

Homily of Bishop Steven J Raica Chrism Mass – March 26, 2018

My brothers and sisters in Christ!

A warm welcome to each and every one of you today!

I sure look forward to our annual celebration of the Chrism Mass every year! It is one of those rare times when we assemble as the Diocese of Gaylord, representatives from every parish and institution along with friends from around the diocese. This year I also give a big shout out to our listeners on Baraga Radio. We are being broadcast live for those who are shut in, or on the road or unable to be present today and want to participate in this celebration. Fr Siler and the representatives from Holy Cross on Beaver Island are fogged in and couldn't get flights out this morning. So we are thinking and praying for and with you today along with the others. We ask and beg for your prayers in return! Today, we also welcome our priests in such large numbers. Together, we form a united college in priestly ministry to Christ and His Bride, the Church. We also welcome permanent deacons and their wives; the women and men in consecrated life; pastoral administrators; lay ministers and lay ecclesial ministers; families; women and men lay faithful from around the diocese along with our youth, some of whom will be confirmed and some catechumens and candidates who will be formally entering or received into the Church this Saturday evening at the Easter Vigil. I extend a warm welcome also to the Knights of Columbus and the [Knights of the Holy Sepulchre] and the Drummers from our Native American community that greeted us with a call to worship. In addition, I welcome our seminarians who are home assisting in local parishes. Thanks for responding so generously to the Lord's call.

For those who are here for the first time, a hearty welcome to our Cathedral Church for this annual event. For others, it is a time to renew friendships, to visit and pray with fellow Christians from around our great northern lower Michigan diocese! It may be gloomy/wet outside; but inside the love of Christ is ever more radiant!

The twofold purpose of this Chrism Mass are: 1) blessing the oils used during the course of the next year in our celebration of sacraments and liturgies; and 2) a gathering of priests to renew their priestly commitments.

The oils blessed today are used in rather significant moments representing what should be moments of great happiness or concern. Oil denotes strength, power and healing. It is a form of setting something apart for particular purpose. We speak at times about the "anointed one" as one whose purpose or destiny is determined.

The **Oil of Catechumens** used in our baptismal rites – denotes the strengthening of resolve and will to follow through wholeheartedly with the formation process to enter the church.

The **Oil of the Sick** – it almost explains itself! It suggests strength toward healing of mind, body and soul. It certainly offers great consolation to those who receive it, those who witness it, and those who impart it. In addition, seeking healing for the sick

and the forgiveness of sins committed, special prayers go out to those in the health profession – doctors and nurses.

And then the consecration of the **Sacred Chrism** Oil – with its sweet aromatic balsam smell. It is the most noble of the oils that we bless today because of its special usage. It represents a participation in the very priesthood of Christ – when a child is anointed, he or she becomes one with us as a priestly people, a kingly people, a holy people! Confirmation candidates are anointed with Chrism to “seal” them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here again we invoke the strength of this oil for those confirmed to remain faithful to Christ’s call in their lives and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live as sons and daughter of God – faithful witnesses of His love. It is here that one becomes a disciple and witness – a “missionary disciple”, as Pope Francis would say! We cannot merely remain a secret follower or admirer of Christ, as though we are in the Christian witness protection program! We are challenged (each and every one!) at the end of each Mass: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord!” In a deeper way, those who receive Holy Orders in the rank of priest / presbyter and bishop are also anointed with Chrism. Priests are anointed on their hands. Bishops are anointed on their heads for the purpose of sacred duties assisting at the celebration of Mass and sanctifying God’s people in worship and sacrament. And, for bishops, one must be a consummate teacher and witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the Sacred Chrism is also used for the consecration of church buildings and altars where that oil represents the places set apart for the priestly ministry of Christ with the People of God. Above all, the Sacred Chrism signifies the unity of the diocese and priests joined with the bishop expresses the unity of priests in service to God’s people.

