.

As we approach the celebration of the Christian Passover in our Easter Triduum, we do so very mindful of the violence and death experienced on an incomprehensible scale in Ukraine, South Sudan and in the very places where the Anointed One himself lived and ministered, let us also reflect on the olive branch, which bore the olives pressed into service for our anointing, and was brought to Noah as a sign of peace and evidence of the receding waters which washed away sin and give birth to peace.