

## **MASS OF THE OILS**

**TUESDAY APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup> 2011**

This is the 23<sup>rd</sup> – and possibly - the last time that I will celebrate the Mass of the Oils with you all in this Cathedral. And I do so today, acutely conscious of the fact that, in the last 23 years, I have ordained 35 priests and 32 deacons to this uniquely special and ordained ministry, which we celebrate in such a solemn way today. Reflecting on past years and on this occasion, I am full of thanksgiving for the wonderful grace of priesthood that I have received and for the privilege that the Lord has given me of sharing that ministry – His ministry – with so many of you.

This doesn't make us any better than anyone else and I am constantly brought back to earth by those famous words of St Augustine, who writes: "The Lord, as he saw fit and not according to my own merits, appointed me to this position...and I exhibit two clearly distinct features: firstly, that I am a Christian and secondly that I am a bishop for others. The fact that I am a Christian is for my benefit, that I am appointed bishop is for yours. With you I am a Christian and for you I am a bishop."

We all begin our Christian lives at the same place – at the baptismal font. For all of us too, our journey of faith through life comes to its end when we stand on the threshold of eternity at the moment of our dying. Then we pray that the anointing of the sick, which makes us one with Christ in his dying and rising, may strengthen us.

But God's living and loving presence is with us throughout our lives. He chooses us and sends us out in the Spirit as His witnesses when we're confirmed. God nourishes us with the "daily bread" of the Eucharist. At different times, when we need that grace which deepens or restores us to communion with one another and with the Lord, He reconciles and forgives us. Some of us live for God, and for others, as dedicated single people in lay life. Others find their consecration in religious life, others, again, in marriage or in ministry through ordination.

One of the beauties of today's Mass is that it brings together all those moments of life – those moments of special calling - which are made holy, as we bless and consecrate the visible elements over which the words of the Lord are spoken to make them Sacraments. The water, the bread and the wine, the oil, the words – all these are invested with the power of the Lord to transform us, to bring us together, to make us into a community and to send us out to proclaim "the year of the Lord's favour."

Today's celebration is a beautiful and significant occasion for the whole diocese, but it concentrates in a special way on the place and importance of the ordained ministry. Listen carefully to the Preface of today's Mass. From within "the dignity of a royal priesthood", which Christ has given to all the people he has made his own, "with a brother's love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands. He calls them to renew in his name the sacrifice of our redemption as they set before your family his paschal meal. He calls them to lead your holy people in love, nourish them by your word and strengthen them through the sacraments. Father, they are to give their lives in your service...grow in the likeness of Christ and honour you by their courageous witness of faith and love."

That is a wonderful description of the vocation of priests and deacons. It is a high calling and lays enormous stress on the importance of the ordained ministry, without prejudice to any other calling in the Church. We cannot be Church without Eucharist and the other Sacraments, and we can have no Eucharist without priests. This is why priesthood is at the centre of what we do today, in terms of thankful celebration, generous commitment and recommitment to service. And it's why we pray fervently that others too will hear and respond to the call the Lord puts before us.

In a few moments, my brother priests, our deacons and I will renew the promises we made when we were ordained. Listen carefully to the words, as we seek to recapture and reassert the joy and the enthusiasm which led us to the moment of our ordination.

We are resolved – and will continue to do our best - to unite ourselves more closely to Christ, setting him and his call first, ahead of our own needs, seeking to be true to our sacred duties. We are resolved to centre our lives in God's mysteries of Eucharist and the other sacraments, teaching and preaching, both by word and example, the reality that God is at the heart of everything we are and do. We promise, once again, despite the failures and sinfulness of our lives, to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Christ.

Isaiah makes it very clear that those anointed by the Spirit have to be the bearers of the the good news of the Gospel to the poor; we have to bind up broken hearts, proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to those who are in any way enslaved. Above all, we have to proclaim by word and life the love and favour of the Lord.

Today we pledge ourselves anew to that essentially pastoral ministry to which the Lord has called us. We do so in the presence of each other and in your presence too. We rely on and are sustained by your prayers and by the immense love and trust that you invest in us, in our ministry and on the leadership that we do our best to give.