Today, the priests will renew their priestly promises, underscoring that “unity” we enjoy as priests. This unity embraces the priests of the Diocese of Gaylord, religious priests in ministry in our diocese and the extern priests who come from other dioceses and exercise ministry here along with visiting priests from other dioceses and religious communities in cooperation with the mission of the Church.

This Presbyteral “unity” exists and thrives insofar as we allow Christ to take root in us. It is an efficacious result of his own deep personal prayer: “That all may be one.” One in heart, one in purpose, one linked together by moral bonds that make us a priestly college dedicated to the mission of Christ in each local community. Such unity is a further visible sign of witness to the world and of the vitality of the local diocesan church. “Unity” signifies that we are all in this together. We accompany each other as we accompany those we are to serve. It also means that we must find ways to acknowledge and repair any brokenness and wounds we may have among ourselves, to forgive those who have wronged us, and seek to understand one another without passing judgment on partial knowledge or personal biases. For this reason, it is incumbent upon us to find ways to build bridges to link us more together more strongly rather than building walls that keep us apart or make us cynical about our vocational zeal. The ardent prayer of Christ must become reality for us: “That they may be one!” It is for this reason that this call to unity also leads to communion of priests with their bishop. We cannot work at odds or be lone rangers with personal vision of ministry at

the expense of the entire mission. Rather, we must work together for the good of Christ's mission for the whole diocese - all the parishes, schools and institutions we have.

As a diocese, the full load of responsibility for proclaiming the fullness of the Gospel of Christ cannot only remain on 40 active priests. It is something that must be part of our shared mission: deacons, religious women and men, and dedicated generous catechists, ecclesial movements present in the diocese and committed lay disciples. A brilliant mosaic of our diocese reflects that each person takes his / her responsibilities seriously for the sake of the good of the Body of Christ. Really, it is taking seriously our baptismal call to be faithful stewards, missionary disciples and zealous ministers for the Gospel.

More and more, we are returning to the more fundamental aspects of our faith. Above all, we need leaders and followers of Christ who are witnesses, not merely functionaries. As priests, our mission is to become dynamic witnesses of Christ's presence throughout our parishes, institutions, and schools. Remaining the same, or dreaming with nostalgia about the good old days (or as a former bishop said, the "G O D") is woefully insufficient to face squarely the challenges we have today. New ways and fresh opportunities should guide us in sharing the attractiveness of discipleship and the interior joy of living as a believing Christian.

Working collaboratively with one another by sharing our hopes and dreams will result in formulating strategic action plans to realize what can and must be done. We cannot shirk from this responsibility. It is not a mission impossible that is before us – but one that should renew our enthusiasm and "zeal for souls" as you will affirm in a few moments.

A challenge is to keep our eyes, our ears, our hearts open to become aware, keenly aware of the activity of God already here. By ignoring it, or by overlooking it, or by downplaying it stifles the movement of God, the presence of God who continues to attract people to Himself. There is a tendency to make our awareness of God and his activity among us "foggy". As a result, life becomes mediocre. We cannot pull ourselves up from mediocrity by a project. It requires attention each and every second. To recognize the presence of Christ within that moment so that each moment has meaning and purpose. Yes, those around us want to forget, to be distracted, to have no memory.

Think of it this way. What made St Paul, St Augustine, St Francis and many other women and men great protagonists in human history? It is the fact that Christ left such a burning mark upon their lives that the meaninglessness of the instant was not an option and is no longer possible. It can happen to us too. Every second, every moment must be an occasion to see Christ's activity here and present.

The growing amazement of things happening here is a great sign of hope. We are not abandoned. Christ is present. The Lord loves us and searches for us, entices us by the many factors that bring our lives together to become a vibrant faith community here in northern lower Michigan. With Our Lady of Mt Carmel, the patroness of our diocese and this cathedral church to guide us, may we remain united in faith, hope and charity "to accomplish his work"!

May God bless you and our Diocese of Gaylord.

+Steven J Raica
Diocese of Gaylord