

Chrism Mass 2020 Homily
Most Reverend John O. Barres
Diocese of Rockville Centre
St. Agnes Cathedral
Thursday, April 9, 2020

This morning we celebrate our virtual Holy Week Chrism Mass 2020.

Let me begin by thanking all of our priests today. You are an inspiration to each other in the solidarity, humility and magnanimity of your fraternity.

You are an inspiration to our people as you model courage, charity, self-possession, holiness and mission during these COVID-19 times of tragedy, trauma, financial, economic and employment upheaval.

And you are an inspiration to me, Bishop Murphy, Bishop Andrzej, Bishop Henning, Bishop Coyle, Bishop-elect Romero, Bishop Dunne and Bishop Wcela.

The Chrism Mass is a time to pray for our Holy Father, Pope Francis and to be in solidarity with him and the Splendor of Truth of the Magisterium of the Church.

We also remember Pope Francis' call at the Amazon Synod last October for a rich new global harvest of vocations to the priesthood.¹

The Chrism Mass is a time to honor our priest jubilarians who celebrate priestly milestones and give thanks to God for the graces experienced in their faithful living of the priesthood.

We also give thanks for our retired priests who are power houses of prayer and holiness for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, the Universal Church and the World.

¹ See Pope Francis' February 2, 2020 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, especially sections 81-93.

We remember during these COVID-19 times the extraordinary spirit of sacrifice and courage of our priests who are hospital chaplains. Like our heroic medical workers, day after day, you risk your life and health to provide spiritual care to the sick and dying and those on the frontlines of the battle with the virus.

On behalf of the entire presbyterate and all the people you serve – thank you! All of your brother priests are praying for your health and welfare and we ask Mary, Mother of the Church, and our diocesan patroness St. Agnes for their intercession for your protection and your heroic pastoral charity.

We remember at this Chrism Mass the souls of those who have died from the corona virus and their families, and those who, as Pope Francis says, are “writing the decisive events of our time: doctors, nurses, supermarket employees, cleaners, caregivers, providers of transport, law and order forces, volunteers, priests, deacons, religious men and women and so very many others.”

We are all deeply touched and gratified to see so many Good Samaritans delivering food from our parish food pantries and caring for the sick and elderly during this health crisis. We also remember our families and the efforts of each of us to care for our families and our neighbors.

We give thanks for the coming episcopal ordination of Bishop-elect Luis Miguel Romero, our Vicar of Hispanic Ministry and Evangelization. We are grateful for his global *Idente* missionary spirit and his charism for parish formation and evangelization.

We give thanks for our newly ordained priests Fr. Cody Bobick, Fr. Matthew Browne, Fr. Kenneth Grooms, Fr. Nelson Marquez, Fr. Alexander Turpin and Fr. Roger Velasquez.

We pray for Archbishop Nelson Perez, who was installed as the Archbishop of Philadelphia on February 18th. We pray for all the diocesan bishops who, as priests and auxiliary bishops, once served the Church on Long Island.

We give thanks for the upcoming Ordination of Permanent Deacons. Those to be ordained are Terrence Culhane, Michael Durso, Matthew Faughan, Gregory Fewer, John Heverin, Ronald Lacs, Gerard Magaldi, George Sprance, and Vincent Sweeney.

We give thanks for the upcoming Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Rafal Borowiejski and Deacon John Crozier.

We pray as a presbyterate for a rich harvest of vocations to the priesthood at this Chrism Mass as together we continue to cast our nets in every parish, every Catholic school and public school, every university, every lacrosse field, and every Spring Musical on Long Island. We will continue to be fishers of men.

I have no doubt that there are many young men on Long Island who are being inspired by our priests during this COVID-19 crisis.

Our seminarians are also a great witness to other men who are discerning in these times of crisis the things that really matter and last in life.

Who knows? Maybe some of these young men are tuning in to this Chrism Mass and asking themselves: “Why not me?” “Why not now?”

