

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Chrism Mass 2023
28 March 2023



Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and Priesthood,
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.” Third Isaiah is well aware of the presence of the living God and awareness of His presence always implies a mission.

The other day I noticed in the necrology for the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, the name of a priest who often celebrated the noon Mass that I frequented when I was in college. He seemed old to me then, but I remember that he was always faithful and even taught me a reading course in metaphysics, a requirement for me to enter the seminary. He had been a missionary in Baghdad, the mission of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, until they were all expelled.

His constant presence at St. Mary’s Hall reminded me of the treasures we celebrate this night: service, fidelity, and mission so characterize this celebration of the priesthood. We gather to celebrate that vocation, to renew our commitment by examining the mission, and to pray for and with those we are privileged to serve.

I have allowed the first Chrism Mass homily of the late Pope Benedict XVI to inspire my thoughts this evening. He recalled that our hands were anointed in that second ordination of holy orders. They are anointed for service “May the Lord Jesus Christ.... guard and preserve you that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifice to God.”¹

¹ Rite of the Ordination of a Priest.

Having reflected that the imposition of hands communicates that now the man ordained belongs to God, the Pontiff continued: “Why one's hands? The human hand is the instrument of human action, it is the symbol of the human capacity to face the world, precisely to ‘take it in hand’. The Lord has laid His hands upon us and He now wants our hands so that they may become His own in the world.”²

It is easy enough to be distracted by the heady responsibilities and privileges that are ours, but we renew our commitment so as to appreciate our mission. Our service is centered on leading women and men to the fullness of life. The finish line is salvation and the ultimate criteria is not the rank device on a uniform, the number of figures in a pay check, the applause of this group or that, the offerings to the supreme “me” that distract from the One who calls or whatever else that causes me to lose focus. At the finish line of the final ruck march, the just Judge will only evaluate our ability to serve those who needed us and to guide them to life without end.

That guidance must always be based on truth: the Word of God, the teaching of the Church, Sacred Tradition, as opposed to every wind of doctrine that tries to sway us one way or another. Fidelity to the authentic teaching of the Church is more important now than ever before. At the Last Supper the Lord begged the Father to consecrate His Apostles in the truth. We cannot fail to draw on that consecration day in and day out. As Father Ezra Sullivan wrote: “When the candle of [our] life is snuffed out, and the dawn of Eternal Life breaks upon you, then you will find great consolation and solace in saying [with St. Paul VI] ‘God, have mercy on me, for although I am a useless servant, I am also your friend; and I have been a friend to your friends.’”³

Like Peter floundering in the sea after his attempt to walk on the water, we grasp the hand which the Lord holds out to us. “.. He grasped us by the hand and gave us a new ‘specific weight’: the lightness that derives from faith and draws us upwards. Then He stretched out to us the hand that sustains and carries us....Let us fix our gaze ever anew on Him and reach out to Him. Let us allow his hand to take ours, and then we will not sink but will serve the life that is stronger than death and the love that is stronger than hatred.”⁴

We renew our commitment tonight whether made last spring, ten, twenty, or fifty years ago and we pray that the renewal will awaken in us the power of the Spirit who is upon us and urges us to continue our mission. “I no longer call you servants but friends. This is the profound meaning of being a priest: becoming the friend of Jesus Christ. For this friendship we must daily recommit ourselves.”⁵

We take to heart the admonition of St. Thomas Aquinas: “To preach profoundly about the Eucharist, the priest must cherish the daily celebration of the Eucharist.”⁶ How

² Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily* for the Chrism Mass, 13.IV.06.

³ Ezra Sullivan, *Alter Christus*, p. 212.

⁴ Pope Benedict, *op.cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ As quoted by Romanus Cessario, *The Grace to Be a Priest*, p.44.

important is that celebration as we try to deepen and enliven the faith of the faithful in our Country in the Eucharist.

Writing about the priesthood, Francois Mauriac commented that the most common priest “as soon as he has put on the stole and lifted his hand above our bent heads, is stripped of his own personality, is changed for us into another person who is infinitely greater than himself. Besides, this man, this priest, is himself submitted to another priest.”⁷

Finally, our sisters and brothers, the laity, gather with us this night to remind us that we are called to serve them, but they also possess a dignity that is equal to ours. The great reflection of St. Paul VI with his dear friend Jean Guitton was on the sacrament of baptism. Je ne sais pas remercier le Seigneur le plus grand don qu’il m’a donné. Guitton thought that he was referring to the Petrine ministry, but the saintly Pontiff said no and repeated his expression of wonder. The philosopher presumed it must have been a reference to the priesthood. No, it was a reflection about the immensity of the gift of rebirth into eternal life that is baptism.

We all share that precious gift of rebirth in the saving waters and we give thanks for that common priestly, kingly, and prophetic vocation. Together we try to build up the Body of Christ, to remedy the deficiencies of modern society, to bring a just and lasting peace to Ukraine, to Africa, and elsewhere. Together we respond to the victims of natural disasters as we think about Turkey and Syria. In every way we try to lower the volume of disagreement, and to stand with the victims of senseless violence in this country—most recently in Nashville-- and beyond.

Many years ago Father Andrea Santoro, a priest of the Diocese of Rome, was assassinated in Trebizond, Turkey while in prayer. He had explained why he had gone to Turkey: ‘I am here to dwell among these people and enable Jesus to do so by lending Him my flesh.... One becomes capable of salvation only by offering one's own flesh. The evil in the world must be borne and the pain shared, assimilating it into one's own flesh as did Jesus’.⁸

The old Jesuit at Boston College knew that and so he served others until the end. He understood mission, service, and fidelity. We renew our commitment tonight to continue to do likewise.

⁷ François Mauriac, *Holy Thursday*, pp. 36-7.

⁸ Benedict XVI, *op. cit.*