



**Most Reverend Bishop Daniel Miehm**  
**ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF PETERBOROUGH**

**HOMILY:   Chrism Mass**

**DATE:       March 30, 2020**

Fathers, this is a remarkable Chrism Mass in an extraordinary year. On this day when we gather to celebrate the priesthood and bless the holy oils to be used by priests throughout the year, we do so with very few priests. Because COVID 19 has kept us, like our people, physically isolated. But as many have been at pains to point out, this crisis should not leave us socially isolated. This is precisely the time that people need to reach out to each other in loving concern, using all the great electronic means at our disposal. And this crisis should not leave us spiritually isolated, from our people or our brother priests. For we remain one body in Christ, the members united to the head and each other, even in these strange times. The unity and fraternity of the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ remains intact despite everything happening these days. And that is most visibly represented when the priests gather around the Bishop – even if we are a small gathering today. I have asked the priests of this diocese to join prayerfully with us at this hour and to unite their intentions to ours. But I would say it is incumbent on us few who are gathered in this Cathedral today, to be mindful of our brothers, and to understand that in some mysterious way we are acting as proxies for them, especially as we renew our priestly promises.

Because I never throw anything out, I was recently able to pull off my shelf the Magnificat Companion for the Year for Priests – which is now ten years old. I did so with definite purpose in mind, as I'm trying to prepare some talks for the Hamilton Priests' retreat later this spring. It remains to be seen whether that will happen, but I am preparing the talks anyway. And I was reminded of a beautiful prayer that appears in several places in that Companion, which is St. Charles Borromeo's Prayer to the Mother of God for priests. Of course, we should remember

from our history that St. Charles was very concerned with the formation of priests and the spiritual life of priests in the time of the Counter-Reformation. It is not surprising that he would compose a prayer on that very subject.

The priesthood was in a distressed state when St. Charles became the Bishop of Milan. The secular priests had become secular in the worst sense of the word. Many of the mendicant or religious order priests weren't much better. So many priests had become mere functionaries, celebrating Mass after Mass, but barely able to understand and proclaim the mysteries they were celebrating. This was hardly surprising, since many of them had received such poor training and formation. St. Charles' response to that, in large part, was the creation of the seminary: a place of learning and formation, and a place that would teach them not simply what to do, but would teach them who they were as priests of Jesus Christ. For action follows being, and St. Charles understood that priestly identity was the key to priestly life and mission.

On this day of the Chrism Mass, the Church gives us the passage of Luke's gospel where Jesus goes to the Synagogue at Nazareth. And there he proclaims that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and the Lord has anointed him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to announce a year of the Lord's favour. It is very clear – he says it himself – that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy which we heard in the first reading. And as Jesus is the fulfillment, we are the continuation: we who were also anointed on the day of our Ordination. He bestows his priesthood on us to be his presence in the world, to carry forward his work, and to allow God's grace to flow in abundance on all those who share in the priesthood of the baptized. Our priesthood is rooted in Jesus Christ and so it is more than a function, more than a job: it is something rooted deeply in our being at the core of our identity. We forget that to our peril. (It's more important than ever to remember that, in these extraordinary times, when priests are limited in many of their usual tasks: but our priesthood endures no matter what our daily schedule looks like.) And so, the Church invites us annually to renew our priestly promises, so that we may never forget who we are and whose we are. The first question we are asked is whether we are resolved to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him, because everything else flows from that.

And with that, I will conclude with St. Charles Borromeo's beautiful prayer, since I don't know how I could improve on it. "O Holy Mother of God, pray for the priests your Son has chosen to serve the Church. Help them, by your intercession to be holy, zealous and chaste. Make them models of virtue in the service of God's people. Help them to be pious in meditation, efficacious in preaching and zealous in the daily offering of the Mass. Help them to administer the sacraments with love and joy. Amen." With those words fresh in our ears, and our spirits united with those brothers who cannot be with us, we proceed to renew the promises of our priesthood.