In the presence of our priests and seminarians who are with us virtually today, I invite every young man throughout the Diocese of Rockville Centre to give serious consideration as to whether the Holy Spirit may be calling you to the Catholic priesthood.

I invite every young woman and young man to give consideration as to whether the Holy Spirit may be calling you to the Religious Life.

And there is no doubt that at this very minute the Holy Spirit is calling some of you. I urge all of our young men and women to listen for that call, whether in moments of silence and prayer or in the most hectic times of life. And, I pray that when called, you will answer “Yes.”

The Chrism Mass offers us the opportunity to pray for the souls of Bishop Kellenberg, Bishop McGann, Bishop McHugh and the souls of all the deceased auxiliary bishops and priests who have served in the Diocese of Rockville Centre since 1957 and those who served the Church on Long Island before the founding of the Diocese.

We remember in a special way at this Mass the priests who have died since our last Chrism Mass in 2019.

I want to thank all of our permanent deacons, both active and retired, their wives and their families who are serving our parishes with a great spirit of prayer and missionary dedication.

We also pray for the souls of permanent deacons and their wives and family members who have died and in a special way for those deacons and their family members who have died since our last Chrism Mass.

As baptized into the one priesthood of Jesus Christ, we priests, with the lay faithful we serve share the call to holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world.

Whether in the ministerial, or common priesthood, we all contribute to the Lord's mission of salvation in our service to others. We express our gratitude for the generous participation in parish ministries of so many lay people, and their noble efforts to be public square Catholics who light the secular world with the Light of Christ and in these days of COVID-19 light the world with the Gospel of Human Life.

Today, as a presbyterate, we renew the promises of our commitment to the priesthood and the Holy Spirit breathes through the oils we use to celebrate the sacraments.

Together, as a presbyterate we celebrate with the people we serve the signs of our times in Holy Week 2020, the signs of opportunity for *dramatic missionary growth* and its relationship to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

In these days when so many are suffering and anxious about many things, we turn to the Gospel truth that God is ever with us, even in “the valley of the shadow of death.”

And this Good God, this God of Life and Love turns fear to faith, suffering to grace, and death to life.

May the God Who “writes straight with crooked lines” strengthen each of us to proclaim His saving love so that this desolate moment become a time when our Catholic faith and missionary spirit abounds here in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, across the country, and around the world.

Our renewal of our vocational promises today is a renewal of our commitment to evangelize.

At this 2020 Chrism Mass, we anticipate celebrating on May 18, 2020, the Centenary of the birth of Saint John Paul II and his inspirational theology and spirituality of the Catholic priesthood. We also commemorated the 15th anniversary of his death on April 2nd.

Most of us have very special personal memories of the impact of St. John Paul II's ecclesial missionary mysticism which was forged in the constant crises he faced throughout his life.

He planted the Cross of Jesus Christ at the heart of every personal and world crisis he faced. Together, we call on his intercession for each of us during this COVID-19 crisis.

We vividly recall his visits to Poland that set in motion the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall, his canonization of Saint Faustina, the spreading of global devotion to the Divine Mercy and the establishment of Divine Mercy Sunday. We invite all our parishes to remember the Centenary of St. John Paul II's birth this Divine Mercy Sunday, April 19, 2020.

We remember the personalism that connected spiritual theology and moral theology in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), his emphasis on Love and Responsibility in Marriage and the Theology of the Body in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and his monumental encyclical on the Gospel of Human Life *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). On March 25th, 2020, we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium Vitae*.

We remember his enormous appeal to Youth and the World Youth Day Dynamic, the promulgation of the Universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) and its impact on the world of catechesis along with his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* (1979), his championing of the New Evangelization in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000), his emphasis on contemplating the Face of Christ in the Eucharist in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) and in the Rosary in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002), the global missiology expressed in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and the union of holiness and mission in the life of every canonized saint and holy person.

We remember his social justice encyclicals *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) that explored the rich history and contemporary relevance of Catholic social justice teaching.

