

HOMILY AT THE CHRISM MASS 2017

St Peter's Cathedral, Lancaster



'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.'

Dear brother priests,

Something is at work in our lives which does not come from ourselves, but comes from beyond us. Just as the Scriptures – the will of God – were being fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ, so in 2017 those same Scriptures, and therefore the will of God, are being fulfilled today in our priestly ministry. The power of the anointed One, the faithful witness and the First-born from the dead, who, John the Seer tells us, *has loved us and has washed away our sins in his blood*, continues his messianic work through the ages down to the present day. We are only too aware that we carry this treasure of priestly ministry in earthenware vessels, but that shows that its transcendent power comes from God, and not from ourselves (cf. 2Cor. 4:7).

St. John Paul II spoke of Christ's gift of the priesthood to his Church. It is not something we confer on ourselves, rather each one of us is called by Christ to be his priestly co-operators, or as the apostle Paul might put it, his fellow-workers. In the daily, often routine, exercise of our ministry we too are bringing good news to the poor, release to those who are held captive one way or another; we offer a new vision to the spiritually blind, and proclaim that every day is a day of God's grace. We continue and make incarnate what Christ began that day in the synagogue of Nazareth, his own home town. Priestly ministry has been exercised in many different ways and in circumstances good and bad in the long history of the Church, and our own age is no different, but always and everywhere it is the one priest, Christ, who is offering his priestly service to his people. *Seated at God's right hand, always interceding for us* (Rom 8:34).

In a little while the oils of baptism, the sick and chrism will be blessed and will be used to anoint the faithful in the diocese of Lancaster in the course of the next year. These oils are coming from the cathedral, the mother church of the diocese, which underlines the unity of the diocese and the Church. With you, my brother priests, gathered around me, the Bishop, the oneness of the priesthood is made visible. Bishop, priests and people belong together. There is only one Church, and Christ holds us all together. As we gather to bless these oils for the comfort and strength of Christ's people, I am reminded of the magnificent vision of the prophet Ezekiel when he saw water flowing from the renewed Temple which brought life wherever it flowed, especially to the trees, *whose leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit...because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing* (cf. Ezekiel, c.47).

The source of these oils soon to be blessed here in this cathedral sanctuary is Christ. They will be life-giving and fresh, and their power will not fail, because they flow from his saving death and resurrection. The supreme high-priest, Christ himself, will infuse them with his risen life. He puts these sacred oils into our priestly hands for the comfort, strength and healing of his people. Once again we priests are being sent forth by Christ to carry the oil of gladness. We now recommit anew our priestly selves to him, confident that the One who has called us to this ministry will not disappoint us. Amen.

+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster

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