

Homily - Chrism Mass – Plymouth Cathedral, 22nd September 2020

It hardly needs saying that this is a Chrism Mass like no other. Like no other because it doesn't take place in Holy Week. Like no other because the numbers of priests and people in the Cathedral is extremely limited. Most of you are kindly joining us virtually online. Like no other, because the priests have already made their annual renewal of priestly promises, on Maundy Thursday.

But it is like no other, too, because this Mass takes place on the 140th Anniversary of the Dedication of this Cathedral. Although the Cathedral building was finished in 1858, and the first Mass celebrated on the Feast of the Annunciation, the Cathedral was not dedicated until this date in 1880, no doubt when its debt had been fully paid.

Our ceremony today, then, takes place at a poignant moment. Not only are we doing so at a point when we are seeking to renew and deepen the sacramental life of the Church in the midst of this pandemic. We are doing so, as we remember the dedication of the Mother Church of our Diocese.

The symbols of this Chrism Mass are stripped right back to essentials. The Oils sit dramatically before the altar, awaiting their blessing and consecration. Shortly afterwards, they will be taken from the sanctuary, to be prepared in oil stocks, and then distributed to all parts of the Diocese. It is fitting that we remember this first dedication of the Cathedral as today we seek to renew the sacramental life of the Diocese with these oils.

We know that we need these gifts of the Lord, to begin anew in this challenging and fearful time of the pandemic. The Sacraments are always a reminder that the Lord does not abandon His people. That belief has been sorely tested in these months. It is right that we re-dedicate ourselves to its truth. The Lord comes to us no matter what the circumstances, to allay our deepest fears, to make Himself present in our darkest moments. In the oil of catechumens, we remember especially

those who are to be baptised. As Christians we are plunged into the mystery of Christ; we die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him. We are made sharers in his royal and prophetic priesthood. In the oil of the sick, to which St James is a witness, we remember and pray for all those who will be anointed in serious sickness or approaching death. May they be given strength to bear their suffering, forgiven of all their sins, and gain the hope of eternal rest for which all of us were made.

Chrism is of course a sign of Christ Himself. It is not just blessed, but consecrated. As we do so we remember those young people and adults who are to receive the spiritual anointing of the Spirit in Confirmation. On this day, too, we give thanks and pray for all priests working in the Diocese, all anointed with the oil of Chrism at Ordination. May we be faithful to our priestly promises, generous in our service of God's people and wholehearted in our dedication to the Good Shepherd.

+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth

PRAYER OF RE-DEDICATION AFTER COMMUNION

Father in heaven,
today we come before you, to re dedicate to your lasting service
this house of prayer, this temple of worship,
this home in which we are nourished by your word and your
sacraments.

Here is reflected the mystery of the Church.

The Church is fruitful, made holy by the blood of Christ:
a bride made radiant with His glory,
a virgin splendid in the wholeness of her faith,
a mother blessed through the power of the Spirit.

The Church is holy, your chosen vineyard:
its branches envelop the world,
its tendrils carried on the tree of the cross,
reach up to the kingdom of heaven.

The Church is favoured, the dwelling place of God on earth:
a temple built of living stones,
founded on the apostles with Jesus Christ its corner stone.

The Church is exalted,
a beacon to the whole world, bright with the glory of the Lamb,
and echoing the prayers of her saints.

Lord,
send your Spirit from heaven to make this Church an ever-holy place,
and this altar a ready table for the sacrifice of Christ.
May the oils, sent forth from here, remind us that the waters of
Baptism overwhelm the shame of sin, that the priestly character is given
to continue your priesthood.

Gathered around your altar, in person, and virtually, may your children celebrate the memorial of the Paschal Lamb, and be continuously fed at the table of Christ's word and Christ's body.

May prayer, the Church's banquet, resound through heaven and earth as a plea for the world's salvation.

As we go from here as your witnesses, may we help the poor find justice, the victims of oppression, true freedom.

From here may the whole world clothed in the dignity of the children of God, enter with gladness your city of peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son, who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever.
AMEN