



Most Reverend Bishop Daniel Miehms
ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PETERBOROUGH

HOMILY: Chrism Mass

DATE: 2018

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, beloved Religious women & men of the Diocese, and dear friends in Christ: At Holy Week 2017, I had been appointed Bishop of Peterborough but had not yet been installed. Bishop Jean-Louis Plouffe, retired from the Diocese of Sault Ste Marie, was kind enough to come and celebrate the Chrism Mass. This year, it is a great joy for me to be able to celebrate my first Chrism Mass as bishop. I am especially happy to gather with our priests who serve the Church of this Diocese so faithfully, with the permanent deacons who carry out such vital ministry, with Deacon Stephen DeCarlo, soon to be ordained to the priesthood, and with all of you, the faithful who have gathered for this Chrism Mass. In my newsletter I expressed my hope that a wide range of the Church would be present. That wish has been realized and I am so happy to see all of you here filling this Cathedral.

If I jump back five years – Holy Week 2013 - I recall that I was preparing to be ordained a bishop. And much to my surprise, I'd discovered that a bishop – like a mechanic – is expected to provide his own tools! I quickly learned that it was up to me to go shopping for the necessary Episcopal paraphernalia – cassocks and mitres and crozier and crosses and ring; a good oil stock for Chrism. Thankfully, many people were helpful and generous in that task, but it was still up to me to assemble “the kit.” I don't why it had never occurred to me that a bishop would have to personally acquire those items – I guess I'd never thought about it. But it makes sense. In whatever walk of life, people require certain tools of the trade.

Tonight the priests of our Diocese are equipped with some of the tools needed by them to carry out their ministry: Oil of the Sick, used to anoint the Sick and bring them spiritual and physical healing; Oil of Catechumens, to be used when conferring the grace of baptism on people; and the Oil of Sacred Chrism, used in anointings at the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Ordination of Priests and Bishops. These oils are blessed tonight at the Chrism Mass to be

used in sacramental celebrations across our Diocese throughout the coming year. And so, it is fitting that the oils will be presented by the some of the very people who have received or will soon receive those Sacraments. As the people of God, we pray in a special way tonight with and for those individuals.

It is important that the oils are not only blessed tonight, but also that they are distributed; so that the grace of God will pour forth abundantly across the Diocese of Peterborough. After the Chrism Mass, priests will line up to obtain the oils to be brought back to their parish churches. There, they will be carefully deposited in rectories and sacristies and ambries, next to baptismal fonts. Oil of the Sick will be placed in some handy spot – maybe a couple of spots at the parish compound - so that it is always at the ready: ready for priests to carry out their sacred ministry to you when you seek the grace of healing and strength.

By its very nature, oil is meant to be poured out and to flow down generously: keeping it bottled up does nothing for anyone! The same could be said of the life and ministry of the priest: it must be graceful and generous. A priest on the day of his Ordination offers his life generously as a gift to God and the Church. He commits himself to be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, to serve in the manner of Jesus himself, the great High Priest. In Luke's Gospel, we hear exactly what that service of Christ, and service in the name of Christ entails: like Jesus, a priest is anointed – chosen and empowered – to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to those who are bound, new sight to the blind; to proclaim the Lord's tremendous mercy and favour. Every priest seeks to pattern himself on that program, announced by Jesus, and fulfilled in his life, death and resurrection. A priest must strive to serve the Lord with his whole heart and to serve the people of God lovingly and faithfully – never bottling up the grace he has received.

If you visit the Venerable English College in Rome, you can see a famous painting of seminarians above the altar in the chapel: painted in 1583, it's referred to as "the Martyrs' Picture." In that era of persecution of the Catholic Church in England, men were ordained priests and sent back home to face almost certain death. Often, they were arrested upon disembarking, given a warning and sent back by ship to Europe... only to catch the next ship back to England. Many of them suffered tortures and were eventually executed. Every time a College graduate was martyred, seminarians would gather beneath that portrait in the chapel and sing the *Te Deum*. And it happened 44 times throughout that era. Yet they kept going over. As one of them wrote, "Faith is the readiness to die for Christ's sake, for his commandments, in the conviction that such death brings life; it is to regard poverty as riches, insignificance as true fame and glory and, having nothing, to be sure that you possess all things."

Priests in some parts of the world are still in imminent peril of their lives, but thankfully, not in the Diocese of Peterborough. Yet as Pope Francis has pointed out, there is a martyrdom of blood for Christians and also a martyrdom of the everyday. Priests must commit themselves daily to proclaiming the Gospel in season and out of season, in places and times where it may not be popular, and where opposing forces may even be downright hostile. Priests are anointed to proclaim faith at a time when secularism and skepticism are on the rise; to announce hope to a

world that doesn't always look beyond the horizon of today; and to profess selfless love in a culture where many have become "selfie-obsessed." It can be tempting for a priest to lose heart: to let the world chip away at the generous self-gift that he made at his Ordination.

And so, every year at the Chrism Mass, priests renew their priestly promises, given so readily and joyfully on the day they were ordained. We re-commit ourselves to be united to Christ, to fulfill our sacred duties, to celebrate the sacred mysteries, and zealously to serve God's people the Church. We do so, not ignorant of the challenges to our priestly vocation, but precisely because of them. And we do so with confidence: first, because we understand that the grace of God which sustains us, can never be defeated by any worldly power. And secondly, because we know that we are supported by your prayers and example - you, the people of God. We seek the strength that comes from you in your faith and goodness and devotion: from you who in your lives are salt for the earth and light for the world. As priests, we know that we labour for you but also with you. That is why, after the priests renew their promises, I will ask your prayers for them, that God may continue to lead and sustain them in their sacred vocation.

The priests of our Diocese will go forth tonight, equipped not only with some necessary tools for their ministry, but even more with the blessing and strength of God. With God's grace and by your prayers, they will continue to serve generously, courageously and joyfully. And all of us will be sent out from this Chrism Mass, nourished and strengthened by the Eucharist, each one of us renewed and fortified for the mission in the world that is ours.