We remember his emphasis that ideas have consequences in history in *Fides et Ratio* (1998), his global ecumenical outreach in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), and his championing the Sacrament of Penance to a world that had lost the sense of sin in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984).

But I would like to highlight especially at this Chrism Mass, the forward looking theology and spirituality of the priesthood contained in his Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (*I Will Give You Shepherds*), shared with the Church and the World on March 25, 1992.

The text from the Chrism Mass from Luke 4:18 – “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” – is woven into every section and theme of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

Saint John Paul II writes, “Even today Christ makes these words which he proclaimed in the synagogue of Nazareth echo in our priestly hearts. Indeed, our faith reveals to us the presence of the spirit of Christ at work in our being, in our acting and in our living, just as the sacrament of orders has configured, equipped and molded it.” (PDV 33)

Each of us looks back on years of priestly dedication and experience grace-filled flashbacks of the people and parishes we have served. We, like St. John Paul II, have experienced a variety of crises and challenges that the Holy Spirit has led us through.

Our interior lives went deeper. Our parish evangelization became more creative. We embraced the mystery and power of the Cross and configured our ontological priestly identity to that Cross.

Our experience of the COVID-19 crisis as Catholic priests will continue to mysteriously forge an extraordinary interior depth in our lives as priests as we embrace with courage the power and mystery of the Cross of Jesus Christ and the Paschal Mystery.

St. John Paul II continues, “Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is the principal agent in our spiritual life. He creates our ‘new heart,’ inspires it and guides it with the ‘new law’ of love, of pastoral charity. For the development of the spiritual life it is essential to be aware that the priest will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit as a totally gratuitous gift and as a task which he is called to undertake. Awareness of

this gift is the foundation and support of the priest's unflagging trust amid the difficulties, temptations and weaknesses which he will meet along his spiritual path." (PDV 33)

In a few moments we will renew our priestly promises. This is a rite that acquires fullness of value and significance precisely as an expression of the journey of holiness, to which the Lord has called us on the path of the priesthood. It is a journey which each one makes in a very personal way, known only to God, who searches and knows the heart...in today's liturgy, the Church offers us the consoling opportunity to be united, to sustain one another at the moment when we repeat in unison: "I do."²

Finally, speaking to us as his priestly sons, he writes, "...Beloved, through ordination, you have received the same Spirit of Christ, who makes you like him, so that you can act in his name and so that his very mind and heart might live in you. This intimate communion with the Spirit of Christ – while guaranteeing the efficacy of the sacramental actions which you perform *in persona Christi* – seeks to be expressed in fervent prayer, in integrity of life, in the pastoral charity of a ministry tirelessly spending itself for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. In a word, it calls for your personal sanctification." (PDV 33)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us and inspires our consecration and mission as 21st Century priests of the New Evangelization. How appropriate it is that in the Chrism Mass immediately after we renew our Priestly Promises, the Bishop blesses the Oil of the Sick, the Oil of the Catechumens and consecrates the Sacred Chrism.

It is appropriate because our lives as baptized Catholics and as ordained priests so much revolve around our reception and sharing with the faithful the power of the Holy Spirit in these blessed oils.

In the Scriptures and in the living Tradition of the Church, anointing always indicates the conferral of a mission.

And so at this Chrism Mass, we rekindle together our commitment to the consecration and mission of our priesthood and the unifying charity and fraternity of the presbyterate of the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

² Cf. Chrism Mass Homily of St. John Paul II, Holy Thursday, April 12, 2001

In his 2001 Chrism Mass homily, St. John Paul II said: “We celebrate the Chrism Mass on the threshold of the Easter Triduum, the centre and culmination of the liturgical year. This evocative rite draws light as it were from the Upper Room, that is, from the mystery of Christ the Priest, who consecrates himself at the Last Supper, anticipating the blood sacrifice of Golgotha. *The sacred anointing flows from the Eucharistic Table.* The divine Spirit fills the house with his mystical fragrance (cf. John 12:3), that is, he fills the Church and gives priests in particular *a share in the consecration* of Jesus. (cf. Opening Prayer).”