

Bishop's Homily
CHRISM MASS
April 10, 2006

Once again, we of the Church of Altoona-Johnstown gather at this very special and unique liturgical celebration of the Chrism Mass. We gather as an Assembly of Believers living in this beautiful portion of the Lord's vineyard. Our purpose in doing so is to demonstrate the communion that is ours as a diocesan church, particularly that of the priests with their bishop due to their sharing in his sacred office of building up, sanctifying, and governing God's people.

During this Mass, we bless the oils that will be used at the various milestones of our earthly journey during the next 12 months. They will be the effective signs of who we are and of who we are becoming.

The Sacred Chrism is a sign of the fact that Christians are sharers in Christ's kingly and prophetic priesthood. By the Sacrament of Confirmation they receive the spiritual anointing of the Spirit who is given to them. Chrism is ointment. Christ is the Anointed One. And, Christians are the anointed of the Lord, along with Jesus.

The Oil of Catechumens extends the effect of the baptismal exorcisms. It strengthens those coming into the Church with the power to renounce the devil and sin, before they go to the font of life for rebirth, that is Baptism.

The Oil of the Sick provides the sick with a remedy for both spiritual and bodily illness. It gives them strength in weakness to bear up under evil and obtain pardon for their sins.

But, in this consecration and blessing of oils, it is the unity or community of the particular Diocesan Church that is celebrated, expressed, and promoted. We are the one Assembly of Believers called by the Lord Jesus Christ to journey together into the Reign of God. That is why, at this one-of-a-kind annual Mass, the Priests of the Diocese

renew their promise to serve God's people faithfully. This promise, which they made on the day of their ordination, they now make to their current Diocesan Bishop.

What we do here this morning is something akin to a new beginning, giving a freshness to our journey into the Lord's Reign. Coming out of the Season of Lent and its cleansing effect upon our souls, we commemorate with solemnity the great love that prompted God's Anointed One to die on the cross and, thus, we come to share in the new life made possible by Christ's resurrection on that first Easter Sunday.

We hear in the Sacred Scripture proclaimed for us today how Jesus quoted the Prophet Isaiah and made the words his own. There, standing in the synagogue and reading from the Prophet, - He spoke of hope, of something wonderful, of something new. It was as if a new chapter was being opened up for God's people. In effect, He said that such a chapter was being "written" even as He spoke. *"Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."*

As we, the Diocesan Church of Altoona-Johnstown, gather this morning for this annual blessing of Sacred Chrism and other holy oils, I presume to issue a challenge to all of us.

We are in the final stages of concluding a very sad and difficult chapter of our history. It has very much been a lenten journey. Our lives and those of others will never be the same, - nor, should they be. However, being gratefully aware of the Lord's emptying out of himself for love of us, we come face to face with the possibility of resurrection and a new life.

You and I are called to be witnesses of that reality. Therefore, let us - the Clergy, the Religious, and the Faithful of this portion of the Household of God - open a new chapter in the life of our Diocesan Church. Let that new chapter be written by an Assembly of Believers that is authentic and whose lives are true to the mission entrusted to us by the Christ whose resurrection from the dead into life we celebrate at this time.