

Chrism Mass
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
March 28, 2018
Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

The great biblical scholar, Sulpician Father Raymond Brown, who was ordained in this Diocese of St. Augustine, once said that the whole teaching on the priesthood of Christ could be stated in three words: One priest...all priests...some priests.

Gathered in this Cathedral that honors St. Augustine for the celebration of the Chrism Mass, a feast of the priesthood, let us turn to the day's liturgy, and note the rightness of Father Brown's proposal. In advance of praying the words of this morning's preface, may we spend a few moments of prayerful reflection with them? Let us listen, and hear that we may then pray well.

For by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, you (...the Father), made your only Begotten Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant and by your wondrous design were pleased to decree that his one Priesthood should continue in the Church. Truly, Jesus Christ is the only High Priest... but he is destined to share his priesthood with others. For Christ not only adorns with a royal priesthood the people he has made his own. All the baptized, as St. Peter taught, and as we repeat in every celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism, all are sharers of the royal priesthood, with the noble and necessary capacity to pray, to worship, to glorify the Trinity... all God's people, interceding for the world's salvation.

But with a brother's kindness he also chooses men to become sharers in the sacred ministry through the laying on of hands, to renew the sacrifice, the paschal banquet, to lead the holy people in charity, to nourish them with the word, and to strengthen them with the Sacraments, giving up their lives (for you) and for salvation of their brothers and sisters..... these are the brother priests who are situated as

"priestly bridges" between the Only One and Eternal Priest and the immense number of the baptized, enabling them to exercise their royal priesthood.

Dear faithful, the Chrism Mass is the Mass that gathers and unites the Bishop with his priests, as a visible sign to the local Church and to the world, of the unity and communion of the priests with their bishop. It is a special joy to welcome representatives from our 52 parishes and other communities, here to bring back to the parishes the newly blessed oils, the oil of the catechuminate, the oils of the sick, and the consecrated oil of sacred chrism.

Our seventh bishop, Bishop Paul Francis Tanner, began the wonderful custom of inviting all the altar servers to join us for this Mass. As I welcome you to this special celebration, I also thank your families and coordinators for joining us each year, and for the faithful and ongoing service which you render throughout the year.

It is wonderfully fitting that the ritual of this liturgy includes the Renewal of Priestly Promises, thus linking it to that day when each priest received the gift of priestly ordination.

On May 8, my brother priests and I will gather again in the Church of San Juan del Rio to give thanks for the 25th anniversary of Fathers Anthony Basso, Alex Diaz, and Tony Palazzolo. As well as 50 years ordained: Father Tom Cody, Monsignor Vincent Haut, and Father William Mooney.

In addition, we welcome Father Wilson Colmenares and think of Father Briggs Hurley presently in Rome who were ordained priests last year.

The great student and teacher of liturgy, Nathan Mitchel, once explained the real meaning of the Triduum celebrations which are before us. For him, these are not meant to be dramatic reenactments of

events that happened during Jesus' last days, like the historical reconstructions with which this city is so familiar.

There is no denying that the events which we will remember and celebrate are true - historically grounded in a specific time and place – in a remote province of the later Roman Empire. But they cannot be repeated or reenacted; instead, they pass over into the mystery of the assembly's liturgical and sacramental celebration. The sacred days which lie before us - the Paschal Triduum - is all about mystery...of remembering, as Cardinal Wuerl insisted at the beginning of his keynote address at this year's Eucharistic Congress “The Liturgies do not take us back to the upper room or to Calvary; their goal is not to retrace to relive. The real point is not to celebrate what once happened, but what is now happening among us as a people called to conversion, gathered in faith, gifted with the Spirit of holiness, living in faith, and committed to works of justice, peace and reconciliation.”

My point is this: as Holy Thursday - the day when the Chrism Mass is the preferred option to be celebrated - is both the day of the institution of the Eucharist and the mandate to the Apostles, do this in memory of me," thus it is also the institution of the ordained priesthood. How fitting and appropriate that we renew the promises of our commitments for the wellbeing of the royal priesthood of the people of God and the sacred ministry which is ours as both bishop and priests.

Brother priests, on that blessed day of your ordination, you promised:

- to collaborate with the Order of Bishops in caring for the Lord's flock.
- to preach the Gospel and teach the Catholic faith.
- to celebrate faithfully and reverently the mysteries of Christ, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation
- to pray for God's people without ceasing ...as you recall, we promised, specifically in our diaconate ordination, to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the

- people of God, and for the whole world.
- to resolve to be united with Christ for the salvation of all.

Putting your hands in to those of the bishop, kneeling, you promised to respect and obey him and his successors.

Dear Deacon John and Deacon Martin, in 45 days, you will make those promises...right here in this Cathedral. May this immediate preparation of your ordination on May 12 sparkle with deep joy - the joy of self-giving, the joy of belonging to a sacramental brotherhood inserted in a local Church of great history in the first evangelization of North America, a Church of great martyrs.

Do not be afraid of your own unworthiness, your own poverty, the unknown future. Do not be afraid, for the God to whom you will commit yourself as priests is as seen at the majestic Easter Candle, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End..., the God of the past, the present and eternity. Do not be afraid, for God is the master of the impossible.

Dear faithful here present in this assembly: as your priests renew their commitment to the Church and to you, I invite you to renew your prayerful support for them, for our seminarians and their families. Many of our priests are far from their families; appreciate the sacrifices they make for you, especially at times such as Christmas, important anniversaries, or "important family events."

This diocese is blessed by a good number of dedicated missionaries. Pray for the priests who have served you and who are serving you. Accept them, and do not judge their preaching or their service. Pay particular attention to celebrate their good deeds and virtues; do not take them for granted.

Pray very especially for priestly vocations, both for us and for the

missions. There is an important list of needs we are not responding to because we are waiting for an increase of vocations of total consecration coming from our families and our parishes and deaneries.

My dear brother priests and deacons, my dear faithful, my dear children in the Lord: today is the only day in the entire year that I officially ask you to pray for me, your bishop. As you know, Pope Francis asks for this all the time. My “lowliness”, my limitations are clearer to you than to me. I am very aware I must give an account of my service to the Lord. I need your witness and your prayers to grow in holiness of life by being a reflection of a merciful shepherd, teaching the faith with integrity in spite of mundane pressures, and like Jesus, in humility, serve all of you and especially the ones who are unborn, who are in prison, those who are oppressed by addictions, those in fear of deportation, those who are discarded, excluded, or rejected by society and need a merciful shepherd, an advocate, a priest, a friend.

Our diocese covers a vast territory from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. It is special to us all when in events like the Eucharistic Congress, priestly or diaconate ordinations, significant anniversaries and the Chrism Mass, we come together to celebrate what links us together as a local Church.

From each of your parishes, we gather at the Lord's altar at the cathedral, in the Mother Church of the diocese. Some are priests, all constitute a priestly people. Together we raise our hearts, hands and voices in praise and petition to our one high priest.

Rejoicing in our Eucharistic unity, incorporating our rich cultural diversity, here we are fed, and from here we are sent, but above all, in spite of it all, to witness the love of Christ to one another, inspired by the Holy Spirit, who always comes to our aid and who is worthy of all our trust.